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With this volume, *Culture Unbound* celebrates its five-year anniversary. This makes a good opportunity both to look back at what we have achieved and to gaze ahead to what we have planned for the future.

Ideas for starting a new journal of cultural research had been circulating for some time at Linköping University, in and around its Department of Culture Studies (Tema Q), the Advanced Cultural Studies Institute of Sweden (ACESIS) and the Swedish Cultural Policy Research Observatory (SweCult). In spring 2008, Johan Fornäs, who was then professor at Tema Q and director of ACSIIS, decided that it was time for action, and took the necessary steps to establish such a publishing project. Policy documents were written and signed by these three founding units, editors were recruited, the trademark was duly registered, logo and web design were commissioned, the editorial board invited, guidelines of all sorts developed in collaboration with Linköping University Electronic Press, and calls for articles were launched along various channels.

The first articles of Volume 1 were then published in June 2009. From then onward, roughly 160 articles comprising more than 3,000 pages and organised into 18 theme sections have been published in the first five volumes, with an average of 32 articles, 600 pages and 3.6 theme sections per volume. The trend is towards a steady growth, and the sixth volume is likely to comprise 40 articles, 750 pages and 4-5 theme sections, which we now regard as our established standard. The number of manuscripts received steadily continues to grow, which stretches our review and editing capacities to the limit. We also receive many very promising theme proposals, which ensures that no volume will ever lack substance, but also means we increasingly have to make a delicate selection of which themes to prioritise. This stream of original themes and articles forms a very inspiring and informative map of current trends in the field, and creates a vital interaction between us and our guest editors, authors and reviewers, thereby contributing to the formation of this transnational as well as transdisciplinary field.

Since the journal’s beginning, founding editor Johan Fornäs has remained Editor-in-chief. Martin Fredriksson has likewise continued in the role of managing editor, the only one involved to receive a (minor) salary for his work, employed as a researcher at Tema Q. For the first four volumes Jenny Johannisson, based at the Centre for Cultural Policy Research of the Swedish School of Library and Information Science in Borås near Göteborg, served as associate editor, particularly covering research with relevance to cultural policy.
From Volume 5, her position was taken by researcher Naomi Stead from the ATCH Research Centre in the School of Architecture at the University of Queensland, Australia, who has further strengthened the journal’s international profile as well as links between arts and academic research.

In qualitative terms, the journal has been a success. Its articles often attract thousands of readers, it is referenced by CrossRef, DOAJ, Scirus and OHP, and has received funding support not only from Linköping University but also from the Swedish Research Council (Vetenskapsrådet) and the Joint Committee for Nordic Research Councils for the Humanities and Social Sciences (NOS-HS). The editorial board with its nearly 100 eminent scholars has provided solid academic support to attract and review article manuscripts and theme sections.

Editorial board members will be invited to a workshop on ‘Public Knowledge’ this forthcoming autumn, to discuss how a journal like *Culture Unbound* can further contribute to the strengthening of an intellectual International – a public sphere for critical investigation and reflection on culture and society. The workshop will have two main subthemes: ‘Public Universities’ (the struggle for open, public universities against the disruptive effects of privatisation and commercialisation) and ‘PublicAtions’ (new ways of making research public through open access and other forms of publishing). These sub-themes, and the workshop as a whole, are a means to further develop and sharpen the aims of the journal, and our tools to fulfil them.

Over the year 2013 that has just passed *Culture Unbound* published four thematic sections: ‘Reports and Reflections From the Field: Current Issues in European Cultural Studies’; ‘Feminist Cultural Studies’; ‘Communicating Culture in Practice’ and ‘Pursuing the Trivial’. The first two sections were derived from the conference ‘Current Issues in European Cultural Studies’, which was held in Sweden in 2011. The first one ‘Reports and Reflections From the Field’ documented the attempts to map the current state of cultural studies in Europe that constituted an overarching goal of the conference. The second thematic section, ‘Feminist Cultural Studies’, focused on the encounter between feminism and cultural studies, which became one of the most important and appreciated issues of the conference. The third theme of the year, ‘Communicating Culture in Practice’ discussed how cultural research can be applied outside of academia, focusing on particular challenges and opportunities that researchers have met when working with civic or commercial partners. The final theme, ‘Pursuing the Trivial’ addressed the social significance of popular culture past and present, and analysed how the seemingly trivial shapes our daily lives and therefore our perceptions of the world.

Together these four themes present a dialogue between academic self-reflection and an outward looking ambition to take part and place in contemporary society that is endemic to contemporary cultural research. While some of the themes and articles focus on the changing conditions for knowledge production in
general and the transformation of the field of cultural research in general, others discuss or exemplify how cultural research can be applied in new ways, approaching new kinds of materials from different perspectives. The themes all point towards the crucial interaction between the conditions for cultural research and the applications of that research, where changes in the economic and political context within which research is undertaken are important not only for the researchers themselves but also for what cultural research can hope to achieve and what role it can play in society.

Volume 6 continues to grapple with contemporary society. The opening theme, ‘Capitalism: Current Crisis and Cultural Critique’ offers a rich and comprehensive analysis of the present economic order. In thirteen articles a number of renowned academics discuss the (un)sustainability of the current mode of capitalist production, against the backdrop of the recent economic crisis and in the light of cultural and social theory. This theme, that plunges head first into the transformation of contemporary society, will be followed by a theme about ‘Social Movements and Protests’ that looks at societal changes from the perspective of resistance. Here the conditions for and consequences of a variety of activist and oppositional social movements are analysed in relation to aspects such as space, religion and new media. Later this year we will publish a section about ‘Therapeutic Solutions and Discourses of Self Empowerment’, discussing the emergence of a therapeutic culture, or even a structure of feeling, based around the notions of individual wellbeing and personal self-empowerment. ‘Therapeutic Solutions’ will be paired with an issue that demonstrates and critically addresses the multiple and disputed features of ‘Sustainabilities’: a set of articles that point to, test, and perhaps also transgress the limits to this notion so widely (mis)used in political, economic, social and environmental discourses. These are followed by a section on ‘Changing orders of knowledge? Encyclopedias in transition’ analysing the current transition and expansion of the concept of the encyclopaedia, and the consequences of the encounter of encyclopaedic knowledge – traditionally communicated in print – and the changed conditions for production of knowledge that digital media and networks bring with them. In the long term we also plan to explore themes such as ‘Writing at Borders’; ‘Concurrences: Archives and Voices in Postcolonial Places’; ‘Circulating Stuff: Second-hand, Vintage and Retro’; ‘The Instability of Intellectual Property’ and ‘Motion and Emotion’.

This new volume, which will be more extensive and ambitious than ever, thus marks a readiness and willingness to engage with some of the most acute problems and complex transformation that society faces. We hope and believe that this not only expresses the ambitions of Culture Unbound but also reflects a more general tendency within contemporary cultural research. In order to better accommodate the most recent developments within the field of cultural research, and facilitate intellectual discussion and critical analysis of contemporary issues we also plan to expand our repertoire of published material. In the coming year
*Culture Unbound* will therefore introduce a section of texts we have chosen to call ‘Unbound Ideas’. Here we welcome academic essays and texts of a somewhat shorter format and freer approach to scholarly convention than our usual full-length research articles. These essays will take different – perhaps speculative or conjectural – positions, or give a new perspective on pressing topics or recently emerged concerns within cultural research.

‘Unbound Ideas’ is not so much a ‘speakers corner’ offering space for personal opinions and heated debates, as a ‘scholars pulpit’ where the best parts of academic knowledge, insight and critical thought can be applied to crucial or complex issues in contemporary society, but without being ‘bound’ by the formal, methodological and stylistic constrains associated with more conventional research articles. Here we will offer space for texts that are by no means un-academic, but that might be allowed to wear their scholarship lightly: texts that are intelligent and learned, but not conventionally scholarly in the sense of being embroidered with references and restricted by conventional research aims. This is thus not a genre that requires less intellectual and stylistic deliberation and accuracy, but rather the contrary – it demands a different kind of rigour, with originality, topicality, relevance and quality of argument being even more crucial than for those ordinary research articles which are obliged to give an overview of a particular field and present research findings. By embracing an essayistic approach to scholarly work, ‘Unbound Ideas’ will acknowledge the power of writing and rhetoric in the presentation of intellectual arguments, and encourage the submission of perhaps more experimental, though equally rigorous, forms, genres or modes of text.

Together with the rest of our themes for the coming year, ‘Unbound Ideas’ reflects our aim to embrace the best parts of academic thinking and writing. *Culture Unbound* is now firmly established as a leading international and interdisciplinary academic journal for cultural research, with a highly user-friendly open-access interface. You are all welcome to join in our enthralling explorations!
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Thematic Section: Capitalism: Current Crisis and Cultural Critique

Edited by Johan Fornäs
Introducing Capitalism: Current Crisis and Cultural Critique

By Johan Fornäs

Capitalism is today again the focus of critical discourse. The virally spreading waves of financial crisis have lent renewed urgency to the critique of capitalism’s specific historical way of organising modern societies. New movements and leading economists share a growing doubt about the sustainability of the capitalist mode of production. This has simultaneously given rise to a wider interest in Karl Marx’s economy critique as a major inspiration.

One key theme of this current critical discourse of capitalism concerns the interface between economy and culture: how economy critique may inform cultural studies and other branches of cultural research, but also how cultural perspectives may qualify the understanding of contemporary capitalism. Under the heading ‘Capitalism: Current Crisis and Cultural Critique’, this theme section of Culture Unbound: Journal of Current Cultural Research presents a set of articles that in various ways approach this discussion from a cultural perspective. The revitalised economy critique of today has a strong cultural component acknowledging symbolic and communicative aspects on several levels. Since the publication of Marx’s Capital, capitalism has grown and expanded, but also developed facets that were not equally visible at that time. In the last century, there has been a series of cultural turns in many research fields reacting to a corresponding culturalisation of social life, politics and the economy itself. Serious efforts have therefore been made to develop the cultural dimensions of economy critique, including the 1930s Frankfurt school of critical theory, the 1960s and 1970s central and east European reconstruction movement of ‘capital logic’ (Kapitallogik) and the contemporary new wave of literature in the wake of financial and ecological crises.1

There are lots of good reasons to read Marx today. In a sharp and often-entertaining style of writing, his work offers uniquely influential political critique, social commentary and economic theory that resonate with the frustrated reactions to the recent series of financial crises. His philosophical argumentation is equally influential, with important concepts such as fetishism, ideology, real abstractions and the dialectical method of immanent critique, all of which point to the key role of symbolic meaning-making, i.e. of culture, to the reproduction of capitalism.

Many of those who today eagerly return to Marx seem to look for solutions to the present day’s deep economic and political crisis, asking what can be done to create a better society. For this purpose, Marx will not suffice in spite of his insightful ideas about post-capitalist potentials. I will return to this towards the end.
I have myself taken part in both the latest waves of culturalised approach to capitalism. My latest book, *Capitalism: A Companion to Marx’s Economy Critique* (Fornäs 2013), is based on study circle activities I organised in Gothenburg, Sweden, between 1974 and 1983, focusing on *Capital*, Volumes I–III. Before presenting the articles included in this thematic section of *Culture Unbound*, I would here like to discuss these intersections of capitalist economy and culture in relation to Marxist critical theory, point to difficult challenges for this theory today and end by outlining three options for strengthening the cultural dimension of modernity theory: (1) a strict continuation of Marx’s own programme for economy critique, further reinforcing its cultural dimensions; (2) an integration of the economy critique in an equally totalising but more generalised model of value production; and (3) a more polydimensional model of contemporary modernity where the economic system interacts with other social and cultural spheres that follow different rules and cannot be reduced to one single logic.

I will start this introduction by offering a personal reflection on why and in which respects I find cultural dimensions necessary for contemporary critiques of capitalism, well knowing that there are lots of other positions in the current debate with divergent priorities. At the end, I will then present the articles in this thematic section of *Culture Unbound*.

**Capital Culturally**

Let me first mention some key cultural aspects of Marx’s capitalism critique. The relation between economy and culture can be understood in many different ways. One may apply economic perspectives to cultural phenomena or vice versa, e.g. by either analysing cultural life with Marx’s concepts or conducting cultural studies of the economic processes of capitalism. Whatever the starting point, one is soon entangled in a more complexly dynamic, mutual and indeed dialectical interplay between capitalism and culture, inviting Marxist economy critique and cultural studies to fruitfully interact more dialogically than before.

Implicit in much of today’s Marx revival is a kind of reconstructed ‘cultural Capital’ – not in Pierre Bourdieu’s specific sense but rather in the general sense of cultural studies: an analysis of capitalism with prominent cultural traits. Instead of seeing communicative, symbolic and signifying processes as belonging to a secondary or mirroring superstructure upon a material basis, or perhaps as the marginalised antithesis of economics, such cultural dimensions should now at last be understood as that core element of capitalism they have actually always been.

Already at the root of commodity analysis, use-values should not be reified into just physical materialities. Marx (1867/1990: 125; see also Fornäs 2013: 31) stresses that it makes no difference whether the needs they meet arise ‘from the stomach, or the imagination’, and thus avoids any clear-cut ontological dichotomy between materiality and mental or cultural aspects of social reality. Symbolic or
sign values are just a type of use-value, not something fundamentally different. Using a commodity to show others who you are, or who you want to be, is as much a use as is eating it. Also, such symbolic or ‘imaginary’ use-values were, in principle, just as important in the nineteenth century as they are today. Commodity consumption is not an individual relation between one human body and one material good but a relation between socioculturally situated and saturated subjects and commodities. Marx’s theory of formal and real subsumption of labour under capital implies that exchange-values (and abstract labour) gradually shape and develop use-values (and concrete labour), but do not replace them. There is thus from beginning to end an intimate dialectic of material and symbolic aspects, rather than a purely material basis on which a cultural superstructure of more or less false appearances and ideologies are later superimposed. If mediatisation and culturalisation processes in late modernity have expanded the scope of communicative and signifying practices, this is therefore no clean historical break, but rather a continuation of a basic capitalist tendency.

Marx’s critique of political economy had clear cultural implications with its dual targets: material exploitation and domination, but also the legitimating ideologies of dominant interpretations of these material processes by bourgeois political economists as well as in everyday life, where daily practices in the capitalist mode of production itself induce forms of understanding which hide its own basic premises behind naturalising appearances which suggest that all is fair and just. This line of dialectical ideology critique may be traced from commodity fetishism at the beginning of Capital, Volume I, to money and capital fetishism and then to the Trinitarian formula in Capital, Volume III. Its implication is that the defining cultural processes of signifying practices are far from derivative, mirroring or in any way innocent superstructures. Instead, they are at the core of capitalism.

Janice Peck (2006) has made similar arguments in an effort to mediate between political economy and cultural studies. UK and US media studies are unhappily divided between these two camps, though they are more interconnected elsewhere, including Scandinavia. Peck refers to Nicholas Garnham and Lawrence Grossberg as key representatives of each camp, and contends that both treat economy and culture (or materiality and meaning) as two distinct areas. She instead argues for reconstructing capitalist commodity production and signifying practice as intrinsically interwoven. One of her main examples is Raymond Williams (1977), who indeed makes an important effort to get away from the base/superstructure dichotomy and instead to conceptualise cultural and economy not as two separate domains but as perspectives on a unified sociocultural practice. Another example is Nancy Fraser’s perspectival dualism of redistribution and recognition, where economy and culture are not understood as two distinct areas or ‘two substantive societal domains’, but rather as ‘two analytical perspectives that can be assumed with respect to any domain’ (Fraser & Honneth 2003: 63).
will come back to Fraser’s perspective, but here just note that these are interesting examples of how the interrelation between cultural theory and economy critique can be strengthened.

Inspired by Hegel’s dialectics, Marx insisted that social change must be based on capitalism itself, and work on the inner contradiction of capitalism, rather than applying norms and ideals from the outside. In a letter of 1843, he wanted to ‘develop new principles for the world out of the world’s own principles’:

The reform of consciousness consists only in making the world aware of its own consciousness, in awakening it out of its dream about itself, in explaining to it the meaning of its own actions. [...] Hence, our motto must be: reform of consciousness not through dogmas, but by analysing the mystical consciousness that is unintelligible to itself, whether it manifests itself in a religious or a political form. It will then become evident that the world has long dreamed of possessing something of which it has only to be conscious in order to possess it in reality. It will become evident that it is not a question of drawing a great mental dividing line between past and future, but of realising the thoughts of the past. (Marx 1843/1982)

Here critique and interpretation fuse into one single mode of interpretive critique. In _Grundrisse_ a decade later, he likewise argued for realising the immanent potentials of history rather than drawing a fundamental line of difference between the past and the future: if societal transformations were to succeed, they must build on existing embryos: ‘if we did not find concealed in society as it is the material conditions of production and the corresponding relations of exchange prerequisite for a classless society, then all attempts to explode it would be quixotic’ (Marx 1858/1993: 159). And again in the commentary on the Paris Commune of 1871: the working class has ‘no ideals to realize, but to set free the elements of the new society with which old collapsing bourgeois society itself is pregnant’ (Marx 1871/1986: 335).

In the Frankfurt school, Walter Benjamin (1982/1999: 13) was similarly against rigid dogmas, describing the emergence of consciousness as a dialectical waking from a bad dream: ‘The realization of dream elements, in the course of waking up, is the paradigm of dialectical thinking’. And Theodor W. Adorno (1955/1981: 27, 31, 33) in his ‘Cultural Criticism and Society’ similarly advocated a dialectical or ‘immanent criticism’ that ‘measures culture against culture’s own ideal’, while the ‘transcendent attack on culture regularly speaks the language of false escape’; this ‘transcendent critique of ideology is obsolete’. While the transcendent critique contrasts the prevailing social and cultural conditions with an external ideal image of how things ought to be, dialectical immanent criticism instead makes conscious the inner contradictions, conflicts, tensions and ambivalences in, for instance, media culture.

Feminist theorists have productively developed similar ideas. In their dialogue on redistribution and recognition, Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth (2003: 207, 244, 264) in different ways both argue for an anchoring of emancipatory transformation or transcendence in immanent social processes, and Fraser (ibid.: 200,
212, 222) explicitly formulates her ‘perspectival dualism’ of redistribution and recognition as a response to the new challenges for critical theory that derive from the cultural turn. Albena Azmanova (2012: 145) has proposed a feminist agenda based on ‘“immanent critique” of the key structural dynamics of contemporary capitalism’. Judith Butler (1994/1997: 1) also insists on ‘continuing the important intellectual tradition of immanent critique’. And positioning herself as a ‘socialist-feminist’ doing ‘antiracist feminist multicultural studies’ in the critical theory tradition from Marx to the Frankfurt school, Donna Haraway (1978/1991: 23) underlines the contradiction of human existence as possessing the means of human liberation while continuing to live in relations of domination and scarcity: ‘The critical tradition insists that we analyse relations of dominance in consciousness as well as material interests’ and ‘play seriously’ with the ambiguity of the contemporary world. This would also imply an immanent critique focusing on inner contradictions in the capitalist social world as the basis for all emancipatory theory and practice.

Immanent critique thus implies that the critique of capitalism should focus on its inner contradictions and ambivalently identify its authoritarian as well as emancipatory potentials in developing a communicative ethics of demystification and denaturalisation. Meanings and interpretations are here at the core of capitalism’s effective force and eventual overthrow. On one hand material processes are ‘real abstractions’ that through social practices enable and give rise to abstract concepts such as labour or value. Understandings are rooted in social interaction. On the other hand this also means that interpretations – the virtual realities created by signifying cultural processes – have a ‘reality effect’. Capitalism survives by inducing understandings that let people live in a kind of dream world, and revolution mainly consists of a ‘reform of consciousness’, which functions as an awakening from that bad dream. Both the reproduction and the fall of capitalism depend on cultural processes involving collective meaning-making. There is a dialectical interplay of understandings and realities, meaning and materiality, and text and action (Ricoeur 1971/1981).

Instead of choosing between a material and a cultural understanding of capitalism, the point may be to look upon how these two sides are intrinsically interlocked. Just as Paul Ricoeur (1965/1970) and Jean Laplanche (1987/1989) have argued that Sigmund Freud must be read neither as a culturalist nor as a biologist, but his point was rather to see how symbols and bodies evolved together, something similar might be said about Marx. Both Freud and Marx emphasized the social and historical character of human beings and modes of production, but both also acknowledged elements of material practice. There is a necessary duality in these theories demanding an ability to maintain ambivalences and tension rather than looking for reductions to either sociocultural events or physical laws. Marx’s theory of commodity fetishism was a way of coming to grips with the processual intertwining of material and social aspects, none of which can be seen as second-
ary or derived. Use-value and value are neither natural-material nor purely sociocultural phenomena, but different ways in which capitalist society combines and ‘articulates’ sociality and materiality, culture and nature, and their mutual interdependence gives rise to the peculiar dynamics of modern society.

Culture is in this perspective far from the opposite other of capitalist economy; rather, capitalism is itself a cultural formation based on the interpretation of symbols. Capitalism is a historically specific social logic that intrinsically rests on processes of interpretation: signifying practices that make meanings interact indistinguishably with material practices – from giving commodities value and equalising different productive acts under the label of abstract labour to the fetishised understanding of labour-power, capital and natural resources as comparable sources of revenues. Thus interpretations and meanings are central to the reproduction and legitimization of the capitalist economic system – but also to its eventual overthrowing as revolutionary ideas emerge as well from the inner contradictions of the capital relation.

Marx strove to represent capitalism as a totality, but its historical situatedness at the same time hints that it was never, and can never be, all there is to social and cultural reality. Capitalist structures are not eternal laws but historically emerging patterns which have been naturalised so that they appear to be a universal automaton, which is true only as far as that appearance is accepted by sufficiently many. Marx’s economy critique was a dynamic and unfinished project where the late works were links in a longer critical knowledge process, rather than any sharply delimited fortress. Such a perspective mediates between voluntaristic humanism and deterministic structuralism, in a formally similar way as the intersubjectivity of the cultural perspective mediates between individual acting subjects and collective societal structures.

Modern culture is capitalist culture. This makes economic relations central to every critical and cultural theory. Modern capitalism thus has a triple link to culture by (1) being intrinsically based on complex cultural processes of signification; (2) its contemporary late modern phase making these symbolic aspects increasingly central or at least increasingly acknowledged in critical social research as well as in discourses of everyday life; and (3) cultivating seeds of its own postcapitalist transition not just in material forces of production but also in critical reflexivity that opens up possibilities to understand the historical character of this society and thus break its spell.

**Cultural Challenges**

Meanwhile, there are from a critical cultural studies perspective certain underdeveloped facets of Marx’s work that call for a way to integrate theoretical elements developed in the almost 150 years since the publication of *Capital*, Volume I, during which both capitalism and critical theory have been ‘culturalised’. Capital-
ism has since then turned in unexpected directions, and cultural aspects that were always there have become increasingly central.

One example is an element of Eurocentrism with regard to Asia and the colonial world that Marx only abandoned late in life (Lindner 2011). Another example is the faith in the emancipatory potential of joint-stock companies, which Marx (1894/1991: 567) saw as ‘the abolition of capital as private property within the confines of the capitalist mode of production itself’: ‘Capitalist joint-stock companies as much as cooperative factories should be viewed as transition forms from the capitalist mode of production to the associated one’ (ibid.: 572). It is today possible to see potentials in workers’ cooperatives but less so when it comes to joint-stock companies as they emerged as a key feature with no discernible tendency to threaten private property, let alone abolish it. Also, the increasingly complex and influential financial system points to a need to further develop Marx’s model presented in Capital, Volume III.

A third and more relevant example here is the striking lack of any specific discussion of commodity design, packaging, branding, marketing and media technologies, considering their obvious central role today in reproducing capitalism. Wolfgang Fritz Haug’s critique (1971/1986) of commodity aesthetics was an early effort in that direction, looking at how specialised industries provide promises of use-value through packaging and advertising. Issues of communication and signification are certainly present as a key subtext, but later developments of capitalism call for them to be much more the focus of critical attention. It has, for instance, become impossible to understand modern social networking media without comprehending how capital can be accumulated not just by producing and selling communication technologies or mediated texts to audiences, but also by packaging and selling audience segments to advertisers. In this way, the capitalist economy has developed a range of highly complex symbolic use-values that call for adding cultural perspectives to the economic models used to map such phenomena.

Marx’s economy critique remained an unfinished programme where even those parts that were published have a fragmentary and contested character as they exist in different versions from various phases of his work, many of them heavily edited by Friedrich Engels before publication. Incomplete versions of Marx’s programmatic thoughts about how to continue his writing project indicate that large sections on the state, the world market, ethics, aesthetics, etc., have been missing from the beginning, leaving these topics for later generations to develop.

The Frankfurt school of critical theory – from its original formation by Adorno, Horkheimer and Benjamin in the 1930s to Habermas and others decades later – was an attempt to update and revitalise Marx’s programme (Habermas 1981/1987: 374–403). Critical theory can be seen as an early response to a cultural turn in the history of modernity, and as a first version of doing critical cultural studies that combined social and symbolic approaches. It has particularly elaborated on issues
such as socialisation and subject formation, media and popular culture, arts and aesthetics since these appear to be increasingly central to the workings of late modern capitalism and at the same time least developed in Marx’s own work.

Today, some go as far as to conceptualise an in some sense new cultural phase of capitalism. The talk of ‘cognitive capitalism’ is one such example of how practices of knowledge, signification and thus of culture have been seen to establish a new phase of capitalist development or at least new conditions for class struggle. It may be asked whether this is really a new phase that replaces classical forms of industrial capitalism, or rather a matter of recognising symbolic aspects that are a key subtext of the whole modern economy. With totally different political shades, this discussion slightly parallels how (mostly non-Marxist) ideas of culturalised post-industrial production giving rise to a new ‘creative class’ have been questioned for exaggerating historical change and underestimating both the cultural aspects of older modes of production and the continued industrial character of contemporary world capitalism (Fornäs et al. 2007: 18).

There is already in the initial analysis of commodities and values a potential for the culturalisation of economy critique. Building on Michael Heinrich (2004/2012), Anders Ramsay (2011: 88) traces an internal opposition and waver-ing in Marx’s economy critique between a naturalistic and a social version of value theory (Fornäs 2013: 297).

Value is not a thing but rather a social relationship. It emerges neither through production nor through exchange, but presupposes both. It is a property something is assigned in relation to other things, which then gives the appearance of possessing it quite apart from such a relationship. As Marx insists on repeatedly, value is a ghostly or over-sensual property, not a substantial one. The conception of a commodity possessing its value objectivity independent of these relations is a semblance that transforms a social property into what is taken to be a natural one. (Ramsay 2011: 90)

Ramsay (2011: 91) compares economic value with Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital. In both cases, individual efforts must be socially recognised in order to result in true value production: ‘the value-relation does not arise in exchange without a labour process, but without exchange, concrete labour would never be reduced to abstract labour either, and thus, no value would emerge’. It, therefore, becomes clear that value is not a purely objective material property, but something that emerges and is defined in social relations, just as is the case with meaning and thus with culture.

There is a dialectical interaction between practice and interpretation (Fornäs 2013: 302–306). Marx sees capitalism’s real social relations and practices of exploitation and oppression as rooted and reproduced in the fetish forms to which his presentation repeatedly returns. By bringing such mechanisms into consciousness, humanity is able to break their spell. Social and cultural practices are therefore mutually interlaced and equally important for transforming society.
Marx’s method of tracing essences behind mystifying but necessary surface appearances was indebted to Hegel. It is clearly different from any postmodern erasure of deep structures or, for instance, Michel Foucault’s explicitly flat discourse theory. However, Marx’s ‘essentialism’ was not biological or universal, but historical and situated. His abstractions were not eternal truths but real abstractions bound to a specific mode of production. It defined the commodity form as the essential social relation of capitalist society, but not for all of human history. There may, in fact, not be any corresponding essence at all in other – pre- or post-capitalist – modes of production. It is the historically specific capital relation that, when established as dominant in the world, introduces the essence/appearance structure and thus also legitimates, enables and necessitates the dialectical mode of interpretation itself. One might conclude that Marx’s ‘essentialism’ (unlike Hegel’s) is neither ontological (as it is only relevant to life under capitalism), nor epistemological (as it is not an ahistorical form of knowledge), but historically and methodologically situated. Slightly paradoxically, the essences of capitalism, with its depth/surface structure, are social and historical constructions.

However, Marx constructs a rather strict model of modern societies by identifying the commodity form as the unique core essence of capitalism, from which all other forms of not only economic but also social and cultural life are derived. It is true that he reconstructs commodities not as homogeneous entities but as deeply contradictory and split between a value and a use-value side, where the latter is a necessary basic condition, whereas the former dominates and shapes the world through exchange-values, money, capital, etc., in a dialectical chain moving from the abstract essence to increasingly more concrete appearances in everyday life. But this model of society tends to reduce other contradictions, struggles and forms of domination or emancipation than those centred on commodity production, markets, capital and class struggle to being secondary or derived surface phenomena.

**Culturalising Strategies**

Immanent critique needs to carefully consider where to find the key inner contradictions in modern capitalist society, and how to identify corresponding forces of emancipation. Here some form of cultural perspective seems needed, which was not possible to conceive until the cultural turns that emerged throughout the twentieth-century. Before that, there was yet no strongly developed theoretical understanding of culture and communication as key resources and spheres of society. This first emerged in the twentieth century as a response to the intensified mediatisation of widening spheres of society and with the development of critical theory, cultural sociology, critical hermeneutics, symbolic interactionism and cultural studies. No wonder Marx could not yet fully decipher the structures and processes...
of this cultural level and aspect of social interaction. It is necessary for late modern critical theory to take the cultural dimension seriously in a much more complex and focused manner than ever before.

In the current German debate on the relation between the logic and history of capitalism, one may trace scattered efforts in this direction in all the main positions: the ‘new orthodoxy’ of W. F. Haug and others; the ‘new Marx reading’ fronted by Hans Georg Backhaus, Helmut Reichelt and Michael Heinrich; and the value critique of Robert Kurz et al. For instance, the historicising arguments in Kurz (2012) open up the theory of fetishism to a wider discussion of the socially integrating role of symbols and signifying practices, and when Heinrich (2004/2012) underlines the centrality of the money form for realising commodity values, this is implicitly also an opening for reflecting on how materiality and meaning mutually determine each other but at the same time are also mutually projected in the fetishised understanding of capitalist commodity production. Nevertheless, the task of performing a cultural turn in the critique of capitalism remains largely still ahead of us.

One may here tentatively discern three or four different possible strategies to explore. These strategies are reconstructed ‘ideal types’ of positions on how to connect cultural theory with economy critique today.

1. Culturalising Economy Critique

It is an immense task to develop a complex cultural theory that integrates Marx’s understanding of capitalism while also meeting challenges that have emerged since his time as a result of a series of ‘cultural turns’ in theory and society. The most orthodox solution would be to stick to Marx’s own programme and strive to expand the explanatory force of his economy critique to a widening sphere of phenomena so that, for instance, the state, media, gender and ethnicity would be interpreted too as ultimately based on a further appearance level of the capital relation. This would require uncovering the function of signifying practices in the commodity form and the capital relation, i.e. to strengthen the cultural dimensions of Marx’s analysis and show how capitalist commodity production shapes culture and communication. This should go all the way from the commodity form to the capital relation to the surface phenomena of contemporary capitalism, with its marketing and cultural industries, for example. Such an analysis not only needs to extract how commodity fetishism plays out on various levels, but also show how the dialectics of value and use-value give rise both to spiralling modes of exploitation and mystification and to equally important germs of emancipatory thought and action. An interesting example at the very basic level was the 1970s efforts to prove how the earliest forms of commodity exchange and money also gave rise to a social capacity for abstract thinking and thus for specific kinds of signifying practice of meaning production (Sohn-Rethel 1970/1978; Müller 1977). It would, however, then be important as well to respect the fundamental difference between
the history and the logic of capitalism in order not to project modern concepts onto pre-capitalist social formations (which both Sohn-Rethel and Adorno tended to do). At the same time, several cultural phenomena such as dialogue, drama, narrative, play or gifts seem to have long historical trajectories that go back far beyond the modern age of capital. This creates a demand to carefully disentangle how the modern forms of such mediating practices can be derived from capitalist commodity production, even when they may have much older historical roots. By tracing how classical and modern modes of representation and discourse also develop in dialectical interaction with the unfolding commodity form, it might be possible for an immanent critique to show how capitalism’s inner contradictions breed modern cultural and social criticism itself. This is at least partly what the first generation of critical theorists tried to do, especially Adorno, who explored the complexities of how the commodity form affected, enabled and constrained the production, circulation and use of (other) symbolic forms. This was also what the 1960s and 1970s capital logic movement and other reconstructions of economy critique tended to aim for.

However, there are reasons to doubt whether such a totalising explanation of all of modern society as deriving from the basic logic of capitalist commodity production can ever succeed and suffice for founding a comprehensive social and cultural theory of modernity. It may be necessary to go even further, and not to reduce all kinds of values and interactions to the production and exchange of economic values. Perhaps the ambitions of Marx and his faithful followers can never be fulfilled since modern society and culture cannot be reduced to the effect of the single logic of economic relations, however full of internal contradictions it may be. There are reasons to hesitate before collapsing all kinds of value into one single commodity system. The world of commodities consists of economic values exchanged according to principles of equivalence in a market, but not all human relations seem evidently reducible to this particular form.

Anthropological and historical economist Karl Polanyi (1957) has distinguished between three different systems of social interaction. Commercial commodities can thus be transformed into mutual interpersonal gifts, which follow a different social logic than the market-bound pricing. A third category consists of common or shared public utilities made freely available to a larger community. In the media sector, interpersonal communication is based on the gift economy, while libraries and public service exemplify public goods. It is evident that commodity exchange interacts strongly with both the other two, but it may not be fruitful to fully reduce them to the first-mentioned. It is not necessary to accept all of Polanyi’s work to see a point in this differentiation. His extension of social intercourse to plural systems of exchange far outside of the market sphere seems to destabilise the boundary between economy and culture, or at least redefine economy as a more limited and specific subset of significant social relations.
I remain unconvinced that the gift or public utility form can be fully translated into (variants of) the commodity form. Both are historically older than the last-mentioned, but still cannot be dismissed as marginal exceptions or residuals from pre-capitalist times, especially considering the new forms of gift economies and public arenas generated in the use of social media. The communicative resources in contemporary networked public spheres do not seem fully reducible to effects of market relations, however influential these may be.

Many cultural theories have seen cultural phenomena of signifying practice and symbolic communication as one of the main dimensions of modern society that calls for another theoretical foundation than commodity analysis. I will here just briefly and tentatively suggest alternative directions for strengthening the cultural dimension on a slightly different basis than economy critique, but still keeping open the possibility of retaining key aspects of Marx’s analysis. While the first position above seemed to equate modernity with capitalism, the two others described below instead see capitalism (based on capitalist commodity production) as just one of several cornerstones of modern societies and seek to construct a more culturally oriented basis for understanding these.

2. Generalising Value Theory

One may culturalise the analysis of capitalism so far as to substitute economic capital as the core of modern society with something else that is more general and may encompass commodity production but also cover other realms of value. I believe Pierre Bourdieu does something like this by developing a more general concept of value and capital, with economic capital as just one of its forms. I will here just briefly mention this position. The polarity between economic and cultural capital is central to Bourdieu, and is seen as the main axis of inner contradiction in modern societies, on which he can build a kind of immanent critique. This places the core contradiction still within society, though not just within the economic market system but between two kinds of value formation. Bourdieu still keeps them together by regarding them both as varieties of symbolic capital, and thus the two competing poles within the social field.

Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital supplementing economic capital as two examples of symbolic values is one prime instance of how to differentiate between kinds of values, and not just economic ones. Bourdieu suggests a general theory of practices and values encompassing but not limited to economic capital. Bourdieu’s general theory of value formation can thus be read to integrate parts of the Marxian analysis of capitalism into a wider framework of symbolic values in which economic values are reconstructed as a subdivision rather than the primary foundation. Bourdieu’s solution (2005) is therefore to redefine value and capital in a much wider sense, with economic capital as one among several different value dimensions.
This necessitates a redefinition of key conceptual pairs such as value/use-value and capital/labour, and it has been discussed how well that has been achieved (Guillory 1993; Beasley-Murray 2000). Suffice to say that such an approach still is, to some extent, reductionist, in that it tends to stress homologies between different systems of value and place them within a larger scheme where all value forms are integrated as instances of a more general value-accumulating process where cultural aspects are more strongly developed than in Marx’s economy critique. Bourdieu generalises the concept of value and reformulates a more ‘cultural’ model of society where economic capital is but one of several forms of symbolic capital.

Whereas the first option would tend to integrate cultural theory into economy critique, the second one does roughly the reverse, integrating commodity analysis into a more general (cultural) theory of symbolic value. One might strive for a more balanced integration of the two into one completely new cultural concept of value that is at the same time a value-oriented concept of culture, i.e. fusing the cultural and the economic perspective without reducing any to the other. I know of no such successful example. Considering how various aspects of signifying practice are differently organised and have a dissimilar historical development than capitalist commodity production, it is difficult to see how the two could be combined in such a non-hierarchic manner. In spite of certain parallels and lots of interaction, economic and cultural values are differently structured. Symbolic value may be conceived as a kind of (never fully quantifiable) use-value, but exchange-value may on the other hand also be understood as a particular kind of (quantified and quantifying) symbolic value. And even if such a new synthesis succeeded, additional problems would then emerge in trying to relate it to other dimensions of modern societies that still would remain outside this synthesis, such as, for instance, the gender order or ethnic relations. This prepares the way for the last strategy to be discussed here.

3. Diversifying Modernity

A last option is finally to give up all such totalising aspirations and develop a multilevel model of capitalism, accepting that parallel social mechanisms co-exist without any evident common denominator. This is similar to the intersectionalist approach to identity issues, which argues that class, gender, ethnicity and age are intertwined but irreducible to one single mode of social relationship. Nancy Fraser’s work (2008) on redistribution and recognition, for instance, acknowledges that issues of symbolic representation and thus culture, which are brought to the fore by gender, sexuality and ethnicity movements, need to be taken seriously besides the demand for redistribution of resources that is the focus of most class analysis. Fraser argues for a ‘perspectival dualism’ that links distribution and recognition to ‘two modes of social ordering’ both based on capitalism: ‘the economic and the cultural, which are conceived not as separate spheres but as differ-
entiated and interpenetrating’ (Fraser & Honneth 2003: 66). Marx’s method of immanent critique can then remain relevant to the economic processes of capitalism, but be extended and also applied to other aspects of society so as to fully conceptualise not only class relations but also those founded on gender, ethnicity and age. Just as with class, these other forms of social identity are based on specific ways in which social practices combine material with symbolic levels.

Gender and ethnicity cannot be reduced to forms of appearance of the commodity value form in the same way that might be said of class. They all form identity orders that are mutually interacting and intertwined, but where none can be subsumed under the other. There is a series of different orders, all of them mutually intersecting within the intersubjective lifeworlds of everyday life. And they, in turn, are all co-determined by, as well as co-determining, the market system of exploitation (and also the system of state power, to which I will soon return below). Capitalism as a mode of production co-constitutes modern gender relations, but does not fully explain them – and vice versa. This could be an argument for the need for more than one theory to understand modern societies. If the third option meant fusing theories into a total whole that still was based on a core integrating mechanism, the fourth strategy would then rather be to give up such total integration and instead accept a plurality of different co-existing theories that need to work dialogically and dialectically in combination, each focusing on a certain level and aspect of society, but never possible to sum up within a neat homological framework. This makes the conflict of interpretations unavoidable in a necessarily open-ended struggle and communication between different approaches since human lives and societies are themselves fundamentally heterological.

Fraser works in the spirit of Habermas, whose Theory of Communicative Action could serve as the basis for one way to develop this fourth strategy. (Another example could build on Paul Ricoeur, who in somewhat similar ways strove to make room for several explanatory dimensions of modern society and culture.) Habermas (1981/1987: 374f.) argues that the theory of value is not needed anymore, and can be replaced with his own theory of communicative action and systemic differentiation, though ‘in other respects’ he follows the Marxian model, e.g. by being ‘critical both of contemporary social sciences and of the social reality they are supposed to grasp’.

In his earlier works, Habermas first added to the logics of production and labour a different dimension of interaction and communication, and problematised Marx’s theories for being stuck in a production paradigm that tended to miss the different basis of intersubjective communicative action, which cannot be analysed in terms of labour, where individual subjects interact with objects in the world. Habermas instead constructed a multilevel model of complex modern society, where the market and the state are two different systems needed for relieving the pressure on interpersonal and public communication. None of them can be reduced to a passive effect of the other. Without the market system, people would
be forced to spend all their lifetime discussing how to distribute the means of existence. In Habermas’s opinion, modern societies cannot do without commodity production, and he instead argues for counteracting the hypertrophy of the market system and its tendency to colonise the lifeworlds of civic society.

From a Habermasian perspective on critical theory, one may propose two main additions to Marx’s model of modern society. First, to acknowledge not just one determining system, but (at least) two: those of the economic market and of the political state institutions, which certainly tend to serve the former but cannot simply be reduced to its form of appearance or its subordinate agent. Marx uncovers the logic of the market system, but the logic of the political and administrative power of the state has at least a relative autonomy. It is hard to say whether Marx would have come to the same conclusion if he had managed to complete his unfinished analysis of the state, or if this could only be done at a later stage of capitalist development, when the complex dialectical interaction between the two systems had become more visible.

The second – and in this context more relevant – move is to acknowledge that the signifying practices of civic culture and communication cannot be reduced to a reflex or appearance of the commodity form, even though economic relations certainly have great influence on everyday life. In people’s lifeworlds, other use-value-based practices stubbornly survive and develop, and they cannot be understood solely on the basis of a paradigm of production or of commodity exchange. Dreams of another world may well arise from the capital relation itself as it, for instance, reinforces working-class collectivity. Other elements of such a dream derive from the experience of concrete labour. However, crucial parts of social life cannot be reduced to labour processes at all, but are rooted in non-commodified modes of interaction of other kinds than productive labour: communicative and signifying practices that, for instance, make it possible to fantasise about fictive realities and contrast them with the brute realities of the present, thus driving forward the collective will to change. Besides commodities, people also interact through communicative action, e.g. when exchanging interpersonal gifts or making use of communal utilities (such as common lands, libraries or public service). When Marx addresses the working class as a formation that not only is reproduced by capital but also resists it, he implicitly acknowledges the existence of another kind of discourse and action.

Habermas thinks of communicative action and the public sphere as key resources for civic society to counteract the colonising tendencies of the market and the state apparatus, and this is clearly a different solution than what Marx had in mind. From such a perspective, Marx may have been right in describing how simple commodity production leads to money that, in turn, transforms labour-power into a commodity and puts capital in motion, but perhaps capitalist history also gives rise to other parallel social formations, such as states and, more importantly, civil societies, with movements and public spheres that build up institutions and
forms of practice that might in the future be able to prevent that first mechanism from being repeated. If that were the case, then the abolition of capital and wage-labour might suffice if the inherent tendencies of the market distribution of resources to develop into those problematic forms could be prevented from breaking through.

In any case, one might argue for the need for a polycentric model of modern society, which cannot be analysed in terms of the unfolding of one singular dialectic – that of commodity production – but must be understood as the result of a combination of economic-market, political-institutional and social-cultural dimensions. Such a supplementary expansion of Marx’s economy critique would result in a polycentric or ‘heterological’ model of society, which conceptualises a range of further contradictions and tensions. Capital offers inspiration for such continued critical interpretation of the inner contradictions of contemporary capitalism, but present-day critical theorists cannot just fill in Marx’s own programme, but must develop a more fully cultural understanding of capitalism.

Openings

It is hard to say which of the three solutions holds most promise for the future: (1) it might still be possible to continue the work of Adorno, the first generation of critical theory and/or later reconstructions of Marx’s programme to develop a late modern economy critique where cultural dimensions are fully acknowledged – from the commodity form to the capital relation to all the current aspects and levels of social and cultural life; (2) it may also be possible to go with Bourdieu or some other theorist who develops a cultural theory of modernity that encompasses Marx’s economy critique but integrates it in a slightly more general totality in which different forms of value are put on a common denominator; and (3) a third possibility might be to evolve a multipolar theory of modernity that makes space for economic, political and cultural dimensions, and shows their mutual tensions, whether in Habermas’s or, for instance, Paul Ricoeur’s terms.

I see advantages and disadvantages in all these positions. The original programme of economy critique retains its fascination and may well have hitherto-underdeveloped potentials when it comes to cultural theory, but seems (as has been argued above) not quite able to account for all aspects of contemporary modernity. The attempt to find another general foundation for social and cultural theory in a wider concept of value formation is a totalising approach that likewise has both its attractions and detractions. As for the third option, I am, in principle, inclined towards ‘heterological’ theories that allow for polydimensional thinking, but Habermas’s version of this approach has been subjected to such extensive critical debate that one might perhaps need to look elsewhere for achieving an acceptable solution to the task of laying a new foundation for a cultural understanding of contemporary capitalism.
This has just been an initial attempt to point out some strategic ways in which economy critique of capitalism needs to be culturalised today. I started by suggesting that Marx’s economy critique may not be enough to offer guidance to those many who these days look for help to invent a better post-capitalist world. Reading Marx is obviously strongly recommended, but can never be enough for several reasons.

First, capitalism has developed in ways Marx could never have predicted, and so has social theory. The culturalisation of both society and theory has given rise to important phenomena that are never fully covered in his work, such as the role of marketing, the service sector and the middle classes, as well as critical ideas from cultural studies and feminist and postcolonial theory.

Second, capitalism theory may, in principle, not suffice to understand modernity as a whole. Commodity analysis may need to be supplemented with other models in order to conceptualise the role of signifying practice, interaction, communication and public spheres without reducing them to forms of appearance of the commodity form.

Third, the difficulty of predicting what a post-capitalist society would look like is not just a lack of clarity in Marx’s theory. Perhaps no theory at all may ever provide the recipe for a post-capitalist future since – unlike capitalism – such utopia can never follow any quasi-automatic rules. Capitalism builds on the quasi-automatic machinery of commodity production, which like a ruthless growth motor propels social development forward as soon as it is solidly in place. It is all too easy to look for a new mechanism that will solve for good the problems and dilemmas of capitalism. There cannot be any such simple answer at all. The answer must instead be sought in the interfaces between many different movements that together deconstruct the logic of history that capitalism once installed. The point of socialism is that what comes after capitalism cannot be an automatism: it is no abstract form that unfolds and determines the world. Instead, it is up to the flow of political practices and actions to shape the post-capitalist world. It cannot be reduced to a simple formula based on a predictable mechanism or an idealist thought-construction that could be envisaged in advance. It must be a matter of practice and agency, not of economic laws. Humanity must release itself from its ‘self-incurred tutelage’ (Kant 1784/1997), which is not only represented by religious fetishes but also by the economic fetishes emanating from the market logic of commodity production, and thus find ways to act together without support in any social logics at all. Immanent critique can therefore only discern the main capitalist contradictions on which such action can build, but never predict its outcomes. Those who produce use-values must explore together, in interaction and communication, how to reorganise society in the absence of any driving motor such as commodity production. This again calls for contemporary critical theory to creatively combine economic and cultural dimensions, issues of distribution...
and of recognition (Fraser 2003, 2008), and never subsume any of them under the other.

Thematic Articles
At the biennial Crossroads in Cultural Studies conference held in Paris in July 2012, the importance of economic issues to cultural research was foregrounded by spotlight sessions on ‘Cultural Studies and Economies/Economics’ and ‘Cognitive Capitalism’. It was these sessions that inspired me to invite some forty scholars to contribute manuscripts to a theme section on ‘Capitalism: Current Crisis and Cultural Critique’ in *Culture Unbound*.

The call for articles for this theme section aimed to attract pieces that (a) debated the role of economic topics in cultural studies and research today, and the possibility for contemporary cultural critique to better integrate key facets of Marx’s theories, but also those that (b) discussed in light of capitalism’s current crisis which new understandings contemporary economy critique needs to deliver, and if there is a cultural dimension to be further developed in this context. What can cultural research in today’s state of economic, social and ecological crisis learn from Marx’s economy critique? How can cultural perspectives cast new light on Marx’s economy critique and on contemporary capitalism? What does it mean to incorporate Marx into cultural studies today? Is it his writing style that inspires followers: his brilliant combination of sharp philosophical arguments, empirical historical and economic research and deeply engaged political commentary and visions? Is it his focus on class or on the economy that needs to be taken up again? Is it a radical political commitment that cultural research today longs to revive? Or is it an understanding of dialectical thinking that can again be explored after having fallen out of fashion through a number of critical deconstructions? Those questions were the starting point for this theme section.

The result is thirteen eminent essays covering a wide range of perspectives on this topical theme. There is no straightforward and self-evident way to organise the articles, and it is easy to come up with other subtopics that would also have been well worth dealing with here. This is therefore not the final word, but a provocative start to continued research and debate. The articles may be loosely divided into four main sections, though there are plenty of overlaps between and heterogeneities within them.

Economy and Culture
First, some articles offer cultural perspectives on economic theory, providing a meta-discussion of different standpoints in this respect. Most authors focus on the uses of Marx today, but attention is also given to how Hegel’s philosophy of labour can shed light on certain aspects of capitalist economy.
Christian Fuchs in ‘Karl Marx and the Study of Media and Culture Today’ critically analyses three cultural studies publications and points out how they agree on asking for more economic analysis but disagree on how to do that and whether Marx has any relevance to this task. Fuchs argues that Marx’s labour theory of value is especially important for critically analysing media, culture and communication in the current times of global crisis and resurgent critique.

The next text, Brett Neilson’s ‘Beyond Kulturkritik: Along the Supply Chain of Contemporary Capitalism’, aims to establish a role for culture in struggles against globalised capitalism and to rethink the place of critique and ideology by reviving a tradition of cultural critique that saw culture as an ideological effect of the mode of production. It contends that cultural processes of translation, signification, communication and argument have become central to the development of capitalism as infrastructural technology shapes relations of capital and labour, but also opens up for oppositional activism.

In the third article, ‘Imagined, Real and Moral Economies’, John Clarke distinguishes three approaches to the idea of economy and explores the possibilities and limits of each, looking for productive ways to confront and interrelate them. Clarke sees both ‘real’ and ‘moral economy’ (introduced by E. P. Thompson) as instances or forms of imagined economy, and uses their interaction to investigate the shifting and contested character of what counts as ‘economic’ in contemporary capitalism.

Anders Bartonek, in turn, moves the focus away from Marx to his key philosophical predecessor, Hegel. In his article ‘Labour against Capitalism? Hegel’s Concept of Labour in between Civil Society and the State’, Bartonek finds cultivating dimensions of Hegel’s concepts of labour, political economy and civil society, offering a critical perspective on the relation between economy and culture, and a useful platform for revitalising capitalism critique.

Cultural Capitalism

A second group of articles deals critically with the phenomenon and discourse of cognitive capitalism, i.e. of a new phase of capitalist societies where culture, communication and information processes are more central than before.

In ‘The General Illumination which Bathes all the Colours: Class Composition and Cognitive Capitalism for Dummies’, Gigi Roggero presents the political theory and concept of cognitive capitalism, focusing on processes of cognitivisation, which is slightly similar to the idea of culturalisation discussed above. He scrutinises the forms of class composition and subjectivity that it implies, summarising its genealogy as a new battlefield of class struggle. He juxtaposes labour cooperation and autonomy, which makes production common, with capital as a social relation of capture and subordination, and ends by discussing how the materiality of class composition can enable a revolutionary break with capitalism.
In ‘The Alternative to Post-Hegemony: Reproduction in Austerity’s Social Factory’, Kylie Jarrett uses the Irish example to investigate whether the distinction between work and sociality has really become blurred in the transition to the ‘social factory’ of post-Fordist economic paradigms. It is often said that sociality is industrialised and industrialisation increasingly centred on immaterial, social activity, in a regime based on biopower where the concept of hegemony has become irrelevant. Jarrett challenges such post-hegemony arguments, and contends that recent European austerity economics seriously undermines such assumptions. She uses feminist thinking to challenge the epochalisation inherent in arguments of post-hegemony, championing instead a return to engagement with the reproductive logic of hegemonic discipline.

Steen Nepper Larsen in ‘Compulsory Creativity: A Critique of Cognitive Capitalism’ scrutinises paradoxical ideas of compulsory creativity and mandatory originality, criticising how human inventiveness becomes attuned to economy and market strategies, depriving them of their social qualities. His ambition is to renew and sharpen a critique of the new type of capitalism and to inspire alternative ways of thinking and living.

Contemporary Crisis

A third subset of this theme section comprises two articles that deal with the recent and contemporary financial crisis from a cultural perspective.

Written from the participant perspective, Andrew Ross’s ‘You Are Not a Loan: A Debtors Movement’ offers a unique insight into contemporary experiences of anti-capitalist struggle during a prolonged financial crisis, with a focus on the debt resistance movement that evolved from Occupy Wall Street. Concentrating on the Student Debt Campaign and its continuation in Strike Debt, the article relates the emerging fabric of a debtors movement to the dynamics of other current and historical instances of popular rebellion against exploitation, arguing that in the twenty-first century, debt is the successor of wages in the front line of anti-capitalist struggles.

In ‘What Difference Do Derivatives Make? From the Technical to the Political Conjuncture’, Randy Martin investigates the role of finance in the contemporary capitalist economy, showing how finance and other forms of capital have become more closely articulated and interwoven. He presents a critical social logic of the derivative, following on Marx’s commodity analysis, explaining the dominating role of finance and the politics of debt today. The derivative provides key insights into the process of valorisation and the interdependence that creates mutual indebtedness.
Culture in Contemporary Capitalism

Finally, the last set of articles analyses how various aspects of culture and cultural practices function in late capitalism: subject formation, cultural policy and cultural work.

Jean-Louis Fabiani’s ‘Cultural Governance and the Crisis of Financial Capitalism’ discusses how the 1980s neoliberal turn has shifted European cultural policies from democratic cultural consumption to creativity, branding and sponsoring. This has created new contradictions and disenchantment in the cultural sector. The crisis has led to shrinking budgets but also to new claims for democratic access to cultural resources, voiced by innovative movements. Post-crisis policies must deal with sharpening contradictions between cultural freedom and commodification, a deepening legitimacy crisis of elite cultures and increased tensions between identity claims and globalisation.

The next article moves from policy issues to subjectivity. Jim McGuigan in ‘The Neoliberal Self’ describes a preferred ideal lifestyle for contemporary capitalism. The neoliberal self combines traits of classical economics with present-day discourses that actually derive from cultures of disaffection and opposition. He shows how the recent transition from organised to neoliberal capitalism has engendered a corresponding transformation in subjectivity. Leading celebrities and high-tech entrepreneurs operate in the popular imagination as models of achievement, providing guidelines of conduct in a ruthlessly competitive and unequal world.

In “‘Being in the Zone’ of Cultural Work’, Mark Banks approaches the intensified exploitation of workers in the cultural industries, where they must perform as creative subjects. ‘Being in the zone’ describes the ideal fusion of the productive mind and the labouring body. Banks studies how such a creative synthesis is constituted, offering a critical perspective that politicises its social effects in different empirical contexts.

Finally, Greig De Peuter’s ‘Revenge of Talent’ also thematises how cultural workers are increasingly invoked as contemporary capitalism’s role-model subjects. Self-exploiting flexible workers who generate economic value from knowledge, symbols, information and social interaction fit in neatly with the neoliberal priorities of post-Fordist capitalism. It is argued that this role model fails to produce the capacity to contest. An alternative approach focuses instead on three kinds of resistant activism in the arts, media and cultural industries: unionisation, compensation and occupation. Empirical examples lead up to a discussion of the creative-economy rhetoric about ‘talent’ and read the oppositional activism as a revenge of talent that defies the role-model reputation.

Together, the articles that form this theme section offer a qualified and provocative introduction to an intensified engagement with various dimensions of inter-
sections between economy and culture, as a step towards an immanent and communicative critique in this ambiguous era of multifaceted late-capitalist crisis.

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Notes

1 The second wave included authors such as the Ukrainian Roman Rosdolsky, the Czechs Jindřich Zelený and Karel Kosík and Germans such as Helmut Reichelt, Hans-Georg Backhaus and Oskar Negt (see Elbe 2010, 2013; Fornäs 2013a: 294; Jameson 2009: 284). The current wave includes Bonefeld and Heinrich (2011), Eagleton (2011), Harvey (2010) and Jameson (2011). Another example was the ‘Marx2013’ conference held in Stockholm on 19–20 October 2013, where a draft of this text received valuable feedback for which the author is grateful to Anders Ramsay’s session on ‘Capital today’ and in particular to Paula Rauhala and Donald Broady.


References


Karl Marx and the Study of Media and Culture Today

By Christian Fuchs

Abstract

The task of this paper discusses the role of Marx in analysing media, communication and culture today. An analysis of three contemporary Cultural Studies works – Lawrence Grossberg’s monograph Cultural Studies in the Future Tense, John Hartley’s monograph Digital Futures for Cultural and Media Studies and Paul Smith’s edited volume The Renewal of Cultural Studies – shows that there is an agreement that the economy needs to be taken more into account by Cultural Studies, but disagreement on which approach should be taken and what the role of Karl Marx’s works shall be. The paper argues that Marx’s labour theory of value is especially important for critically analysing the media, culture and communication. Labour is still a blind spot of the study of culture and the media, although this situation is slowly improving. It is maintained that the turn away from Marx in Cultural and Media Studies was a profound mistake that should be reverted. Only an engagement with Marx can make Cultural and Media Studies topical, politically relevant, practical and critical, in the current times of global crisis and resurgent critique.

Keywords: Karl Marx, Marxist theory, culture, media, capitalism.
Introduction

* ‘Marx makes a comeback’ (Svenska Dagbladet, Oct 17, 2008)
* ‘Crunch resurrects Marx’ (The Independent, Oct 17, 2008)
* ‘Crisis allows us to reconsider left-wing ideas’ (The Irish Times, Oct 18, 2008)
* ‘Marx exhumed, capitalism buried’ (Sydney Morning Herald, Oct 23, 2008)
* ‘Marx Renaissance’ (Korea Times, Jan 1, 2009)
* ‘Was Marx Right All Along?’ (The Evening Standard, March 30, 2009).

These news clippings indicate that with the new global crisis of capitalism, a new interest in Karl Marx’s works has emerged. The new world economic crisis that started in 2008 is the most obvious reason for the return of the interest in Marx. This shift is however multidimensional and has multiple causes:

- The new world economic crisis has resulted in an increasing interest in the dynamics and contradictions of capitalism and the notion of crisis.
- Neoliberalism and the precariousness of work and life can best be analysed as phenomena of class, exploitation, and commodification.
- New new social movements (the anti-corporate movement, global justice movement, Occupy movement) have an interest in questions of class.
- The financialization of the economy can be analysed with categories such as the new imperialism or fictitious capital.
- New global wars bring about an interest in the category of imperialism.
- Contemporary revolutions and rebellions (as the Arab spring) give attention to the relevance of revolution, emancipation, and liberation.
- The globalization discourse has been accompanied by discussions about global capitalism.
- The role of mediatization, ICTs, and knowledge work in contemporary capitalism was anticipated by Marx’ focus on the General Intellect.
- A whole generation of precariously working university scholars and students has a certain interest in Marxian theory.

Given that the interest in Marx’s works and the economic in general has today returned, the question arises which role Marx should play in the analysis of media, communication and culture and which role his works actually do play in such studies. In order to contribute to the discussion of this question, this paper discusses the role of Marx in current works of selected representatives of Cultural Studies and argues for a renewed reading and interpretation of Marx’s works in the context of studying the media, communication and culture.

Section 2 contextualises the paper by briefly discussing the role of Marx in Cultural Studies. It lays the grounds for an analysis of the role of Marx in contemporary works in Cultural Studies that is accomplished in section 3 that discusses the role of Marx’s theory in three books published by prominent representatives of Cultural Studies: Lawrence Grossberg’s Cultural Studies in the Future Tense (section 3.1), John Hartley’s Digital Futures for Cultural and Media Studies (section 3.2) and the collected volume The Renewal of Cultural Studies that features 27
contributions and was edited by Paul Smith (section 3.3). Many approaches in contemporary Cultural Studies agree that the economic has to be taken more into account, although there is no agreement on how this engagement with the economy should look like. The position taken in this paper is that the analysis of media, communication and culture requires a profound engagement with, discussion and interpretation of Karl Marx’s works. Therefore, section 4 presents a possible entry point into such a debate, namely the application of Marx’s labour theory of value to contemporary media. Finally, some conclusions are drawn.

Karl Marx and Cultural Studies

The works of Karl Marx had an important influence on early Cultural Studies. So for example Raymond Williams argued in one of his earliest books, *Culture & Society: 1780-1950*, that he is ‘interested in Marxist theory because socialism and communism are now important’ (Williams 1958: 284). Williams argued for and worked on a ‘Marxist theory of culture’ that recognises ‘diversity and complexity’, takes ‘account of continuity within change’, allows ‘for chance and certain limited autonomies’, but takes ‘the facts of the economic structure and the consequent social relations as the guiding string on which a culture is woven, and by following which a culture is to be understood’ (Williams 1958: 269). 17 years later, Williams confirmed his deep commitment to Marxist thought: he argued that he has ‘no real hesitation’ to define himself as a historical materialist, if this position means demanding ‘the destruction of capitalist society’, ‘the need to supersede’ capitalist society and ‘to go beyond’ it ‘so that a socialist society’ is established (Williams 1975: 72). He wrote that Marxism that extends its scope to the totality of culture is ‘a movement to which I find myself belonging and to which I am glad to belong’ (Williams 1975: 76).

Edward P. Thompson argued for a Marxism that stresses human experience and culture. He defended such Marxism politically against Stalinism (Thompson 1957), theoretically on the left against Althusserian structuralism (Thompson 1978) and against the right-wing reactions against Marx led by thinkers like Leszek Kolakowski (Thompson 1973). Thompson argued that this form of Marxist thinking was present, first, in Marx’s ‘writings on alienation, commodity fetishism, and reification; and, second, in his notion of man, in history, continuously making over his own nature’ (Thompson 1973: 165). The political perspective underlying Thompson’s political and theoretical interventions is socialist humanism, a position that ‘is humanist because it places once again real men and women at the centre of socialist theory and aspiration, instead of the resounding abstractions – the Party, Marxism-Leninism-Stalinism, the Two Camps, the Vanguard of the Working-Class – so dear to Stalinism. It is socialist because it re-affirms the revolutionary perspectives of Communism, faith in the revolutionary potentialities
not only of the Human Race or of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat but of real men and women’ (Thompson 1957: 109).

In the 1990s, a controversy between Cultural Studies and Critical Political Economy developed that culminated in an exchange between Nicholas Garnham (1995a, b) and Lawrence Grossberg (1995). The basic points of criticism are summarised in table 1. Garnham (1995a: 64) summarises the criticism of Cultural Studies by saying that the latter refuses ‘to think through the implications of its own claim that the forms of subordination and their attendant cultural practices – to which cultural studies gives analytical priority – are grounded within a capitalist mode of production’. The discussion between Garnham and Grossberg is an indication that something fundamentally changed in Cultural Studies since the time Williams and Thompson had written their major works, namely a profound move away from Marx, Marxism and the analysis of culture in the context of class and capitalism.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Nicholas Garnham</th>
<th>Lawrence Grossberg</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The basic difference between Cultural Studies and Critical Political Economy</td>
<td>Political Economy sees class as the key to the structure of domination: in capitalism, non-class domination is always related to class domination. Cultural Studies sees class and gender, race, etc as independent, it ignores the economy and class.</td>
<td>Political Economy is a form of class/economic reductionism and determinism. Cultural Studies sees a plurality of articulated differences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment of classical Cultural Studies works</td>
<td>William, Hoggart and Thompson stressed working class culture and the struggle against capitalism.</td>
<td>William, Hoggart and Thompson focused on practices, by which people represent themselves and the world.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The analysis of production</td>
<td>Cultural Studies gives priority to cultural practices and ignores that they are grounded in the capitalist mode of production.</td>
<td>Political Economy equates production with the cultural industries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The analysis of consumption</td>
<td>Cultural Studies focuses on cultural consumption/leisure instead of production/work/institutions.</td>
<td>Political Economy ignores studying consumption and everyday life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The analysis of resistance in culture</td>
<td>Cultural Studies sees the interpretation of culture as arbitrary and always resistant, authentic, progressive.</td>
<td>Some, but not all work in Cultural Studies celebrates popular culture as resistant. Political Economy sees people as passively manipulated cultural dupes and culture only as commodity and ideological tool. Cultural Studies says that...</td>
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institutions cannot control how people interpret culture. Cultural Studies sees consumers as active.

<table>
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<th>Truth and ethics</th>
<th>Cultural Studies rejects the notion of truth and therefore ethics and the quest for a just society.</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Notions like truth and false consciousness are elitist.</td>
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Table 1: The controversy between Nicholas Garnham and Lawrence Grossberg

The return of Marx in contemporary academia was preceded by a disappearance of Marx. In 1990, it was announced that Stuart Hall’s keynote talk at the conference ‘Cultural Studies: Now and in the Future’ would have the title ‘The Marxist Element in Cultural Studies’ (Sparks 1996: 72). The programme finally announced him as talking about ‘Cultural Studies and its Theoretical Legacies’, which is also the title of the published version of the presentation (Hall 1992/1996). Hall describes in the troubled relationship of his version of Cultural Studies to Marx. He says that was never a moment ‘when cultural studies and marxism represented a perfect theoretical fit’ because Marx’s work has ‘great inadequacies’: he ‘did not talk about […] culture, ideology, language, the symbolic’. A certain ‘reductionism and economism’ and ‘Eurocentrism’ would be ‘intrinsic to marxism’ (Hall 1992/1996: 265). Therefore ‘the encounter between British cultural studies and marxism has first to be understood as the engagement with a problem’ (Hall 1992/1996: 265). The 1990s and 2000s were decades of the disappearance of Marx in the humanities and social sciences in general.

Hall generalizes and constructs a homogeneity of British Cultural Studies that never existed. Whereas his own encounter with Marx may always have been troubled and at the time, when he felt more appealed by Marx’s works, was mainly an encounter with Althusser’s structuralism, other representatives of Cultural Studies, namely Edward P. Thompson and Raymond Williams, were much attracted by Humanist Marxism. Whereas Hall took up Althusser’s work, Edward P. Thompson at the same time employed his theoretical and literary skills for writing a bitter satirical critique of Althusser from a Marxist-Humanist standpoint (Thompson 1978) and for writing a defence of Marx and Marxism against Leszek Kolakowski (Thompson 1973), a former Humanist Marxist, who published a book against Marx and Marxism (Kolakowski 2005). So the identification and depth of engagement with Marxism has definitely been different in various strands of Cultural Studies. Stuart Hall gives (against his own epistemology) a quite non-complex, non-contextualized and reductionistic reading of Cultural Studies and Marxism that too much generalizes his own experiences and worldview.

Vincent Mosco (2009) argues that Hoggart, Williams, Thompson, Willis and Hall et al. (1976) ‘maintained a strong commitment to an engaged class analysis’ (Mosco 2009: 233), but that later Cultural Studies became ‘less than clear about
its commitment to political projects and purposes’ (Mosco 2009: 229) and that it is ‘hard to make the case that cultural studies has devoted much attention to labor, the activity that occupies most people’s waking hours’ (Mosco 2009: 214). Colin Sparks describes the relationship between Hallian Cultural Studies and Marxism as ‘move towards marxism and move away from marxism’ (Sparks 1996: 71). He argues that Stuart Hall’s ‘slow movement away from any self-identification with marxism’ (Sparks 1996: 88) in the 1980s was influenced by the uptake of Ernesto Laclau’s approach. The resulting ‘distance between cultural studies and marxism’ is for Sparks a ‘retrograde move’ (Sparks 1996: 98). ‘Marrying’ Marxism and Cultural Studies would remain ‘an important and fruitful project’ (Sparks 1996: 99). Ernesto Laclau has in a dialogue with Judith Butler and Slavoj Žižek admitted that in postmodern approaches it is a common language game to ‘transform ‘class’ into one more link in an enumerative chain […] ‘race, gender, ethnicity, etc. – and class’ (Butler, Laclau & Žižek 2000: 297) and to put class deliberately as last element in the chain in order to stress its unimportance – Laclau speaks of ‘deconstructing classes’ (Butler, Laclau & Žižek 2000: 296). Slavoj Žižek has in this context in my opinion correctly said that Postmodernism, Cultural Studies and post-Marxism have by assuming an ‘irreducible plurality of struggles’ accepted ‘capitalism as ‘the only game in town’’ and have renounced ‘any real attempt to overcome the existing capitalist liberal regime’ (Butler, Laclau & Žižek 2000: 95). Colin Sparks (1996: 92) holds that the Laclauian move in Cultural Studies was to ‘give equal weight to each of the members of the ‘holy trinity’ of race, class and gender’. According to Laclau himself, the task of his approach was to deliberately ignore and downplay the importance of class in favour of other forms of power.

Given the ambivalent position of Karl Marx in Cultural Studies, the question that arises is what role for Marx and the analysis of capitalism and class Cultural Studies scholars see today and in the future. I will take up this question next.

**Cultural Studies and Karl Marx Today**

I have looked at how three recent Cultural Studies books have discussed the relationship of Cultural Studies to Marx and Marxist theory. The books were published in the past three years, so all are relatively recent, and have set themselves the task to reflect on the future of Cultural Studies. This is already indicated in the titles of the three works: *Cultural Studies in the Future Tense* (Grossberg 2010), *Digital Futures for Cultural and Media Studies* (Hartley 2012) and *The Renewal of Cultural Studies* (Smith 2011b). Grossberg’s title choice indicates that the book sets the stage for the future of Cultural Studies. Hartley goes one step further and includes a specific statement on how the future of Cultural Studies should look like in the title: he wants this field to focus on the analysis of digital media. Paul Smith’s book title is also oriented on the future of Cultural Studies, but in contrast
to Grossberg and Hartley makes a quite normative statement, namely that something is wrong with Cultural Studies and that it therefore needs to be renewed.

I conducted a book title search covering the years 2010-2013 for the keyword Cultural Studies in the British Library’s catalogue (date: February 2nd, 2013). It produced 47 results that have both words in their title and refer to the academic field named Cultural Studies. Many of these books are introductions and have titles like *Introducing Cultural Studies*, *Introduction to Cognitive Cultural Studies*, *Cultural Studies: A Practical Introduction*, or *American Cultural Studies: An Introduction to American Culture*. So most of these books are oriented on documenting specific aspects of the history of Cultural Studies, whereas only a few are concerned with assessing the current status and the potential futures of Cultural Studies. The three selected books in contrast have exactly the purpose of critically assessing the present and helping to construct the future of Cultural Studies and are therefore suited for further analysis.

The three books have in common that they see a problem in contemporary Cultural Studies and a task for the future. For Grossberg, the problem is that ‘too much of the work that takes place under the sign of cultural studies has simply become too lazy’ (Grossberg 2010: 2). For Hartley, the problem is that Media and Cultural Studies was founded on and would stick to a broadcasting model of the media that sees ‘everyday cultural practices […] beset on all sides by darker forces that seemed to be exploiting the pleasure-seeking consumer for quite different ends, both political and corporate’ (Hartley 2012: 1). For Smith, the problem is that Cultural Studies on the one hand has always had ‘this kind of residual desire for some form of political efficacy’ (Ross & Smith 2011: 245), but on the other hand by its institutionalisation this desire would have ‘turned into something like a phantom limb’ (Ross & Smith 2011: 246). So all three books have in common that they perceive a crisis of Cultural Studies and the need to change something in this field of studies. The profound crisis of contemporary society is on the academic level accompanied by a profound crisis of Cultural Studies. This is at least the impression that one gets from reading the books of these authors, who can all be considered to be among the most influential contemporary figures in Cultural Studies.

All three books identify a future task for Cultural Studies. For Grossberg, the task is to ‘construct a vision for cultural studies out of its own intellectual and political history’ (Grossberg 2010: 3). His book is ‘an attempt to set an agenda for cultural studies work in the present and into the future’ and to ‘produce a cultural studies capable of responding to the contemporary worlds and the struggle constituting them’ (ibid.). For Hartley, the task is to reform Cultural Studies (Hartley 2012: 2) so that it takes into account digital media and the ‘dialogic model of communication’ (ibid.). The task for Paul Smith’s collected volume is to ‘help define a new kind of identity for cultural studies’ (Smith 2011a: 2) and to give answers to the question: ‘What can and should cultural studies be doing right
now?’ (Smith 2011a: 3). These tasks vary in the way they want to transform Cultural Studies, but have in common that in the situation of the crisis of Cultural Studies they want to contribute to its reconstruction.

I will here discuss the books in chronological order of publication and therefore start with Lawrence Grossberg.

**Lawrence Grossberg: Cultural Studies in the Future Tense**

Grossberg (2010: 16) argues that Cultural Studies focuses on complexity by refusing ‘to reduce the complexity of reality to any single plane or domain of existence’, It would be ‘decidedly antireductionist’ (Grossberg 2010: 17), contextual and opposed to universalism and completeness (Grossberg 2010: 17). ‘Radical contextualism is the heart of cultural studies’ (Grossberg 2010: 20). This contextuality is expressed in the use of Stuart Hall’s concept of articulation, the ‘transformative practice or work of making, unmaking, and remaking relations and contexts, of establishing new relations out of old relations or non-relations’ (Grossberg 2010: 21). It focuses on ‘discovering the heterogeneity, the differences, the fractures, in the wholes’ (Grossberg 2010: 22). Power has ‘multiple axes and dimensions that cannot be reduced to one another’ (Grossberg 2010: 29). ‘Contexts are always in relations to other contexts, producing complex sets of multidimensional relations and connections’ (Grossberg 2010: 31). The ‘commitment to complexity, contingency, contestation, and multiplicity’ is ‘a hallmark of cultural studies’ (Grossberg 2010: 54).

Grossberg sees an important role for economics in Cultural Studies today. He argues that Cultural Studies should ‘take on and take up economic questions without falling back into forms of reductionism and essentialism’ (Grossberg 2010: 101), which logically implies that previously there was a neglect and ignorance of economic questions. Grossberg (2010: 105) argues that Cultural Studies ‘does need to take questions of economics more seriously’. He says that it should do so in a way ‘which would not reproduce the reductionism of many forms of political economy’ (Grossberg 2010: 105). Looking back on the debate between Cultural Studies and Marxist Political Economy of the Media, he says that Cultural Studies opposes ‘economic and class reductionism’ and refuses ‘to believe that the economy could define the bottom line of every account of social realities’ (Grossberg 2010: 105). Paul Smith argues in this context from within the Cultural Studies field that the claim by certain Cultural Studies scholars that Marxism is ‘reductive’ and ‘economically determinist’ (Smith 2006: 337) is a rhetoric used ‘to eschew the economic’. The result would be an ‘anarchist or nihilistic stance in relation to the object’ (Smith 2006: 338). As a result, Cultural Studies would have followed ‘numerous dead ends and crises’ and would have been held back from ‘realizing its best intellectual and political aspirations’ (Smith 2006: 339).

Grossberg’s own approach of reconciling economics and Cultural Studies starts with a discussion of Marx’s labour theory of value (Grossberg 2010: 151-165). He
argues for ‘a radically contextual theory of value and, hence, a radically contextual reading of Marx’s labor theory of value’ (Grossberg 2010: 156). Grossberg aims at decentring the value concept from the labour concept and therefore interprets it in its broader meaning as representation, desire, measure of a degree of singularity, and what is good and desirable (Grossberg 2010: 158f). He suggests a ‘general theory of value’ (Grossberg 2010: 159) that is based on the assumption of a ‘multiplicity, dispersion, and contingency of values’ (Grossberg 2010: 122) and a ‘general theory of value’ (Grossberg 2010: 159). Value would involve the production of all types of surplus so that ‘the real’ is ‘always greater than, in excess of, the actual’ (Grossberg 2010: 160). The contemporary crisis would be constituted by manifold ‘crises of commensuration’ (Grossberg 2010: 160), the inability to measure/value various differences, which would have resulted in religious, political, economic, intellectual, and financial fundamentalisms (Grossberg 2010: 167f) that demand ‘the extermination of the other’ (Grossberg 2010: 168). The financial crisis would have been caused ‘by the existence of an enormous set of financial (‘toxic’) assets that cannot be commensurated – that is to say, their value cannot be calculated’ (Grossberg 2010: 167), but it would just form one of many simultaneous crises of commensuration.

The Research Assessment Exercise (RAE, now called Research Excellence Framework: REF) is an assessment of research conducted in the United Kingdom that aims at producing ‘quality profiles for each submission of research activity’ (http://www.rae.ac.uk/). It tries to measure the quality of research and to thereby compare and rank higher education institutions and departments. The results have implications for budget allocation. In the 2008 RAE, 45% of the submissions of Middlesex University in the ‘unit of assessment’ area of philosophy were classified as 3* (internationally excellent) and 20% as 4* (world-leading), which makes a total of 65% of excellent (4* + 3*) research. 7 institutions received better, 8 the same (including the Universities of Cambridge and Oxford) and 26 worse results. According to this assessment, philosophy at Middlesex University was very good. In April 2010, Middlesex University announced that it would close all Philosophy programmes and to terminate further recruitments in this area for ‘simply financial’ reasons and ‘based on the fact that the University believes that it may be able to generate more revenue if it shifts its resources to other subjects’1. The announcement was followed by protests, an occupation, the suspension of staff members and students, many protest letters to the university’s administration, signed by leading intellectual as e.g. Étienne Balibar, Judith Butler, David Harvey, Martha Nussbaum or Jacques Rancière, and the institutional relocation of the Centre for Research in Modern European Philosophy from Middlesex University to Kingston University. In 2012, no courses and research in the area of philosophy were indicated on Middlesex University’s website (see http://www.mdx.ac.uk; accessed on August 30th, 2012) – philosophy had formally ceased to exist at the
university. In 2011, Philosophy at London Metropolitan University and the University of Greenwich was facing similar debates as at Middlesex University.

Modern universities are based on an enlightenment ideal – they accumulate systematic knowledge that aims at advancing the status of human knowledge about the world as well as society. In this accumulation, universities compete with each other. Capitalist industry and governments apply the accumulated scientific knowledge, whereas the workforce and management in the modern economy apply the accumulated educational skills created by higher education. The Noble Prize, established in 1895, is characteristic for the modern competitive assessment of knowledge and universities in the areas of chemistry, economics, literature, medicine, peace and physics. Modern universities are inherently shaped by an economic logic of accumulation, competition and ranking. At the same time, the university has also been a locus and space for the formation of counterculture, critical ideas, and political protests that question the very logic of accumulation and resulting inequalities in society at large. An important step in the institutionalization of quality assessment was the establishment of the Science Citation Index in 1960 that is today owned by a commercial publishing company – Thomson Reuters. The index originated in the natural sciences, but was later extended to cover the humanities (Arts and Humanities Index) and the Social Sciences (Social Sciences Citation Index). Nation-wide research assessments (such as the RAE) and global university rankings are more recent developments. The first RAE was conducted in 1986 under the Thatcher government. The first Times Higher Education World University Ranking was published in 2004. The Academic Ranking of World Universities has been conducted since 2003.

These phenomena are indications that economic logic is one immanent feature of the modern university system and that in neoliberal times, the economization of higher education and research has become an even stronger feature of universities. The closing of Philosophy at Middlesex University is an indication that fields, programmes, and people engaged in areas that are difficult to subsume under the logic of revenue generation and industry are prone to being dropped. In this example, the contradictions of economization became fully apparent: Although receiving very good results in one form of economization (research assessment), Philosophy at Middlesex University was closed because of another form of economization (monetary revenue): the university management thought that the department does not generate enough monetary revenue.

I have chosen this example because it shows how modern culture in general and contemporary culture in particular is shaped by economic logic. It shows that the central (moral) value of modern society is (economic) value. The ‘radical contextuality’ that Lawrence Grossberg propagates does not allow grasping the particular role that the economic logic of accumulation and money plays in modern society. It advances a peculiar kind of relativism disguised under headlines such as contextuality, multidimensionality, heterogeneity and difference. Modern so-
ciety definitely is complex in that it is made up of many interacting and interdependent spheres (the economy, politics, everyday life, private life, the public sphere, the media, higher education, health and care, nature, arts, entertainment, sports, etc), but there is a need for a conceptual apparatus that allows analysing the power relations between these spheres. It is unlikely that all spheres and actors in a state, phase or ‘conjuncture’ of society have the same power. There are indications that the economic sphere has in capitalism always been the dominant (although not determining) sphere. A ‘radical contextualism’ results in a dualistic relativism that cannot adequately analyse power relations and power distributions (and as a consequence power struggles) and sees power as independently constituted in multiple spheres. Rejecting such a position does not mean that struggles against capitalism and domination are impossible, but that in modern society all struggles necessarily have an economic dimension that is of particular importance. It is not only important that there are multiple spheres of power, but that these spheres are related to each other in variable dimensions that are determined in struggles. Radical contextualism risks conceiving and analysing power as independent containers, not as power relations.

Grossberg propagates the equal importance of all societal spheres, which results in a concept of multiple values that dissolves Marxian theory into a ‘general theory of value’ and classifies all attempts to stress a particular importance and shaping role of the economic – which has in Media and Cultural Studies especially been stressed by Marxist Political Economy – as ‘economic and class reductionism’, economism, capitalocentrism, essentialism, etc. Grossberg calls for respecting ‘each other as allies’ (Grossberg 2010: 201), but at the same time continues to uphold old prejudices against Marxist Political Economy that were most fiercely expressed in the debate between him and Nicholas Garnham, in which he concluded that he ‘must decline the invitation to reconcile’ Cultural Studies and the Political Economy of Culture and the Media because ‘we don’t need a divorce because we were never married’ (Grossberg 1995: 80; see also: Garnham 1995a, b).

Grossberg calls for giving more attention to the economy in Cultural Studies. He does so himself by engaging with economics, including Marx’s labour theory of value that he introduces and dismisses with the argument that the value concept needs to be broadened in order to avoid economic reductionism and to conceive, based on Marx’s dialectic, the economy as contradictory. So he sets up a Marxist camouflage argument (the importance of contradictions) in order to dismiss Marx and the labour theory of value and instead use a relativist approach on cultural economy. Toby Miller argues in this context that Grossberg caricatures the political economy approach and asks him to ‘rethink the anti-Marxism’ because it is the ‘wrong target’ (Miller 2011: 322).
John Hartley: Digital Futures for Cultural and Media Studies

A recent book by John Hartley represents another prominent approach that advances the idea of connecting Cultural Studies to economics. Hartley describes the emergence of a ‘dialogical model of communication’ (Hartley 2012: 2), in which ‘everyone is a producer’ (Hartley 2012: 3) and discusses the implications of this model for Media and Cultural Studies. His general argument is that with the rise of online platforms that support social networking and user-generated content production and diffusion, journalism, the public sphere, universities, the mass media, citizenship, the archive and other institutions have become more democratic because ‘people have more say in producing as well as consuming’ (Hartley 2012: 14). These developments would be advanced by the emergence of ‘consumer entrepreneurship’ (Hartley 2012: 25), social network markets (Hartley 2012: 48) and microproductivity (Hartley 2012: 52).

Hartley shares with Grossberg the assessment that Cultural Studies is in crisis. It would have lost steam and adventurousness and would have gotten lost in ‘infinitely extensible micro-level’ analyses that do not ‘pay enough attention to the macro level’ (Hartley 2012: 28). Like Grossberg, Hartley ascertains that Cultural Studies ‘has not enjoyed a sustained dialogue with economics’ and has ‘remained aloof from the turbulent changes within economics’ (Hartley 2012: 35).

Hartley acknowledges that Marxist Political Economy has given attention to the economics of culture (he mentions Chomsky, Garnham, Miller, Schiller; Hartley 2012, 35), but claims that this approach ‘was too challenging, knowing what was wrong in advance’ (Hartley 2012: 46) and assumes ‘single-cause determinations of entire systems’ (Hartley 2012: 55).

Hartley’s version of introducing economics into Cultural Studies is called ‘Cultural Science 2.0’ and wants to achieve this aim by using evolutionary economics. It stresses that value in the cultural industries today emerges dynamically from the co-creativity of citizens and users in social networks. Hartley metaphorically uses the language of evolutionary systems-, complexity- and self-organization-theory, but fails to systematically apply concepts of this theory approach (such as control parameters, critical values, fluctuations, feedback loops, circular causality, non-linearity, bifurcation, autopoiesis, order out of chaos, emergence, openness, symmetry braking, synergism, unpredictability, etc) to the Internet (for a different approach that is critical in intention see: Fuchs 2008). Hartley also does not seriously engage with the fact that thinkers like Friedrich August Hayek (the concept of spontaneous order) and Niklas Luhmann (the concepts of functional differentiation and self-reference) have used the language of self-organization and complexity for ideologically legitimating neo-liberalism (see Fuchs 2008: chapters 2 and 3). Hartley (2012: 57) only briefly asks if his approach is ‘stalking horses for neoliberalism’. He has a negative answer to this question, grounded in the fact that also Adbusters magazine once referred positively to evolutionary economics. Just
like with one of Hartley’s (2005) earlier works, one gets the impression that *Digital Futures for Cultural and Media Studies* is ‘a Powerpoint presentation by a management consultant’ that has the goal ‘to nourish the entrepreneurial self’ (McGuigan 2006: 373).

Hartley says that cultural analysis has been shaped on the one hand by an approach that is ‘critical’ in the Williams/Hall tradition and a romantic approach represented by the ‘Fiske/Hartley’ tradition that propagates ‘as widely as possible the emancipationist potential of participatory media’ (Hartley 2012: 182). The opposition of critical and romantic logically implies that Hartley considers his own approach as being uncritical. Consequently, he propagates staying in the romantic tradition and that Cultural Studies turns ‘from ‘critique’ as a method to *evolution* as a methodological goal’ (Hartley 2012: 183). The focus on evolution shall according to Hartley substitute a focus on critical studies. He argues for what one could term Uncritical Evolutionary Cultural Studies.

Hartley’s bottom line is that the Internet is a self-organizing network, in which ‘everyone is networked with everyone else’ (Hartley 2012: 196) and that this system constitutes a new source of democracy and dialogic communication. He does not take into account the simple counter-argument that not everybody has access to this ‘democratic self-organizing network’: 32.7% of the world population and only 13.5% of all Africans had access to the Internet in August 2012 (data source: [http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm](http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm), accessed on August 30th, 2012). Nor does he take into account the argument that on Twitter, Facebook, YouTube etc some, especially large companies, established political actors and celebrities, are ‘more equal’ than others, have more views, clicks, friends, connections, etc., which reflects the actual power inequalities of society (for a detailed form of this argument, see: Fuchs 2011: chapter 7; Fuchs 2014b).

Hartley (2012: 56) mentions that social network markets may have hubs and be dominated by elites, but this analysis is not systematically connected to power inequalities in society. It rather seems that Hartley assumes that such markets are nonetheless a realm of democracy because many have communicative tools available that can, if they are lucky and hard working, enable them to become part of this elite, at least for a short time. This logic is at the heart of neo-liberalism’s stress on performance, individualism and personal responsibility for success, failures and downfall.

Hartley shows no sympathy with the outcasts and exploits of the social media age, people like Tian Yu, a Foxconn worker, who in 2010 at the age of 17 attempted suicide by jumping from a building because he could no longer stand the bad working conditions in the factory that produces among other gadgets iPods and iPads, and as a result is now paralyzed from the waist down, or the children, who as slaves extract ‘conflict minerals’ such as cassiterite, wolframite, coltan, gold, tungsten, tantalum or tin in countries like the Democratic Republic of Congo that are used as raw materials for the production of ICTs. Such stories are not only
missing in Hartley’s account of contemporary digital media, he rather speaks the
language and conveys the same messages as business manifestos that claim that
there is an emergence of ‘a new economic democracy’ (Tapscott & Williams
2007: 15) in times of high socio-economic inequality and youth unemployment
and thereby represent the interests of the owners of the likes of Facebook and
Google.

Paul Smith has edited a collected volume that also discusses, among other
things, the relationship of Cultural Studies and economics.

**Paul Smith: The Renewal of Cultural Studies**

*The Renewal of Cultural Studies* is a collection edited by Paul Smith (2011b) that
features 27 contributions. Most of the contributors share with Grossberg and Hart-
ley the conviction that the economic needs to be taken serious by Cultural Studies
and has in the past too often been neglected. But there is a profound difference
between this volume and the books by Grossberg and Hartley, namely the rela-
tionship to Marx and Critical Political Economy. Smith holds that ‘British cultural
studies is a narrative of ever-increasing suspicion of Marxist thinking’ (Smith
2011a: 5). Cultural Studies has ‘an extreme desire not to be seen as Marxist’
(Ross & Smith 2011: 252). The result would have been an ‘increasing irrelevance
of cultural studies’ practice’ (Couldry 2011: 10). Paul Smith argues that Cultural
Studies has become politically irrelevant and is therefore like a ‘phantom limb’
(Ross & Smith 2011: 246). In the introduction, Smith (2011a) asks the question
what Cultural Studies should be doing right now. An answer that he suggests and
that many of the contributors in the volume share is that ‘an increased attention to
political economy is a sine qua non for a revived cultural studies’ (Smith 2011a:
6).

Almost all the authors in Smith’s collected volume share the insight that Cul-
tural Studies has ignored labour and the economic and has to take it seriously. So
for example Andrew Ross says: ‘Whether or not this is a reductive narrative, it’s
clear that labor, work, and the politics of the workplace have been constantly ne-
glected’ in Cultural Studies (Ross & Smith 2011: 252). Nick Couldry supports
this view:

> After three decades of neoliberal discourse and a particular version of globalization
> based on inequality, exclusion, and market fundamentalism, the issue of labor fore-
> grounded by [Andrew] Ross is clearly central. It is difficult to imagine any mean-
> ingful ‘project’ of cultural studies – understood politically and socially – that does not
> address the broader questions of how people experience the economy and society in
> which they work (or seek work), perhaps vote, and certainly consume (Couldry
> 2011: 10f).

Vincent Mosco (2011a: 230) argues that ‘labor remains the blind spot of commu-
nication and cultural studies’ and that therefore ‘labor needs to be placed high on
the agenda or projects for the renewal of cultural studies’. S. Charusheela (2011:
177) says that it ‘is a perennial claim that cultural studies does not pay enough attention to economy’.

Given this analysis, many contributors in Smith’s (2011) volume hold that Cultural Studies should explicitly re-orient itself as Marxist Cultural Studies that works based on Marxist theory, the analysis of labour and class and Critical Political Economy. So for example, Max Gulias (2011) argues that Cultural Studies needs a Marxist methodology, which would require ‘to revisit Marxist labor theory’, but much ‘non-Marxist cultural studies’ would stay preoccupied with the sign systems constituted by consumer-spectators and disregard the labour of humans in capitalism (Gulias 2011: 149). Randy Martin (2011) argues that financialization is a key topic for renewing Cultural Studies and grounding it in Marxism. Marcus Breen says that in the era of neoliberalism and capitalist crisis, for Cultural Studies ‘the time has come to reassert the primacy of political economy, by rearticulating economy with culture instead of pretending that some sort of indeterminacy will magically give cultural studies credibility’ (Breen 2011: 208).

The impression that one gets from the books by Grossberg, Hartley and Smith is that paradoxically the crisis of capitalism is accompanied by a crisis of Cultural Studies. At the same time, there are indications for a renewal of Marxism in one strand of Cultural Studies. The implication is that the time is ripe for taking Marx serious, reading Marx, using Marx for thinking about media, communication, and culture, to introduce Marx and Marxism to students, and especially to institutionalize Marx and Marxist studies in the courses about media, communication and culture taught at universities as well as in the research conducted and the projects applied for and funded. It is time to no longer introduce students to small excerpts from Marx and Engels as (alleged) examples of economic reductionism, but to rather read together with them full works of Marx and Engels, such as Capital, Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts, Grundrisse, The German Ideology, The Communist Manifesto, The Condition of the Working Class in England, The Poverty of Philosophy, The Holy Family, The Class Struggle in France, The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, The Civil War in France, Dialectics of Nature, the articles published in Rheinische Zeitung, etc. Marx is too often seen and treated as the outside and outsider of the study of media, communication and culture. It is time that he takes central stage, which requires resources, institutions, positions – and therefore the struggle to change academia.

Smith’s (2011b) book shows that besides the class/labour-relativist approach of Grossberg and the celebratory approach of Hartley, there is also a true interest in Marx and the notions of class and labour in Cultural Studies. Speaking about Cultural Studies, Toby Miller (2010: 99) notes that although labour ‘is central to humanity’, it is overall ‘largely absent from our field’. He argues that in the cultural industries, a cognitariat has emerged that has ‘high levels of educational attainment, and great facility with cultural technologies and genres’ and is facing conditions of ‘flexible production and ideologies of “freedom”’ (Miller 2010: 98). He
therefore suggests the equation: culture + labour = precariat. Andrew Ross (2008, 2009) in a similar vain stresses the role of precarious labour in the cultural industries. Creativity would for many come ‘at a heavy sacrificial cost – longer hours in pursuit of the satisfying finish, price discounts in return for aesthetic recognition, self-exploitation in response to the gift of autonomy, and dispensability in exchange for flexibility’ (Ross 2008: 34). Employees in the IT industry would often describe their workplaces as ‘high-tech sweatshops’ (Ross 2008: 43, for related work see for example: Gill, 2002, 2006; Maxwell 2001, Maxwell & Miller 2005/2006, ). Such engagement with labour and class within Cultural Studies complements the concern within the Political Economy of the Media and Communication with issues relating to class, exploitation, value and labour in the context of the media, culture and communication that have been strongly inspired by Karl Marx’s works (see for example: Huws 2003; McKercher & Mosco 2006, 2007; Mosco & McKercher 2008; Burston, Dyer-Witheford & Hearn 2010; Mosco, McKercher & Huws 2010; Mosco 2011b; Fuchs & Mosco 2012).

The problem of Cultural Studies is, as Robert Babe says, that its ‘poststructuralist turn [...] instigated the separation’ (Babe 2009: 9) from economics. A reintegration requires first and foremost ‘setting aside poststructuralist cultural studies’ (Babe 2009: 196) and seriously engaging with Marx and Marxism. Engaging with Marx for understanding the media and culture requires an engagement with the concepts of labour and value.

**Media, Communication and Marx’s Labour Theory of Value**

Media contents and media technologies do not come out of nowhere. They are objectifications of the labour of human beings working under certain conditions. Neither these human beings nor their working conditions are generally visible to media users. There is a certain difference in media content production because journalists’ names and faces are most of the time known to the public, whereas the work of camera operators, cutters, designers, paper workers, etc. rather remains invisible. There is another significant difference in user-generated online content where the conditions of production are known to oneself and can be communicated to others. Nonetheless, the production of media content and technologies is a complex process that involves a lot of different forms of work that are to a certain degree not immediately visible and are hidden inside of things and artefacts.

Why are labour, capitalism and class important topics? The recent global crisis of capitalism has shown that class relations, precarious labour and unemployment are important aspects of contemporary capitalism. The gaps between the rich and the poor, between wage levels and profits and between the hours worked by those who have jobs and the number of unemployed people have vastly increased in the past decades in many countries. The unemployment rate of young people aged less than 25 years was 22.9% in the 27 EU countries in 2012 with particularly
high rates of around 50% in Greece and Spain (data source: Eurostat). At the same
time, the average working hours per week are well above 40 hours for those who
have full-time jobs (data source: Eurostat). Being a highly skilled knowledge
worker with university education does not necessarily solve the problem: In the
third quarter of 2012, 19% of EU citizens aged less than 25 who have attended a
university were unemployed (data source: Eurostat). The unemployment rate of
this sector of society was 53.2% in Greece and 39.5% in Spain (data source: Euro-
stat). The crisis of capitalism has to do with the deepening of class inequality.
From 1995 to 2011, the wage share, i.e. the share of the wage sum in the gross
domestic product, decreased from 74.3% in 1975 to 66.3% in 2014 (data source:
AMECO – Annual Macro-Economic Database). This is an indication that wages
have been relatively falling, which has resulted in rising profits. The economy
matters and is an important context for studying media, communication, culture
and digital media.

Nicholas Garnham argued in 1990 that ‘the bibliography on the producers of
culture is scandalously empty’ (Garnham 1990: 12) and that there is a focus on the
analysis of media barons and their companies. Ten years later, he saw this prob-
lem as persisting: ‘The problem of media producers has been neglected in recent
media and cultural studies – indeed in social theory generally – because of the
general linguistic turn and the supposed death of the author that has accompanied
it. If the author does not exist or has no intentional power, why study her or him?’
(Garnham 2000a: 84). Again ten years later, Vincent Mosco (2011: 230) argued
that ‘labour remains the blind spot of communication and cultural studies’ and
that therefore ‘labour needs to be placed high on the agenda or projects for the
renewal of cultural studies’. A particular problem of contemporary Media and
Communication Studies is the strong focus on the capital-side of the creative and
cultural economy and the neglect of the labour side.

In recent years, the situation has however improved and communication labour
has become the subject of a significant number of critical studies. A number of
scholars has conducted important work for trying to overcome the labour blind-
spot of Media and Communication Studies. Vincent Mosco and Catherine
McKercher have edited a series of collections about communicative labour
(McKercher & Mosco 2006, 2007; Mosco, McKercher & Huws 2010) as well as a
monograph (Mosco & McKercher 2008). A number of conferences has contribut-
ed to the emergence of a discourse on digital labour: ‘Digital Labour: Workers,
Authors, Citizens’ (Western University, London, Otario, Canada, October 16-18,
2009, see http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/digitallabour/, Burston, Dyer-Witheford & Hearn
2011), ‘The Internet as Playground and Factory’ (New York, New School, No-
vember 12-14, 2009, see http://digitallabor.org/, Scholz 2013), and ‘The 4th ICTs
and Society Conference: Critique, Democracy and Philosophy in 21st Century
Information Society. Towards Critical Theories of Social Media’ (Uppsala Uni-
versity, Sweden, May 2-4, 2012, Fuchs and Sandoval 2014, Fuchs 2012a, b). The
journal *tripleC* has increasingly moved towards publishing Marxist works on digital media and informational capitalism, as the special issue ‘Marx is back – The importance of Marxist theory and research for Critical Communication Studies today’ (Fuchs & Mosco 2012) that featured 30 articles on more than 500 pages. The EU COST Action IS1202 ‘Dynamics of Virtual Work’ (2012-2016, http://dynamicsofvirtualwork.com/) points out the need to refocus the study of the creative and cultural economy on issues such as the global division of labour in this industry, the working conditions involved in the global ICT value chain, precarious cultural labour, the problem of ‘free’ digital labour and challenges to theorizing digital labour’s value-creation, the challenge of prosumption (productive consumption) and playbour (play labour) for knowledge work, policy perspectives on virtual work (the role of trade unions, watchdog and civil society projects such as MakeITFair, policy problems and challenges for the regulation of virtual work, etc.) and occupational identities in knowledge work.

Examples of studies that have analysed labour in the value chain of media production include the analysis of flexible labour in Silicon Valley (Benner 2002), toxic work places in Silicon Valley’s ICT manufacturing industry (Pellow & Park 2002), value creation in the media industries (Bolin 2011), the unpaid digital labour of users (Fuchs 2010; Burston, Dyer-Witheford & Hearn 2011; Scholz 2013), labour and labour resistance in the ICT manufacturing industry in China (Zhao 2007, 2008, 2010; Qiu 2009; Hong 2011), the proletarianisation of knowledge workers (Huws 2003), software engineering in India (Ilavarasan 2007, 2008; Upadhyya & Vasavi 2008), precarious working conditions in the knowledge industries (Ross 2009), African slave work performed in the extraction of ‘conflict minerals’ needed for ICTs (Nest 2011). In addition, a kind of activist scholarship has developed that fostered by civil society organisations such as China Labor Watch (http://www.chinalaborwatch.org/), Finnwatch (www.finnwatch.org), SACOM – Students & Scholars against Corporate Misbehaviour (sacom.hk), SOMO – Centre for Research on Multinational Corporations (http://somo.nl/), Swedwatch (http://www.swedwatch.org) and projects like MakeITFair (http://makeitfair.org). This kind of scholarship has e.g. produced empirical research reports on conflict minerals in the ICT industry (Finnwatch 2007; SOMO 2007; Swedwatch 2007; Finnwatch & Swedwatch 2010) and working conditions at Foxconn in the production of iPhones and iPads (SACOM 2010, 2011a, b, 2012).

If labour, class and capitalism matter for studying media, culture and communication, then a theoretical approach is needed that can guide the analysis. The most well-suited approach is in this context Marx’s labour theory of value. But why exactly Marx’s labour theory and not another theory of labour? In Christian philosophy, the existence of alienated labour and class relations was always considered as being God-given. In classical political economy, the idea of the God-given nature of toil and poverty was given up and class relations were conceived
as social relations. This relation was however considered as being necessary for progress, its potential sublation was not seen as a historical potential enabled by the development of the productive forces. Classical political economy ignored to clarify its claim that the current state of the capitalist mode of production is eternal. As a consequence, it saw the form of labour that exists in capitalism and that is characterised by a division of labour, private property and class relations, as eternal and naturalised it thereby. In contrast, Marx was critical of such views. Therefore his approach is a critique of political economy and not only a contribution to political economy. Marx was the first author who described the historical character of work as crucial point for understanding political economy (Marx 1867/1990: 131f). When discussing what work and labour are, Marx offers the most thorough analysis that is available. In encyclopaedias and dictionaries of economics, entries such as labour, labour power, labour process or labour theory are therefore often predominantly associated with Marx and Marxist theory (see e.g. the corresponding entries in Eatwell, Milgate & Newman 1987).

What is the Marxian labour theory of value about? It is a theory that assumes that labour and labour time are crucial factors of capitalism. Abstract human labour is the substance of value; it is a common characteristic of commodities. The value of a commodity is the average labour time that is needed for producing it. Labour time is the measure of value. Value has both a substance and a magnitude and is in these characteristics connected to human labour and labour time. Value is a ‘social system, which is common’ to all commodities, ‘the common factor’ in the exchange relation (Marx 1867/1990: 128). ‘A use-value, or useful article, therefore, has value only because abstract human labour is objectified [vergegenständlicht] or materialized in it’ (Marx 1867/1990: 129). The values of commodities are ‘determined by their cost of production, in other words by the labour time required to produce them’ (Marx 1867/1990: 137). The magnitude of value is measured ‘by means of the quantity of the ‘value-forming substance’, the labour, contained in the article. This quantity is measured by its duration, and the labour-time is itself measured on the particular scale of hours, days, etc’ (Marx 1867/1990: 129). To be precise, socially necessary labour is the substance of value: ‘Socially necessary labour-time is the labour-time required to produce any use-value under the conditions of production normal for a given society and with the average degree of skill and intensity of labour prevalent in that society. […] What exclusively determines the magnitude of the value of any article is therefore the amount of labour socially necessary, or the labour-time socially necessary for its production’ (Marx 1867/1990: 129). ‘The value of commodities as determined by labour time is only their average value’ (Marx 1858/1993: 137). ‘If we consider commodities as values, we consider them exclusively under the single aspect of realized, fixed, or, if you like, crystallized social labour’ (Marx 1865). Socially necessary labour determines an average commodity value that ‘is to be viewed on
the one hand as the average value of the commodities produced in a particular sphere’ (Marx 1894/1991: 279).

Every commodity has an individual value (production time). What counts on the market and in the industry, is however the average production time. On the market in one industry, average labour times needed for producing similar commodities compete with each other. Socially necessary labour time is the average labour time that is needed in the entire economy for producing a commodity based on average skills and an average level of productivity. An individual capital has its own productivity, its workforce has a specific skill level, etc. So the average value of a commodity produced may deviate from the social necessary labour required to produce the commodity on average in the entire industry.

The law of value has to do with the speed of production and the level of productivity: The higher the productivity used to create a commodity, the lower its value: ‘In general, the greater the productivity of labour, the less the labour-time required to produce an article, the less the mass of labour crystallized in that article, and the less its value. Inversely, the less the productivity of labour, the greater the labour-time necessary to produce an article, and the greater its value. The value of a commodity, therefore, varies directly as the quantity, and inversely as the productivity, of the labour which finds its realization within the commodity’ (Marx 1867/1990: 131).

Workers are forced to enter class relations and to produce profit in order to survive, which enables capital to appropriate surplus. The notion of exploited surplus value is the main concept of Marx’s theory, by which he intends to show that capitalism is a class society. ‘The theory of surplus value is in consequence immediately the theory of exploitation’ (Negri 1991: 74) and, one can add, the theory of class and as a consequence the political demand for a classless society.

Capital is not money, but money that is increased through accumulation, ‘money which begets money’ (Marx 1867/1990: 256). Marx argued that the value of labour power is the average amount of time that is needed for the production of goods that are necessary for survival (necessary labour time), which in capitalism is paid for by workers with their wages. Surplus labour time is all of labour time that exceeds necessary labour time, remains unpaid, is appropriated for free by capitalists, and transformed into money profit. Surplus value ‘is in substance the materialization of unpaid labour-time. The secret of the self-valorization of capital resolves itself into the fact that it has at its disposal a definite quantity of the unpaid labour of other people’ (Marx 1867/1990: 672). Surplus value ‘costs the worker labour but the capitalist nothing’, but ‘none the less becomes the legitimate property of the capitalist’ (Marx 1867/1990: 672). ‘Capital also developed into a coercive relation, and this compels the working class to do more work than would be required by the narrow circle of its own needs. As an agent in producing the activity of others, as an extractor of surplus labour and an exploiter of labour-power, it surpasses all earlier systems of production, which were based on directly
compulsory labour, in its energy and its quality of unbounded and ruthless activi-
ty’ (Marx 1867/1990: 425).

For Marx, capitalism is based on the permanent theft of unpaid labour from
workers by capitalists. This is the reason why he characterizes capital as vampire
and werewolf. ‘Capital is dead labour which, vampire-like, lives only by sucking
living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks’ (Marx 1867/1990:
342). The production of surplus value ‘forms the specific content and purpose of
capitalist production’ (Marx 1867/1990: 411), it is ‘the differentia specifica of
capitalist production’, ‘the absolute law of this mode of production’ (Marx
1867/1990: 769), the ‘driving force and the final result of the capitalist process of
production’ (Marx 1867/1990: 976).

Why do concepts such as labour time and surplus value matter for studying the
media? I will try to make an argument on this issue by using several examples.

Muhanga Kawaya, an enslaved miner in North Kivu (Democratic Republic of
Congo) who extracts minerals that are needed for the manufacturing of laptops
and mobile phones, describes his work in the following way: ‘As you crawl
through the tiny hole, using your arms and fingers to scratch, there’s not enough
space to dig properly and you get badly grazed all over. And then, when you do
finally come back out with the cassiterite, the soldiers are waiting to grab it at
gunpoint. Which means you have nothing to buy food with. So we’re always hun-
gry’ (Finnwatch 2007: 20).

A Chinese engineer at Foxconn Shenzhen, where computers and mobile
phones that are sold by Western companies are assembled, says: ‘We produced
the first generation iPad. We were busy throughout a 6-month period and had to
work on Sundays. We only had a rest day every 13 days. And there was no over-
time premium for weekends. Working for 12 hours a day really made me exhaust-
ed’ (SACOM 2010, 7). In Silicon Valley, a Cambodian ICT assembler exposed to
toxic substances reports: ‘I talked to my co-workers who felt the same way [that I
did] but they never brought it up, out of fear of losing their job’ (Pellow & Park
2002: 139). Foxconn shows the corporate social irresponsibility of capitalist me-
dia corporations (Sandoval 2014). ‘Apple […] is more than a ‘bad apple’. It is an
example of structures of inequality and exploitation that characterize global capi-
talism’ (Sandoval 2013: 344).

Mohan, a Project Manager in the Indian software industry who is in his mid
30s, explains: ‘Work takes a priority. [...] The area occupied by family and others
keeps reducing’ (D’Mello & Sahay 2007: 179). Another software engineer argues:
‘Sometimes you start at 8 am and then finish at 10–11 pm, five days a week. And
anytime you can be called [...] Also you don’t develop any hobbies’ (D’Mello &

A software engineer at Google describes the working situation at Google:
‘Cons – Because of the large amounts of benefits (such as free foods) there seems
to be an unsaid rule that employees are expected to work longer hours. Many peo-
ple work more than 8 hours a day and then will be on email or work for a couple hours at home, at night as well (or on the weekends). It may be hard to perform extremely well with a good work/life balance. Advice to Senior Management – Give engineers more freedom to use 20% time to work on cool projects without the stress of having to do 120% work’ (data source: glassdoor.com).

The Amazon Mechanical Turk is a ‘marketplace for work’ that ‘gives businesses and developers access to an on-demand, scalable workforce. Workers select from thousands of tasks and work whenever it is convenient’ (https://www.mturk.com/). Clients can advertise on the platform that they look for certain services for a certain wage, to which those who want to perform them can respond online. If the deal comes about, then the worker performs the task and submits the result to the client online. The work tasks almost exclusively involve informational work A search for speech transcription tasks (conducted on November 20th, 2012) resulted in three tasks that had (if one assumes that it takes on average six hours of work time to transcribe one hour of interview time) an hourly wage of a) US$4, b) US$4 and c) US$3. In contrast, typical professional transcription services (e.g. www.fingertipstyping.co.uk/prices_and_turnaround.htm, http://www.franklin-square.com/transcription_per_line.htm) charge approximately US$ 15-25 per hour.

Facebook has asked users to translate its site into other languages without payment. Translation is crowdsourced to users. Javier Olivan, Head of Growth, Engagement, Mobile Adoption at Facebook, sees user-generated platform translation as ‘cool’ because Facebook’s goal is to ‘have one day everybody on the planet on Facebook’ (MSNBC 2008). ‘Valentin Macias, 29, a Californian who teaches English in Seoul, South Korea, has volunteered in the past to translate for the non-profit Internet encyclopaedia Wikipedia but said he won't do it for Facebook. ‘(Wikipedia is) an altruistic, charitable, information-sharing, donation-supported cause,’ Macias told The Associated Press in a Facebook message. ‘Facebook is not. Therefore, people should not be tricked into donating their time and energy to a multimillion-dollar company so that the company can make millions more – at least not without some type of compensation’ (MSNBC 2008).

These examples outline various forms of labour associated with the ICT industry. They differ in amount to the levels of payment, health risks, physical, ideological and social violence, stress, free time, overtime and the forms of coercion and control the workers are experiencing, but all have in common that human labour power is exploited in a way that monetarily benefits ICT corporations and has negative impacts on the lives, bodies or minds of workers.

Labour time is so crucial for capitalism because labour power is organised as a commodity and therefore every second of labour costs money. This is the reason why capital has the interest to make workers work as long as possible for as little wages as possible and to make them labour as intensive as possible so that the highest possible profit that is the outcome of unpaid labour time can be achieved.
Value in a Marxist approach (Marx’s labour theory of value) is the amount of performed labour hours that is needed for the production of a certain commodity. There is an individual labour time for the production of every single commodity that is difficult to measure. What matters economically is therefore the average labour time that is spent during a certain time period (such as one year) for producing a commodity. Average labour values can be calculated for commodity production in one company, a group of companies, an entire industry in a country or internationally. Capital strives to reduce the value of a commodity in order to increase profits. A decrease of the value of a commodity means a speed-up of production, i.e. the same labour time that costs a certain amount of money will suddenly produce a higher number of the same commodity, although the labour costs have not increased, which allows accumulating more profit per time unit.

The outlined examples show the importance of labour time for the ICT industry: Slave mineral workers like Muhanga Kawaya work at gunpoint with the threat of being killed, which makes them work long hours for low or no wages so that a maximum of labour time remains unpaid. The workers at Foxconn are working long hours and unpaid overtime so that Apple and other ICT companies reduce labour costs. Foxconn workers have relatively low wages and work very long hours. Foxconn tries to lengthen the working day in order to increase the sum of hours that is unpaid. Working conditions. ICT assemblers in Silicon Valley, who are predominantly female immigrants, have quite comparable labour conditions and many of them are exposed during many working hours to toxic substances. In the Indian software industry and at Google, software engineers are overworked. They work very long hours and do not have much time for hobbies, relaxing, friends and family. Software developers at Google, in India and in other countries and places are highly stressed because they work in project-based software engineering with high time pressure. Their lifetime tends to become labour time. The Amazon Mechanical Turk is a method of getting work done in the same time as in the case of regular employment by irregular forms of labour that are cheaper. It helps companies to find workers, who work for the time a regular employee would take for a certain task, but for a lower payment. The idea is to crowsource work over the Internet in order to reduce costs, i.e. to pay less for the same labour time as under regular working conditions. Facebook translation goes one step further and tries to outsource work to users, who are expected to perform the translation without remuneration. The idea is to transform usage time into work time.

The lengthening of working day, unpaid working times, overwork, spare time as labour time, overtime – the examples show that labour time is a crucial aspect of the capitalist ICT industry. Different forms of labour – mining, hardware assemble, software engineering, callcentre work, ewaste labour, etc – come together in the international division of digital labour (Fuchs 2014a): digital labour should best be understood as an umbrella term for all acts of labour conducted in an interconnected but mostly anonymous manner in order to enable the existence.
of digital media and digital media usage. This includes forms of labour that are expressions of different modes of the organization of the productive forces (agricultural labour, industrial labour, knowledge labour) and different modes of production (as for example: slavery, feudalism, capitalism, patriarchy, communism). The phenomenon of digital labour shows that capitalism incorporates other modes of production that are sublated in the capitalist mode and that the information economy as a specific mode of the organization of productive forces does not substitute agriculture and industry, but that these modes rather are interconnected in contemporary economies (Fuchs 2014a).

The concept of the international division of digital labour (IDDL) shows that various forms of labour that are characteristic of various stages of capitalism and various modes of capitalist and pre-capitalist modes of production interact so that different forms of separated and highly exploited forms of double free wage labour, unpaid ‘free’ labour, feminised and ‘housewifised’ labour and slave labour form a global network of exploited labour forms that creates value and forms profits of the variety of companies involved in the capitalist ICT industry. The IDDL shows that stages of capitalist development and historical modes of production (such as patriarchal housework, classical slavery, feudalism, capitalism in general, industrial capitalism, informational capitalism) are not simply successive stages of economic development, where one form substitutes an older one, but that they are all dialectically mediated (Fuchs 2014a). The earliest form of private property was constituted in the patriarchal family. The patriarchal mode of production and housework continues to exist in the ICT value chain in the form of feminised and housewifised work of the ‘free’ online workers of Google, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter & Co and the highly controlled and exploited work of call centre agents and ICT manufacturers. Classical and feudal forms of slavery, in which workers are not double free, but rather the property of slave owners who physically coerce and almost limitlessly exploit them, persist in the extraction of conflict minerals that form the physical foundation of ICTs. Capitalism is based not only on capital accumulation, but also on double-free wage labour, which means that workers are by the threat of dying of hunger compelled to sell their labour power as commodity to capitalists, which alienates them from the process and the products of capitalist production and installs wage labour as specific form of exploitation of labour. Double-free wage labour takes on several specific forms in the ICT value chain. First, there are wage workers who work under conditions that resemble the early stage of industrial capitalism. These are manufacturing and assemblage workers, who risk their health and lives at work. Their work is no fun at all. They are subject to high levels of control, workplace surveillance and standardised work, which shows that Taylorist and Fordist factory work does not cease to exist, but continues to exist under new conditions in the information society. Also call centre agents are facing a kind of Taylorist work situation, with the difference that their labour is in contrast to ICT manufacturing and assemblage
not primarily physical, but informational in nature in respect to the circumstance that their main activities are talking, convincing with affects, typing, using phone systems and accessing databases. The IDDL also involves relatively new forms of wage labour that are forms of highly paid and highly stressful play work, as represented by the Google worker.

In his underestimated book *Marxism and Literature*, Raymond Williams questions the Marxism’s historical tendency to see culture as ‘dependent, secondary, ‘superstructural’: a realm of ‘mere’ ideas, beliefs, arts, customs, determined by the basic material history’ (Williams 1977: 19). He discusses various Marxist concepts that Marxist theories have used for discussing the relationship of the economy and culture: determination, reflection, reproduction, mediation, homology. These approaches would all assume a relationship between the economy and culture with a varying degree of causal determination or mutual causality. But all of them would share the assumption of ‘the separation of ‘culture’ from material social life’ (Williams 1977: 19) that Williams (1977: 59) considers to be ‘idealistic’. The problem of these approaches would be that they are not ‘materialist enough’ (Williams 1977: 92).

Williams (1977: 78) argues that Marx opposed the ‘separation of ‘areas’ of thought and activity’. Production would be distinct from ‘consumption, distribution, and exchange’ as well as from social relations (Williams 1977: 91). Productive forces would be ‘all and any of the means of the production and reproduction of real life’, including the production of social knowledge and co-operation (Williams 1977: 91). Politics and culture would be realms of material production: ruling classes would produce castles, palaces, churches, prisons, workhouses, schools, weapons, a controlled press, etc (Williams 1977: 93). Therefore there would be a ‘material character of the production of a social and political order’ and the concept of the superstructure an evasion (Williams 1977: 93).

In order to illustrate his point that culture is material, Williams mentions a passage from Marx’s *Grundrisse*: ‘Productive labour is only that which produces capital. Is it not crazy, asks e.g. (or at least something similar) Mr Senior, that the piano maker is a productive worker, but not the piano player, although obviously the piano would be absurd without the piano player? But this is exactly the case. The piano maker reproduces capital; the pianist only exchanges his labour for revenue. But doesn't the pianist produce music and satisfy our musical ear, does he not even to a certain extent produce the latter? He does indeed: his labour produces something; but that does not make it productive labour in the economic sense; no more than the labour of the madman who produces delusions is productive. Labour becomes productive only by producing its own opposite’ (Marx 1858/1993: 305). Williams remarks that today, other than in Marx’s time, ‘the production of music (and not just its instruments) is an important branch of capitalist production’ (Williams 1977: 93).
The point that interests me here is not what labour is productive and unproductive, but the question what constitutes the economy and culture. If the two realms are separated, then building the piano is work and part of the economy and playing it is not work, but culture. Marx leaves however no doubt that playing the piano produces a use-value that satisfies human ears and is therefore a form of work. As a consequence, the production of music must just like the production of the piano be an economic activity. Williams (1977: 94) stresses that cultural materialism means to see the material character of art, ideas, aesthetics and ideology and that when considering piano making and piano playing it is important to discover and describe ‘relations between all these practices’ and to not assume ‘that only some of them are material’.

Besides the piano maker and the piano player there is also the composer of music. All three works are needed and necessarily related in order to guarantee the existence of piano music. Fixing one of these three productive activities categorically as culture and excluding the others from it limits the concept of culture and does not see that one cannot exist without the other. Along with this separation come political assessments of the separated entities. A frequent procedure is to include the work of the composer and player and to exclude the work of the piano maker. Cultural elitists then argue that only the composer and player are truly creative, whereas vulgar materialists hold that only the piano maker can be a productive worker because he works with his hands and produces an artifact. Both judgments are isolationist and politically problematic.

In contrast, Raymond Williams (1977: 111) formulates as an important postulate of Cultural Materialism that ‘[c]ultural work and activity are not […] a superstructure’ because people would use physical resources for leisure, entertainment and art. Combining Williams’ assumptions that cultural work is material and economic and that the physical and ideational activities underlying the existence of culture are interconnected means that culture is a totality that connects all physical and ideational production processes that are connected and required for the existence of culture. Put in simpler terms this means that the piano maker, the composer and the piano player are for Williams all three cultural workers.

Williams (1977: 139) concludes that Cultural Materialism needs to see ‘the complex unity of the elements’ required for the existence of culture: ideas, institutions, formations, distribution, technology, audiences, forms of communication and interpretation, worldviews (138p). A sign system would involve the social relations that produce it, the institutions in which it is formed and its role as a cultural technology (Williams 1977: 140). In order to avoid the ‘real danger of separating human thought, imagination and concepts from ‘men’s material life-process’” (Williams 1989: 203), one needs like Marx to focus on the ‘totality of human activity’ (Williams 1989: 203) when discussing culture. We ‘have to emphasise cultural practice as from the beginning social and material’ (Williams
1989: 206). The ‘productive forces of ‘mental labour’ have, in themselves, an in-escapable material and thus social history’ (William 1989: 211).

In his later works, Williams stressed that it is particularly the emergence of an information economy in which information, communication and audiences are sold as commodities that requires rethinking the separation of the economy and culture and to see culture as material. ‘[I]nformation processes […] have become a qualitative part of economic organization’ (Williams 1981: 231). ‘Thus a major part of the whole modern labour process must be defined in terms which are not easily theoretically separable from the traditional ‘cultural’ activities. […] so many more workers are involved in the direct operations and activations of these systems that there are quite new social and social-class complexities’ (Williams 1981: 232).

As information is an important aspect of economic production in information societies, the culture concept cannot be confined to popular culture, entertainment, works of arts and the production of meaning in the consumption of goods, but needs to be extended to the realm of economic production and value creation. The concept of cultural labour is therefore of crucial importance.

In contemporary capitalism, pianos, compositions (via intellectual property rights) and music are all three commodities. So what unites the cultural work of the piano maker, the composer and the musician is that the commodity form mediates their works. Raymond Williams argues that this circumstance requires us to think of culture as material and economic. But he adds that in the first instance all of these practices are material because they produce use-values of different kinds.

Taking the example of music culture and transferring it to digital media, we find correspondences: there are digital media makers who produce hardware, digital media composers who create software, and digital media users who operate software on hardware in a productive manner in order to create content, communications and social relations. Those who reduce digital labour to digital content producers just like those who reduce cultural labour to the production of meaning and ideas separate in an idealistic manner two elements that necessarily belong together. Thinking the elements that enable digital media to exist together requires a common category: the international division of digital labour (IDDL) (Fuchs 2014a).

The global collective ICT worker consists of many different workers: unpaid digital labour, a highly paid and highly stressed knowledge worker aristocracy, knowledge workers in developing countries, Taylorist call centre wage workers, Taylorist hardware assemblers and manufacturers, slave mine workers. This shows that ‘double free’ wage labour in the ICT industry and, as Marcel van der Linden and Karl Heinz Roth (2009) argue, in general is ‘no longer the strategic and privileged part of the global working class and that slaves, contract workers, (pseudo-) self-employment and others are equally important for theorising capitalism’ (van der Linden & Roth 2009, 24; translation from German).
Certain scholars argue that the rise of a ‘knowledge society’ or ‘cognitive capitalism’ as well as of ‘social media’ has resulted in an outdatedness and non-applicability of the labour theory of value to contemporary capitalism. Virno (2003: 100) says that the law of value is ‘shattered and refuted by capitalist development itself’. Hardt and Negri (2004: 145) argue that the ‘temporal unity of labor as the basic measure of value today makes no sense’. Vercellone (2010: 90) writes that ‘cognitive capitalism’ has resulted in the ‘crisis of the law of value’ and ‘a crisis of measurement that destabilizes the very sense of the fundamental categories of the political economy; labor, capital and obviously, value’. The rise of knowledge in production, what Marx (1858/1993) termed the General Intellect, would result in the circumstance that labour, particularly knowledge labour ‘can no longer be measured on the basis of labour time directly dedicated to production’ (Vercellone 2007: 30). Abstract labour, ‘measured in a unit of time’ would no longer be ‘the tool allowing for the control over the labor and simultaneously favouring the growth of social productivity’ (Vercellone 2010: 90). Creativity and knowledge would today form ‘the main source of value’ (Vercellone 2010: 105).

The assumption of many Autonomist Marxists that the law of value no longer applies today is not feasible because this law is a foundation of the existence of capitalism and because the assumption is based on a false interpretation of a passage from Marx’s Grundrisse (see e.g. Vercellone 2007: 29f), in which Marx says that ‘labour time ceases and must cease to be’ the measure of wealth (Marx 1858/1993: 705). The misinterpretation is precisely that Marx here describes a transformation within capitalism. Instead Marx in the same passage makes clear that he talks about a situation, in which the ‘mass of workers’ has appropriated ‘their own surplus labour’ (Marx 1858/1993: 708). As long as capitalism exists, value is set as standard of production, although the value of commodities tends to historically diminish, which advances capitalism’s crisis-proneness. Harry Cleaver has pointed out that Marx’s passage is based on a framework that results from the circumstance that class struggle ‘explodes the system and founds a new one’ (Cleaver 2000: 92).

In the specific passage in the Grundrisse, Marx says: ‘Once they have done so – and disposable time thereby ceases to have an antithetical existence – then, on one side, necessary labour time will be measured by the needs of the social individual, and, on the other, the development of the power of social production will grow so rapidly that, even though production is now calculated for the wealth of all, disposable time will grow for all’ (Marx 1858/1993: 708). Marx talks about a society, in which ‘production based on exchange value breaks down’ (Marx 1858/1993: 705) – a communist society.

In corporate ‘social media’, Facebook and other companies constantly monitor interests, usage behaviour, browsing behaviour, demographic data, user-generated content, social relations, etc. These are individual, affective, social, economic, political, cultural data about users. The more time a user spends on Facebook, the
more data is generated about him/her that is offered as a commodity to advertising clients. Exploitation happens in this commodification and production process, whereas the data commodities are offered for sale to advertising clients after the production/exploitation process. The more time a user spends online, the more data is available about him/her that can potentially be sold and the more advertisements can be presented to him/her. Time therefore plays a crucial role for corporate social media. Users employ social media because they strive to a certain degree for achieving what Bourdieu (1986a, b) terms social capital (the accumulation of social relations), cultural capital (the accumulation of qualification, education, knowledge) and symbolic capital (the accumulation of reputation). The time that users spend on commercial social media platforms for generating social, cultural and symbolic capital is in the process of prosumer commodification transformed into economic capital. Labour time on commercial social media is the conversion of Bourdieuan social, cultural and symbolic capital into Marxian value and economic capital.

Labour that generates content, affects, likes, social relations, networks, etc. is organised in time and space and that Facebook usage time is productive labour time. All hours spent online by users of Facebook, Google, and comparable corporate social media constitute work time, in which data commodities are generated, and potential time for profit realization.

Our discussion thus far shows that the labour theory of value is frequently used as a target of ideological critique that argues that Marx’s theory is out of date. Resulting claims are that value has been generalized and pluralized (Grossberg), stems from affects or social networks (Hartley), but is not constituted by labour and measured by labour time. The implications of these approaches are diverse, but they all share the consequence that the immediateness of the radical critique of capitalism and capitalist media is either reduced in importance or altogether rejected.

Not all Autonomist Marxists share the assumption that there is an end of the law of value today. Karl Heinz Roth (2005: 60) stresses the large number of unpaid and underpaid workers in the world today. Examples that he mentions are reproductive work in the family, precarious and informal labour, slave workers, prison labour (Roth 2005), temporal work, seasonal workers, migrant workers and precarious self-employment (Roth & van der Linden 2009). Karl Heinz Roth and Marcel van der Linden (2009: 560) say that these workers constitute the global worker (Weltarbeiterklasse) that is ‘a multiversum of strata and social groups’. Nick Dyer-Witheford (2010: 490) argues that the global worker is a) based on the globalization of capital, b) based on a complex division of labour, c) based on underpaid and unpaid labour (migrants, houseworkers, etc), d) embedded into global communication networks, e) facing precarious conditions, and f) has worldwide effects. Slave workers that are unpaid would also produce value, although their labour power does not have a price for which it is rented to an owner,
but rather is the private property of a slave master (Roth & van der Linden 2009: 581-587). Roth and van der Linden use the example of the slave worker in order to argue that exploitation and value production does not presuppose a wage relationship. They argue for a dynamic labour theory of value (Roth & van der Linden 2009: 590-600) that assumes that all humans who contribute to the production of money profit by entering a relationship with capital, in which the latter controls and owns their personality (slaves), labour power (wage workers), the means of production and subsistence (outsourced contractual labour), the products of labour (unpaid and underpaid labour) or the sphere of reproduction (reproductive labour), are part of the exploited class.

Capital has the inherent interest to maximize profit. For doing this, it will take all means necessary because the single capitalist risks his/her own bankruptcy if s/he cannot accumulate capital as a result of high investment costs, heavy competition, lack of productivity, etc. The wage relation, as argued above, a crucial element of class struggle. Capital tries to reduce the wage sum as much as possible in order to maximize profits. If possible, capital will therefore remunerate labour power below its own value, i.e. below the socially necessary costs that are required for survival. The transformation of the value into the price of labour power and the difference between the two is, as Cleaver (2000) and Bidet (2009) stress, the result of class struggle. Labour legislation and an organized labour movement can struggle for wages that are higher than the value of labour power. If labour is, however, weak, e.g. because of fascist repression, capital is likely to reduce wages as much as possible in order to increase profits. Neoliberalism is a form of governmentality that increases profits by decreasing the wage sum with the help of cutting state expenditures for welfare, care and education, privatizing such services, creating precarious wage-relations that are temporary, insecure and underpaid, weakening the power of labour organisations, decreasing or not increasing wages relatively or absolutely, outsourcing labour to low-paid or unpaid forms of production, coercing the unemployed to work without payment or for extremely low wages, etc. It is a form of politics that aims at helping capital to reduce the price of labour power as much as possible, if possible even below the minimum value that is needed for human existence. The creation of multiple forms of precarious and unpaid forms of work is an expression of the class struggle of capital to reduce the costs of labour power. The result is a disjuncture of the value and price of labour power. The disjuncture between value and price of labour power is accompanied by a disjuncture of the value and price of commodities: The financialization of the economy has established stocks and derivatives that have fictitious prices on stock markets that are based on the hope for high future profits and dividends, but are disjointed from the actual labour values and commodity prices. Contemporary capitalism is a disjuncture economy, in which values, profits and prices tend to be out of joint so that there is a high crisis-proneness.
Digital media scholars, entrepreneurs, managers, consultants and politicians often celebrate the rise of ‘social media’ like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube etc. as the rise of a democratic and participatory economy, in which users control the means of communication and intellectual production and consumers can actively and creatively shape the economy. Seen from the view of a dynamical labour theory of value, corporate social media are in contrast forms of the exploitation of unpaid labour: all the time users spend on such platforms is recorded, analysed and creates data commodities that contain personal and usage data and are sold to advertising clients that provide targeted ads to the users. The price of the users’ labour power is zero, they are unpaid, which allows capital to maximize profits by reducing the price of labour power as much below its value as possible.

The multiverse of the global worker does not consist of separate types of work and relations of production, but rather of interdependent production relations that form a whole. Nick Dyer-Witheford (2002, 2010) therefore speaks of the emergence of a global value subject that forms a value chain that is organised by multinational corporations in the form of a global factory. He stresses that the emergence of knowledge work and the global worker does not mean an end of the law of value, but rather an expansion of exploitation and the law of value from the workplace as the ‘traditional locus of exploitation’ (Dyer-Witheford 2002: 8) to the ‘factory planet’ (Dyer-Witheford 2010: 485). The exploitation of user labour on commercial Internet platforms like Facebook and Google is indicative for a phase of capitalism, in which there is an all-ubiquitous factory that is a space of the exploitation of labour. Social media and the mobile Internet make the audience commodity ubiquitous and the factory not limited to your living room and your wage workplace – the factory and work place surveillance are also in all in-between spaces. The entire planet is today a capitalist factory. The exploitation of Internet users/prosumers is not isolated, it is part of a larger value chain of computing, in which African slave workers extract raw materials, underpaid workers in developing countries (and Western countries) assemble hardware, underpaid workers in developing countries and highly paid workers in the West engineer software and precariously working service workers (e.g. in call-centres) provide support.

The global value subjects are thus ‘subject to the law of value constituted and constrained by the logics of the world-market’ (Dyer-Witheford 2002: 9). But they also have the potential power to subvert the law of value by refusals to work (protests, strikes, occupations, in the most extreme form, as in the case of Foxconn, suicide, etc.), refusals to consume (stopping to use certain products and the use of non-commercial products) and the creation of alternative forms of valuation/production that transcend monetary values and are non-profit and non-commercial in character (e.g. non-proprietary software/operating systems, non-commercial social networking sites, self-managed alternative IT companies, etc.). Göran Bolin (2010) stresses in this context that economic value is not the only
moral value that can shape the media. Nick Couldry (2010) points out that neoliberalism reduces the possibilities for the expression of voices that constitute an alternative moral value to economic logic. Expressed in another way: The value of capitalism is value, which reduces the status of the human to a voiceless and exploited cog in the machine that although perceiving itself as permanently talking, mostly has a voice and power without real effects. What must be achieved is the sublation of economic value so that (economic) value is no longer the primary (moral) value.

The law of value has not lost its force. It is in full effect everywhere in the world, where exploitation takes place. It has been extended to underpaid and unpaid forms of labour, corporate media prosumption being just one of them. Due to technical increases in productivity, the value of commodities tends to historically decrease. At the same time, value is the only source of capital, commodities and profit in capitalism. The contradictions of value have resulted in a disjuncture of values, profits and prices that contributes to actual or potential crises, which shows that crises are inherent to capitalism. This in turn makes it feasible to replace capitalism by a commons-based system of existence, in which not value, but creativity, social relations, free time and play are the source of value. Such a society is called communism and is the negation of the negativity of capitalism.

Conclusion

Graeme Turner (2012: 158) in giving answers to the question ‘What’s become of Cultural Studies?’ argues that this field has lost power as a political project and turned into a ‘genre of academic performance’ that is ‘merely self-serving’. One of my arguments in this paper has been that one of the causes of this circumstance is that Cultural Studies has had a troubled relationship to Karl Marx’s works. Early representatives like Raymond Williams and Edward P. Thompson were strongly influenced by and contributed to Humanist Marxism, whereas Stuart Hall at times was influenced by Structural Marxism and at times moved away from Marxism. There was a significant move away from Marx in Cultural Studies during the past three decades. The analysis of three contemporary Cultural Studies works showed that there is a broad agreement that Cultural Studies needs to engage more with the economic today.

How such an engagement shall look like and how it relates to the works of Karl Marx is contested. John Hartley argues for the replacement of a critical and Marxist approach in Cultural Studies by evolutionary economics. Lawrence Grossberg uses Marx against Marx in order to argue for a radically contextualist interpretation of the value concept and a theory of crisis that is based on a general theory of value. Paul Smith and others make a point for the renewal of a genuine Marxist Cultural Studies. I share the argument made by Smith and think that Marx is the linkage between Cultural Studies and Critical Political Economy that is needed.
today. Today one need to take seriously not only how the economic interacts with culture and the media, but that much can be gained from reading, discussing and interpreting the multitude of Karl Marx’s original works. I argue for an institutional revolution that buries prejudices against Karl Marx (see Eagleton 2011 for a brilliant invalidation of the 10 most common prejudices against Marx as well as Harvey 2010 and Jameson 2011 for contemporary interpretations of *Capital, Volume 1*) and takes his works and theoretical legacy serious in the study of the media and culture. There is a generation of students and young scholars today, who have been growing up under post-welfarist conditions and know the reality of precarious labour and precarious life. At the same time, this is a world with multi-dimensional global inequalities. Interpreting and changing this world requires thinking about class, crisis, critique and capitalism. For those who in this context are interested to critically study the role of communication, the engagement with the ideas of the thinker who has had the largest intellectual and practical influence on the study of these phenomena, is an absolute necessity. Only an engagement with Marx can make Cultural and Media Studies topical, politically relevant, practical and critical, in the current times of global crisis and resurgent critique. Such an engagement requires not just interested scholars and students (that anyway already exist), but also institutional changes of universities, funding agencies, journals, conferences, academic associations and entire research fields. Academia has experience an administrative and neoliberal turn. Marxism is not just a reaction to these changes, but also offers crucial solutions to the resulting problems.

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Beyond *Kulturkritik*:
Along the Supply Chain of Contemporary Capitalism

By Brett Neilson

**Abstract**

Notions of *Kulturkritik* stemming from twentieth century accounts of mass consumption present culture as an effect of the mode or relations of production. Culture becomes the means by which capitalism imposes itself as an ideological system. This paper asks how *Kulturkritik* might be revived or revisited in the current moment of capitalist globalisation. Focusing on changes to production systems introduced by the growth of logistics and supply chain management, it argues that cultural processes of translation, signification, communication and argument have become deeply and materially embedded in the development of capitalism. Particular attention is paid to how infrastructure and technology shape relations of capital and labour. The paper asks how the subjective force of labour can exploit the vulnerabilities inherent in supply chains and confront the networked forms of organisation that enable contemporary capitalism. Overall the aim is to establish a role for culture in struggles against capitalism and to rethink the place of critique and ideology in the wake of such an approach.

**Keywords:** Logistics, infrastructure, capitalism, supply chains, culture, critique, ideology.
Introduction

Capitalism, crisis, cultural critique – these guiding terms of the present special issue of *Culture Unbound* have begun to interact in new ways. Theodor Adorno’s essay ‘Cultural Criticism and Society’ provides a strategic point of departure from which to gauge just how much things have changed. Adorno (1967: 19) begins his essay by remarking that the term *Kulturkritik* has an ‘offensive ring’. This is not just because, ‘like “automobile”’, it is pieced together from Latin and Greek, but because the cultural critic is ‘necessarily of the same essence’ as the ‘civilization’ to which ‘he owes his discontent’. Adorno moves his analysis from the ‘contradiction’ that marks the critic’s relation to culture. Caught between transcendence and immanence, the critic must juggle the passing of judgment against the view that culture is a cipher of society. The first requires an ‘Archimedean position’ (13). The second implies that the ‘substance of culture … resides not in culture alone but in its relation to something external, to the material life-process’ (28). This paper explores an alternative that emerges not from a dialectical tension between these poles but from the proposition that culture is internal to the material life-process. At stake is not merely an affirmation of the anthropological view of culture or a refutation of the approach that sees culture as ideology. The aim is to outline the basis for a renewed cultural critique capable of grappling with the operations of contemporary capital. To this end, the paper argues that culture is embedded in and constitutive of systems of global production. Focusing on the organisation of supply chains and the position of labour in logistical systems, I approach culture as a generative process that is an essential part of current modes and relations of production.

The paper is divided into three sections. The first is wide ranging and in its textual economy follows the contemporary resonances of Adorno’s comments on the word ‘automobile’. Thematically this section engages with questions of capitalist transition, crisis and the contested status of critique in contemporary theoretical and political discourses. It asks what hope there is for a renewed cultural critique and suggests this can be accomplished by turning attention to the infrastructural conditions of contemporary capitalist production. The second section extends this argument by exploring the limits of classical political economy from a biopolitical perspective. I propose that the operational dimensions of capital and, in particular, the software control of global mobilities through logistical technologies, provide an appropriate ground upon which to elaborate such a perspective. This leads to engagement with anthropologist Anna Tsing’s (2009) account of ‘supply chain capitalism’ in which I find conceptual and empirical resources for understanding and tracking the role of culture in production systems. In the third section, the focus of the article shifts to labour and its position in these systems. Emphasising the ways in which logistical practices are both productive of subjectivity and crucial to the articulation of cultural difference, I argue that the acquisition of
knowledge by workers about logistical modes of organisation is an important political project. Overall the article seeks to elaborate cultural critique toward practices of political experimentation and collaboration that work across and beyond the operations of capital. If culture is a generative and material element of the life-process so critique must be more than an intellectual proposition, an exercise in judgement or a discovery of the social in the cultural. It requires the invention of new knowledge practices and methods that intervene in the world.

Critique, Crisis, Capital

Adorno’s comment about the ‘offensive ring’ of the word *Kulturkritik* resembling that of the word ‘automobile’ for its combination of Latin and Greek provides an appropriate entry point for a paper that investigates the role of logistics in the material organisation of culture and capital. This is not only because the concept of hybridisation, to recall the term of Bakhtin (1981), has provided cultural critics with a means to interrogate a variety of issues from the cultural dynamics of globalisation (Pieterse 1994) to the flexible organisation of contemporary capitalism (Hardt & Negri 2000). It is also because capitalist transitions are often characterised as involving a shift from Fordism to post-Fordism (see Lipietz 1986; Harvey 1989; Marazzi 2011). Although these denominations are unsuitable to describe varieties of capitalism that have evolved in parts of the world that never developed large scale industry, it is relevant in the wake of Adorno’s comment that they position contemporary capitalism with respect to the waning of automobile manufacture. In her book *Forces of Labor* (2003), Beverly Silver charts the story of the automobile industry as a ‘product cycle’ that leads the development of twentieth century capitalism with its successive spatial displacements to poorer parts of the world and accompanying workers’ struggles. By contrast, she finds contemporary capitalism to be characterised by ‘its eclecticism and flexibility, visible in the dizzying array of choices in consumer goods and the rapid emergence of new commodities and new ways of consuming commodities’ (104). The question I want to ask is this: if, as Silver argues, automobile manufacture has ceded its position within the development of capitalism, what has become of *Kulturkritik*? What is the fate of that intellectual practice that Adorno associates with the word ‘automobile’ but which also finds its strongest articulations within and against that variety of capitalism that was driven (or at least symbolised) by automobile manufacture?

For over a decade, there have been calls from within the cultural and social sciences to move beyond critique. The most famous of these is Bruno Latour’s (2004) declaration that critique ‘has run out of steam’. There are myriad versions of this claim, but the practical upshot is the advocacy of practices of collaboration or experimentation that seek to make small differences in the world rather than launch wholesale discursive or activist assaults on capitalism. To be sure, this
post-critical tendency often corresponds with the institutional realities in which
the human sciences are practiced, marked by pressures to obtain industry funding
and create measurable forms of impact. But regardless of whether such impera-
tives are primary, the compulsion is to make or do something rather than merely
to engage in deconstructive interpretation. These perspectives are relevant to the
interrogation of logistics and production networks because ‘running out of steam’
also implicitly registers the exhaustion of carbon fuels that have powered automo-
biles and other machines of manufacture and transport. In his book Carbon De-
mocracy (2012), Timothy Mitchell argues that the provision of energy through the
burning of carbon fuels provided the technical and social conditions for the evolu-
tion of twentieth century politics and industry. But it in light of current scenarios
of peak carbon and climate change claims for the exhaustion of critique reach a
crescendo. In a widely read essay entitled ‘The Climate of History: Four Theses’
(2009: 212), Dipesh Chakrabarty writes that ‘critiques of capitalist globalization
[…] do not give us an adequate hold on human history once we accept that the
crisis of climate change is here with us and may exist as part of this planet for
much longer than capitalism or long after capitalism has undergone many more
historic mutations’. How are we to make sense of developments in the current
cultural and social sciences amid such warnings that the critique of capitalism
remains a necessary but not sufficient premise for radical political practices that
seek to better the world?

The turn in this essay to grapple with these questions through the analysis of
logistics, labour and life is informed by attention to the operational aspects of cap-
ital that come to the fore in the recent economic crisis. It is no accident that the
environmental crisis of which Chakrabarty writes has been accompanied and tem-
pered by a global crisis of capitalism that has exposed the material limits and con-
duits of financial globalisation (Magnani 2013). If ever one wanted empirical con-
firmation to discredit arguments for economic determination – even in the ‘last
instance’ as Althusser (1971) famously wrote – it is only necessary to consider the
social and political ramifications of this crisis. The turbulent global economy has
delivered harsh punishments to many populations, but the governmental response
has generally been limited to bail-out and austerity measures that have not ad-
dressed the root causes of the situation. Stuart Hall, Doreen Massey and Michael
Rustin (2013: 8) capture this predicament nicely: ‘The economic settlement that
has underpinned the social and political settlement of the last three decades is un-
raveling, but the broader political and social consensus apparently remains in
place’. Small changes seem incapable of unsettling this compact. It is not a matter
of staging revolution against reform. Both ultimately are carried by a desire for
change. What seems to be at stake is a blockage at the social and political level or
the capture of possibilities for change by entrenched material and technical prac-
tices that remain impervious to social action and cultural expression. To be sure,
this is an impasse that social movements and struggles, from Occupy to the Arab
revolutions, have chipped away at. New forms of organisation and political communication have been invented in the process. But the possibility of turning the passions and aspirations of these movements into levers for changing the wider political and social realities is elusive. A complex interplay between economic processes, science and technology, institutions, state politics and cultural ferment is at play. To shift this dynamic, we need something more than Kulturkritik. But what is the intellectual practice that will recognise the systematic and global character of the crisis? And can the environmental urgencies be addressed in concert with rather than in contradistinction to the economic realities? These are the questions of the moment. The horizon against which they are cast is open.

This brings me to the third of the terms that animates the discussion of this special issue: capitalism. As is well known, the word capitalism was never used by Karl Marx, who wrote rather of the ‘capitalist mode of production’. It finds its origins in the classical sociology of the late nineteenth century, and, particularly, in the writings of Werner Sombart (1902) and Max Weber (1930). These thinkers were deeply concerned with the radical challenge posed to traditional forms of social order by the reshaping of the world market and the mediation of social relations by the abstract character of value. The concept of capitalism emerged from their attempts to confront this challenge. Weber struggled to derive new criteria of legitimacy for political and social power in the face of capital’s expansion. The point is this: capital-ism, as a concept, implies the systematic organisation of economic processes and relations in ways that impinge upon politics and society. If, for Weber, this meant looking for a balance between the growth of the German nation-state and the world scale of ‘advanced capitalism’ (Hochkapitalismus), today such a balance seems elusive. The nation-state retains a capacity to regulate but such regulation seems increasingly overshadowed by the global operations of capitalism. This is particularly clear in countries hard hit by the economic crisis, such as Greece and Italy, where popular rejection of austerity measures has been met by the institution of commissary forms of power (troikas and technical governments) amenable to the global dictates of finance. How are we to account for a situation in which economic forces can discipline the life of entire populations but at the same time seem to be spinning out of control? In what sense can we claim that capitalism does not determine ‘in the last instance’ at the same time as we observe a reassertion of its powers in ways that seem to sidestep current practices of social and political resistance?

One way of confronting these questions without positing a disabling victory of the economic over the political is to investigate the sense in which capitalism’s operations have become embedded in technical processes and routines that provide an unacknowledged background to both economic aspects of social life and contemporary ways of being political. This draws attention to another dimension of the word automobile, associated with neither its etymological origins nor a particular capitalist product cycle but with what the British sociologist John Urry
(2004) calls the ‘the system of automobility’. With this phrase, Urry identifies ‘a self-organizing autopoietic, nonlinear system that spreads world-wide, and includes cars, car-drivers, roads, petroleum supplies and many novel objects, technologies and signs’ (27). Urry is interested in how this system locks social life into certain patterns of mobility, remakes time and space, and displays the potential for small changes that might move it in another direction. I mention this system not to suggest that the mobilities it generates provide a privileged point of entry for engaging questions about the continued viability of cultural critique. Urry’s interest in automobilities reflects a wider concern with the infrastructural conditions for contemporary capitalism and environmental change that extends far beyond a fascination with the motor car. A range of authors, including Paul N. Edwards (2003), Keller Easterling (2005) and Stephen Graham (2009), emphasise the material role of infrastructure in shaping social and cultural life. There is an emergent interest in how computer code (Mackenzie 2005), algorithms (Parisi 2013) and logistical systems (Cowen 2009) merge into circulatory practices that influence not only economic processes and relations but also possibilities for political organisation and expression. Jodi Dean (2012) argues that efforts of political activism and organisation that utilise networked electronic media are part of a system of ‘communicative capitalism’ that aggregates and harvests information to produce value in ways that excite and exhaust our attention and energies. But perhaps this is too pessimistic a vision, caught in the trap of Adorno’s critic who cannot escape the civilization she despises. If so, is there an exit from this predicament? Does culture present a political dead end? Or do new possibilities rise from the ashes of Kulturkritik?

Operations of Capitalism

The intellectual practice of political economy has provided thinkers of the twentieth and twenty first centuries with one of their most powerful arsenals for the analysis of capitalism. It is often forgotten, however, that the most prominent figure associated with this practice, Karl Marx, styled his work as a critique of political economy. This is the case even though Marx did not articulate his thought systematically. Despite the influence of Hegel and the efforts of Engels, his writing remains discontinuous, and unfinished. In this sense, he cannot be said to have produced a version of Marxism – significantly the term, like capitalism, is absent from his work. Marx’s critique does not function like a well oiled machine, a steam engine, which demolishes all in its path. It is committed to changing rather than merely interpreting the world, as the famous quotation from Theses on Feuerbach insists, and it draws sensitively if inconsistently on the divergent traditions it reworks and moves between: British political economy, French social and German idealism. Perhaps here it is possible to find resources for a critical practice that neither replicates the Kantian paradigm of judgement nor becomes entwined
in the death and rebirth of the theory of ideology (Laclau 1997). What Marx calls, in the first volume of *Capital* (1867/1977: 279), the ‘hidden abode of production’, where capital not only produces but is produced, provides a material and conceptual space from which such a practice might proceed. At stake is not necessarily a political anthropology of deception and revelation by which the depth reveals the truth of the surface. It is true that Marx contrasts this ‘hidden abode’ with the ‘sphere of circulation and commodity exchange within whose boundaries the sale and purchase of labour power goes on’ (280). But this contrast needs to be rethought on two counts.

First, the sphere of freedom and legally contracted wage labour, which Marx tended to assume as a capitalist norm, cannot be taken for granted. Global labour historians such as Marcel van der Linden (2008) have shown how, aside from the wage, systems of bondage such as slavery and indenture have been central to capital’s global development. Likewise, feminist arguments and struggles have questioned the division between productive and reproductive labour, challenging the masculinist bias implicit in the focus on the freely contracted wage (Pateman 1988; Weeks 2011; Federici 2012). Theorists of post-Fordist economic transformations have pointed to new kinds of productivity associated with traditionally reproductive tasks such as relation building and communication (Marazzi 2011). Accounts of precarious labour have emphasised how different kinds of economic need and affective disposition can harness workers to jobs, including emotional blackmail in the case of carers (Anderson 2000) or ‘loving the job’ on the part of creative workers (Gill 2006). Both historically and in the present day there has been a deep heterogenisation of labour across time and space, and this has shattered the smoothly functioning and legally regulated ‘surface’ of freely contracted labour that Marx supposed to cover the ‘hidden abode of production’ (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013a).

The second factor that disturbs this arrangement concerns the modes of power exercised in the space of production. If, in the realm of circulation and exchange, the juridical power of the state seals the labour contract, the abode of production seems to be one in which disciplinary power, to recall a term from Michel Foucault, comes to the fore. One remembers that Marx completes the chapter where he writes of the ‘hidden abode of production’ by suggesting that when the ‘money-owner’ emerges as a ‘capitalist’ and the ‘possessor of labour-power as his worker’, the latter ‘has nothing else to expect but – a tanning’ (1867/1977: 280). If, however, we follow one of the first lectures in which Foucault questions an exclusive focus on the juridical power of the state, ‘The Meshes of Power’ (2007), the situation appears more complex. In this lecture, delivered at the University of Bahia in 1976, Foucault compares ‘the juridical type of power’ to ‘the simultaneously specific and relatively autonomous, in some way impermeable, character of the de facto power that an employer exerts in a workshop’. In so doing, he recalls Marx’s *Capital* where he finds awareness that ‘there exists no single power, but
several powers’ (156). This leads to one of Foucault’s first formulations of the concept of biopower, which regulates the life of populations. Writing with Sandro Mezzadra, I have correlated the ‘heterogeneous subjective targets (individuals and populations)’ of these two arms of Foucauldian power with ‘the two sides of labor power: the “living body” produced as the “bearer” of labor power and the general human potency epitomized by the concept – or, from another point of view, the individualized experience of the laborer and his or her living in the reality of social cooperation’ (Mezzadra & Neilson 2013a: 194).

This emphasis on an intertwining of disciplinary and biopolitical power in the moment of production when combined with attention to the historical specificity of freely contracted wage labour allows a more flexible assessment of the types of power that come to bear in the social relation of capital. The notion of assemblages of power is useful here because it gives a sense of the multiple and contingent ways in which different varieties of power combine to facilitate capital’s turnover and make labour productive (for a detailed discussion of this concept see Mezzadra and Neilson 2013a: 189-197). It can also account for the tendency of such combinations to congeal and maintain stability over long stretches of time or in certain spaces. Although it has a history in the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1987), my use of the concept of assemblage stems more directly from discussions of global assemblages offered by Aiwha Ong and Stephen Collier (2005) and Saskia Sassen (2006). These thinkers highlight how such assemblages tend to reconfigure state territory and power rather than completely displacing them. There is a disaggregation of powers that were once exclusively exercised by the state and a rearrangement of them in specific configurations that mix technology, politics and actors. This accords the Foucauldian account of biopower which traces the historical movement of power away from the juridical form of the state. It also adds an element of contingency that questions totalising explanations of economy and culture deriving from organic notions of society such as those that stem from Hegelian visions of spirit or from functionalist and structuralist versions of sociology. Attention to contingency, however, can lead to a perspective that flattens out networked interactions as if the linking and delinking of elements occurs without conflict or dissensus. In the case of labour and productivity, it is crucial to show how assemblages of power are crossed by fundamental dissymmetry and antagonisms that are inherent to their material constitution.

This is where the empirical study of production networks and supply chain systems comes into play. Under current conditions, what Marx (1867/1977: 932) described as the mediation of social relations ‘through things’ has become the object of the thriving management science of logistics. Although the business of distribution has been subject to algorithmic calculations at least since the publication of works such as Wilhelm Launhardt’s The Theory of the Trace (1900) and Alfred Weber’s Theory of the Location of Industries (1929), the introduction of digital systems has greatly enhanced possibilities for trading transport and labour
costs off against each other. The so-called logistics revolution (Allen 1997) that swept through capitalist organisational cultures in the 1960s, alongside the increasing speed and social significance of financial trading and the growing pressure to extract value from human populations and natural resources, has placed new emphasis on the operative dimensions of capitalism.

The blending of production with elements of circulation and exchange is perhaps best illustrated with reference to developments in the logistics sector. Within the Fordist regime of accumulation, the assumption was that the process of adding value through production and exploitation of labour stopped at the factory gates. Although contested by feminist thinkers who argued that such production rested on the unwaged work of women (Dalla Costa & James 1972), this view also had ramifications for the role of transportation or distribution within the firm. The cost of getting the commodity to the consumer was one that simply needed to be minimised, since it was not productive of value. With logistics this changed. A system analytics approach derived from military operations research was applied to problems of transportation (Holmes 2010). This saw a number of related developments including the introduction of the shipping container, the interlinking of logistics with computing and software design, the formation of academic and industry bodies for the production and dissemination of logistical knowledge, and the invention of more efficient systems for the performance monitoring of workers. More pointedly, logistics was integrated into the production process itself and became a means of maximising profit. Linked to this were changes in the spatial organisation of firms, the evolution of global supply chains, and the search for cheap labour rates in the world’s poorer regions. The assembly of goods across different global sites, with objects and knowledge travelling between locations, made the lines between production and distribution increasingly indistinct. Logistics also made the global organisation of space more complex. Geographical entities such as export processing zones and logistics parks began to appear and provided a new geography for attracting investment and organising global production. Increasingly, logistics also came to play a role in service economies and production processes not involving the manufacture of material goods. From financial operations to television production, translation services to the formation of global care chains, the logistical organisation of work and mobility became central to the expansion of capitalist markets and market logics.

In a series of publications (Neilson & Rossiter 2011; Neilson 2012; Mezzadra & Neilson 2013b; Neilson 2013), I have explored these developments in relation to the transformations of capitalism, the production of space and time, and the mutations of sovereignty and global governance. The technical and organisational systems that enabled the logistics revolution have undergone vast changes since the 1960s. The evolution of supply chain management and just-in-time production systems required the controlled feedback of logistical data into production and distribution systems. Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) and Electronic Data
Interchange (EDI) software platforms aided efforts to digitally record, communicate and analyse every aspect of production, transport, display and sales. This resulted in more expansive and articulated logistical systems that sought to continuously map out the position and trajectory of objects in motion. The real-time integration of these systems provided an unprecedented ability to rationalise labour at every point along the chain, intensifying the pace at which the system turned over and squeezing workers for greater productivity. But the desire to match ideals of lean production to agile and adaptable logistical processes proved elusive. The reduction of costs, elimination of waste and optimisation of flow could only be pushed so far without jeopardising the robustness and flexibility of production systems. Issues of supply chain resilience sparked efforts to minimise contingency by simulating the decisions of actors on both supply and demand sides of global production regimes. Today complex techniques of scenario planning, sometimes involving the use of software adapted from financial market applications, are deployed to maximise options for smoothing out discrepancies and interruptions. The challenge of achieving interoperability between systems and building ‘fault tolerance’ into them has underscored the difficulties that underlie efforts of standardisation. Nonetheless, the internal governance of supply chains continues to demand protocols of hierarchy, codifiability, capability and coordination (Gereffi, Humphrey & Sturgeon 2005).

As Anna Tsing (2009: 151) points out, the ‘diversity of supply chains cannot be fully disciplined from inside the chain’, making them ‘unpredictable – and intriguing as frames for understanding capitalism’. Tsing’s observations are of great relevance for an investigation of how culture, after the demise of Kulturkritik, might play a role in the development of a politically powerful approach to the operations of capital. Central to her understanding of supply chains is an emphasis on how they link and create situations of diversity, both in their spanning of wide global vistas and their grappling with the responses of labour and capital in attempts to cut labour costs and discipline workforces. ‘Supply chain capitalists’, she writes, ‘worry about diversity, and their self-consciousness is what makes it easy to show how diversity forms part of the structure of contemporary capitalism rather than an inessential appendage’ (150). This is not merely a matter of the dissimilarities between firms arrayed along a supply chain or the cultural and economic conditions that pertain in the sites where they operate. It is also a question of relations between different actors in the chain and the kinds of negotiation they must perform for it to function. In her book Friction (2005), Tsing gives the example of a piece of coal that travels from Kalimantan to India. First it must be removed from the earth, then it travels to a port city where it is sorted and graded, from here it must be moved quickly to avoid loss of value, and when it finally arrives in India it must meet the requirements of power plant managers. Shunting the commodity along the chain requires ‘not a vague and transcendent “coalness” but rather a step by step negotiation of the possibilities at hand – for digging, sort-
ing, transport, and so on’. ‘The closer we look at the commodity chain,’ Tsing writes, ‘the more every step – including transportation – can be seen as an area of cultural production’ (51). By this she means that the work of commodity production is partly accomplished by uneasy cultural interactions between participants along the chain.

This understanding of cultural production is a far cry from Adorno’s discontented engagement with the culture industry. It is also quite remote from more recent assessments of the labour precarity and ‘free labor’ that characterise employment in today’s digitalised creative industries (Terranova 2000; Ross 2009). Tsing’s ruminations draw attention to the presence of friction in supply chains and the role of culture in both facilitating and disrupting their operations. She uses the metaphor of a tyre on the road: ‘Friction is not just about slowing things down. Friction is required to keep global power in motion. It shows us (as one advertising jingle put it) where the rubber meets the road’ (2005: 6). This metaphor is helpful. It registers how economic processes are never frictionless but also suggests how friction can support the business of economic turnover. Logistics is a case in point, since its imaginaries are deeply invested in the possibility of smoothing out relations of production and distribution. In practice, the programs and designs of logisticians meet hindrances of all kinds and even contribute to their generation, from unruly workforces to traffic chokepoints. Tsing’s vision encompasses these moments of blockage as well as exploring the role of culture in facilitating economic interactions. Less pronounced in her work is a sense of how to invent practices of political organisation that respond to the peculiar forms of networked organisation that capitalism pursues in its construction of supply chains. It is to this question that I now turn, attending to its theoretical as well as practical moments.

**Strategic Position**

How is it possible to combine a sense of the uncertain role of culture in the organisation of supply chains with an analysis of the variable geometry of power that bears upon the contemporary scene of production? Tsing’s insistence that ‘even transportation’ has become ‘an area of cultural production’ draws attention to an important aspect of supply chains: they link not only dissimilar sites and firms but also dissimilar workforces. In dealing with the question of how labour forces arrayed along a supply chain relate to each other – a question of upmost importance for the creation of political solidarities that reach across the fractured geographies of globalisation – it is crucial to maintain a sense of the production of labour power as a commodity. This means that labour forces cannot be considered, as Taylor (2008: 18) puts it, ‘an a priori factor in the spatial disbursement of economic processes’. There must be an account of how they are produced and reproduced across as well as within sites, drawing the necessary empirical investigation be-
beyond existing research regarding the making of local labour forces (Wolff 1992; Kelly 2013). It also means that the question of cultural interactions along the supply chain becomes linked to the theoretical and practical issues surrounding the production of political subjectivity. What kind of political subject can interrupt the workings of a supply chain? Where is such a subject located? How is it produced and how might it be named? These are crucial questions for any reinvention of politics that seeks to confront the networked forms of organisation that enable the workings of contemporary capitalism.

For purposes of analysis, it is helpful to tackle this question by looking at two of its most important aspects separately, although in reality they are intertwined: the subjection of labour at any point along the chain and the opportunities for solidarity between labour forces working across these points. My earlier discussion of assemblages of power is relevant to the first of these concerns as it explains why contractual arrangements are only one factor contributing to labour conditions alongside disciplinary and biopolitical elements. Clearly there are variations between the modes of subjection operating at various worksites along supply chains. There are also social and cultural factors that impinge from outside and affect how labour power is produced at any point along these chains. As Tsing (2009: 151) recognises: ‘No firm has to personally invent patriarchy, colonialism, war, racism, or imprisonment, yet each of these is privileged in supply chain labor mobilization’. Logistical operations also provide powerful forms of global governance. The attempt to measure labour performance in real-time and use the resultant data to generate parameters for optimising labour efficiencies and costs is a prominent feature of contemporary supply chain management. Such real-time labour measurement can be understood as an attempt to eliminate the difference between living and abstract labour. Marx (1858/1973: 361) defines living labour as ‘form-giving fire’, the subjective capacity for labour carried in the worker’s body, inserted into networks of cooperation and positioned in the concrete circumstances under which labour is performed. Abstract labour is the generalised temporal measure of labour that enables its translation into the language of value and provides the regulatory nexus for the establishment of a world market for the commodity of labour power. But the distinction between living and abstract labour also has important political ramifications that can be understood in the frame of resistance and control. This means it can shed light on the qualities of power inherent in logistical practices, which have come to the fore with the globalisation of economic processes and relations. The tension between living and abstract labour, which derives from the fact that the multiplicity and concreteness of the former cannot be fully reduced to the latter, has intensified under contemporary capitalism. Logistics presents the fantasy of eliminating this gap through technical processes of coordination and measure.

Yet logistical control crosses workers in a double way. It subjects them to new forms of monitoring elaborated by key performance indicators (KPIs), standard
operating procedures (SOPs), benchmarks, audits, quotas, best practices and the like. At the same time, it positions them within global production systems in which small actions on their part can have widespread effects. John Womack (2006) writes of what he calls ‘strategic position’, seeking to identify the social and/or technical conditions that maximise the disruptive effect that actions taken at certain point in the chain might have. Here the negative moment of sabotage meets the constitutive moment of labour organisation, since the identification of such a point, let along the taking of action at it, is a complex matter that often requires collaboration among workforces. This brings me to the second moment in my analysis of the production of political subjectivity along the supply chain: the question of solidarity between different labour forces. This is no easy matter given the dissimilarities of race, class and gender that typically mark the workforces arrayed along a supply chain or the fact that they often operate in different national jurisdictions and across different regimes of authority, territory and rights – for instance, in cases where key industrial activities are undertaken in special economic zones. Here the questions of cultural difference and translation are not abstract metaphors for making arguments about hybridisation or flow but practical issues that must be unavoidably confronted in the political organisation of labour forces.

Despite their crucial role in the articulation of contemporary capitalism, global supply chains are often extremely fragile entities. This is because the effort to play off leaness against agility can result in scenarios where the optimisation of a system occurs at the cost of its resilience. New opportunities emerge for labour organisation since strategic actions can resonate along the supply chain, having potentially devastating effects both up and downstream. The dock worker who engages in wildcat strikes or the courier who fails to work at key times of the year responds to vulnerabilities in the supply chains in which he or she works. Although capital can respond to such actions by rerouting or stockpiling, it can only do so at the cost of comprising the efficiency of the operations it has strived so highly to produce. Workers’ collective understanding of the logistical networks in which they work can become a crucial piece of political knowledge if studied and applied systematically.

The production of such knowledge involves not only the building of strategic links between workers along supply chains but also the reckoning with divisions that separate the computational from the physical domains of logistics. The masculine domains of dock work and trucking, for instance, need to build alliances with the feminised ‘no collar’ labour of data entry, freight forwarding and procurement, as occurred in the successful strike that closed the Port of Los Angeles in December 2012 (Bologna 2012). The challenges mount when these differences stretch across national borders – a familiar predicament in situations of ‘virtual migration’ (Aneesh 2006) where workers in countries such as India perform service labour for companies and customers in distant locations. Overcoming these
barriers requires awareness on the part of logistical workers of the substantive affects of code and computational systems on their lives, both inside and outside the workplace. It also implies knowledge of those aspects of life that cannot be absorbed by the operational and ordering dimensions of logistical practices, which can represent and regulate differences in some ways but not in others. The material presence of culture with global production systems rears its head in the organisation of labour as much as in the operative dimensions of capital. A renewed *Kulturkritik* must come to grips both with code and those aspects of difference and life that persist outside it.

**Conclusion**

There is an affinity between the kinds of logistical knowledge workers need to accrue to further their political aims and the knowledge practices that cultural and social researchers must invent to understand the changing forms of capitalism amidst the contemporary crisis. Supply chains are not the only contemporary form of global capitalism. There is also the increasing reach of financialisation (Martin 2002; Marazzi 2010) and the pull of extraction that has forced new kinds of economic and social settlements in Africa (Ferguson 2006) and Latin America (Svampa 2012). Understanding the mutual implication and separate development of these different kinds of capitalist operations is an analytical and political priority (Mezzadra & Neilson 2013b). But a focus on supply chains allows an analysis of how the heterogeneity of global space and time comes to figure in arrangements of technology and labour power that span vast swathes of the earth’s surface. It thus begs questions of global cultural and social analysis in ways that reach beyond both the ‘Archimedean position’ of the judging critic and an ‘immanent criticism’ that cannot ‘resolve the contradictions under which it labours’ (Adorno 1967: 31). The sphere of logistical organisation may seem remote from the material realm of culture but in reality it must grapple with it at every turn. Cultural investigations in this sphere demand new practices of experimentation and collaboration in the space that links the gleaming circuits of information technology to hard and often dirty toil. What is made is a kind of knowledge that facilitates political organisation and industrial disruption.

Logistical disputes have been mounting around the world, as recent struggles against companies like IKEA and Amazon attest (Uninomade Collective 2013; Leisegang 2013). These practical struggles have a life apart from theoretical arguments but the intervention they make suggests the need for criticism to engage with the system of production and exchange itself rather than its ideological representations. A merely cultural analysis of contemporary production systems, which does not take account of their material and informational processes, will be unable to discern the operative elements of capital that have come to the fore in the current crisis. Similarly it will not be able to grapple with the environmental chal-
lenges that shadow and confront anticapitalist politics. It is no accident that the logistics sector is booming despite the current economic turmoil. Stefano Harney and Fred Moten (2013) describe logistics as ‘a booming field, a conquering field’ that was always after a ‘bigger prize’ than financialization – the ‘fantasy that capital could exist without labor’ (88-90). Shattering this fantasy is not merely a matter of reinventing cultural critique. It requires a cultural intelligence that remains critical in a syncretic and inventive way while working beyond and across the material and technical elements that hold capital in place.

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Imagined, Real and Moral Economies

By John Clarke

Abstract
This article explores three different inflections of the idea of economy: imagined, real and moral. Each offers a distinctive way of thinking about economies and each raises the possibility of providing critical purchase on the formations of ‘actually existing capitalisms’. The article begins from the idea of imagined economies given the proliferation of such imaginaries, not least in the wake of the financial crisis. In political, public and policy discourse, economies have become the focus of intense fantasy and projection. The resulting imaginaries underpin a range of economic, public and social policies. Importantly, they articulate a foundational distinction between economic and other sorts of policy. The idea of imagined economies opens the space for a certain type of critical engagement with contemporary political economy. In a rather different way, ideas of the ‘real economy’ have also been the site of critical work – distinguishing between ‘real’ relations and practices involved in the production of material objects (and value) in the contrast with virtual, digital, financialised economies. This article treats the ‘real economy’ as one further instance of an imagined economy. Like the concept of the ‘real economy’, E.P. Thompson’s exploration of a ‘moral economy’ also offers a standpoint from which critical analysis of the current economic, political and social disintegrations might be constructed. Thompson’s articulation of a moment in which collective understandings of economies as fields of moral relationships and obligations dramatises the contemporary de-socialization of economies, even if it may be harder to imagine twentieth and twenty first century capitalisms as moral economies that the current crisis has disrupted. Again, the article treats ‘moral economies’ as another form of imagined economy, in part to make visible the shifting and contested character of what counts as ‘economic’.

Keywords: Imagined economies, everyday thinking, crises, contradictions, fractures, consent, conjuncture.
Introduction

This article emerges from the unfolding crises inaugurated by the global financial crisis of 2007-8. The crisis itself triggered many different, and contending, diagnoses. Most of these offered more or less plausible accounts of economies and how they worked, failed and might be reformed or reconstructed. As The Crisis morphed into multiple crises, such accounts of economies continued to proliferate, whether linking household irresponsibility to the global credit crisis, or demanding austere approaches to public finances. In the process, distinctions between types of economy were elaborated (between virtual and real economies, or between immoral and moral capitalisms, for example). They form part of the contemporary proliferation of such imaginings, providing framings through which different political and social desires may be projected and pursued. Each of them also reinscribes a supposed foundational distinction between the economy and ‘the rest’: the social, political, cultural, etc. In these circumstances, I suggest that it may be worth paying attention to all this ‘economy talk’ and to consider what might be at stake in imagining economies. This is a potentially productive point for the intersection of cultural studies and political economy (see also Jessop 2011/2013) and this article explores both its potential and some of the pitfalls and problems that it might engender.

The first section explores what it means to talk of imagined economies, which leads to an exploration of some of the contemporary ways in which economies are being imagined. The third section discusses the relationships between imagined economies, real economies and moral economies, while arguing that – in this context at least – conceptions of real and moral economies need to be understood as varieties of imagined economies. The conclusion poses the question of what it means to think about imagined economies conjuncturally.

Imagined Economies: Coming to Terms

So, the immediate provocation for this article lies in the contemporary proliferation of ‘economy talk’ in which diagnoses of the present, demands for change and desires for the future are recurrently articulated. Nevertheless, the choice of ‘imagined economies’ as an analytical starting point is hardly a spontaneous or innocent response to this moment. Rather it is a direction of inquiry motivated by the conjunction of several factors.

First, the idea of ‘imagined economies’ emerges as an alternative pole of thinking to all those accounts of the ‘real’, ‘fundamental’ or ‘material’ character of the world that lay claim to the economy as foundational, and which seek to discipline thinking by the force of this claimed reality. This fundamentalism works through different rhetorical tropes: in conceptual architectures (the base/superstructure distinction lives on with its real/epiphenomenal implications); in terms of tem-
poral structures of thinking (the economy in the first instance, everything else then follows); and in terms of political urgency, from austerity to growth, from crisis to transformation, politics must begin with the economy. This order of precedence alarms me, not least because of its presumption of a separate or separable 'economy', a point to which I will return below. This challenge to such reductive forms of realism draws on Gibson-Graham’s profound critique of ways of thinking about capitalism (1996).

Secondly, the concept of imagined economies has links to a growing interest in how to analyse apparently unified, homogeneous and solidified entities as imagined. Conceptions of the imaginary character of such formations points to the articulation of acts of imagining and the work of installing such imaginaries as taken for granted realities: the creation of contradictory unities in difference. This last phrase - unity in difference - is Marx’s, used in the Grundrisse when he is describing the circuit of capital. It seems to me to be a useful way of thinking of articulated entities which are neither a simple totality nor a merely heterogeneous collection of disparate parts. It has contemporary echoes in the interest in such terms as configurations, assemblages, ensembles and so on (see the discussion in Clarke 2008 around welfare states). This line of thinking connects Benedict Anderson's provocative interrogation of the nation as an imagined community (1991) to Cameron and Palan's exploration of the imagined geographies of globalisation and other geographers examining other spatial imaginaries.

Thirdly, the idea of imagined economies produces a fascinating, if somewhat uncertain, echo of an earlier conceptualisation. In his famous essay on Ideological State Apparatuses, Louis Althusser developed a conception of ideology as people's 'imaginary relationship to their real conditions of existence' (1970/1971: 162). This is a compelling, if somewhat elusive, formulation that places a particular (Lacanian) view of the 'imaginary' at the core of thinking about ideology. This seems a good place to explore its implications, and its elusiveness, a little further.

Finally, in everyday life in the UK and elsewhere, such imagined economies address their subjects in a variety of economic identities and relationships: as a worker, taxpayer, consumer, welfare dependent and/or entrepreneurial self. Such modes of address – or interpellations in Althusser’s sense – summon their recipients as economic subjects in the first instance, and as subjects who think economically, are able to calculate in such terms and grasp the relationships between the global, the national, the household and the self as sites of economic practice (and desire).

Each of these elements contributes to the character and tendency of this article, shaping both the interest in imagined economies and the way in which they are examined. They also contribute rather diverse resources to the way that economies (and other domains and entities) are understood as being imagined. By imagined I mean the discursive or ideological representations of what an economy is: this includes both 'economies' in the large sense and more particular specifications of
things and people as economic (agents, data, devices, techniques, technologies, etc, see Newman and Clarke 2009, chapter 5). This view of imagined economies shares much with the analysis developed by Bob Jessop from the standpoint of Cultural Political Economy:

Imaginaries are semiotic systems that frame individual subjects’ lived experience of an inordinately complex world and/or guide collective calculation about that world. Viewed in these terms, an economic imaginary gives meaning and shape to the ‘economic’ field and, in certain conditions, may become the basis for economic strategies, state projects, and hegemonic visions …

Imagined economies are discursively constituted and materially reproduced on many sites and scales, in different spatio-temporal contexts, and over various spatio-temporal horizons. … where an imaginary has been successfully operationalized and institutionalized, it transforms and naturalizes these elements into the moments of a specific economy with specific emergent properties. (Jessop 2011/2013: 6-7)

What follows will explore imagined economies as operating at many levels/scales and across many sites, bit with particular attention to the ways in which they may connect the projections of large scale political and policy discourse and the forms of everyday thinking. In a Gramscian sense, we can see such grand schemes attempting to selectively address and organize elements of popular or ‘common-sense’ thinking, naturalizing the dominant (or would be dominant) modes of economization in the process. This implies paying attention to the mundane imagery through which the economic is narrated in the many everyday, as well as to the grand or more abstracted statements about the power of the economic. Such mundane economizations might include the continuing discussions about whether ‘we can afford welfare’, to Margaret Thatcher's attempted reimagining of the national economy as a household purse (itself an interesting inversion of Foucault's reminder of where the concern with 'economy' originates). In this sense, this article is a modest contribution to a larger project that David Ruccio has called ‘de-centering economic knowledge’ (2008: 896). Ruccio argues that there are many forms in which economic knowledge circulates:

The fact is, there are diverse representations of the economy – what it is, how it operates, how it is intertwined with the rest of the natural and social world, what concepts are appropriate to analyzing it, and so on – in all three arenas: within the official discipline of economics, in academic departments and research centers other than departments of economics within colleges and universities, and in activities and institutions outside the academy. And the diversity of economic representations that exists in these arenas simply cannot be reduced to or captured by a singular definition, including the all-too-common statements about ‘how economists think’ or what the ‘central economic question is’ that one finds in the textbooks that are used very year, around the world, to teach hundreds of thousands of students how to think about the economy – in other words, how to represent the economy, to themselves and others. (2008: 895-6)

This concern with how economies/the economy are imagined and represented necessarily opens the space of plural, diverse and/or heterogeneous imaginaries that circulate in the domains of popular or public knowledge (with more or less
authority attaching to them). The analysis developed here also aims to stretch the discursive/ideological analytical focus on representation by exploring some of the ways in which imagining economies might be associated with desire and doubt, or anxiety and aspiration. Imagined economies are also objects of fantasy: both in the Freudian meaning of being fantastic projections, and in the more mundane sense of articulating possible desires and dreads. An overly rationalist view of representation risks missing these potential lines of articulation that have the capacity to connect (and, necessarily, to disconnect) political projects and popular sentiments.

Imagined economies are always the focus of attempts to make them come true, to make them real, to make them materialise. Such political projects seek to install the imaginaries in plans and strategies, to locate them in apparatuses, institutions, relationships, and practices. There is, of course, no guarantee that attempts to make them come true are successful. Or, at least, such attempts do not necessarily match up to the fantasy, the image, the desire. At this point, I will merely note two sets of conditions that tend to get in the way of the successful realization of imagined economies. First, they are difficult to realize because they tend to engender antagonisms, tensions and contradictions. Second, they are hard to realize because they are rarely alone in the world. Rather they are contested by other imaginings of the economy. Both of these conditions are profoundly consequential, even if the forms they take are conjuncturally specific.

**Imagining Economies**

This section considers some of the imagined economies that are currently circulating in public, political and governmental discourse within the UK. This is a convenient conjunctural framing that limits some of the range of time and space that can be explored in one article, but I do not assume that these examples of imagined economies are in practice limited in time and space. Indeed they have a significant character as travelling imaginaries, not least in accruing some of their symbolic power and material effectiveness by claiming either long historical value (if not eternal truth) or global scope. Nowhere is this more significant than in the starting point for this discussion: the very possibility of imagining an economy as a thing in itself.

There is something distinctive, even if taken for granted, about imagining an economy as a domain separate from, and increasingly superordinate to, other fields of life (the social, the political, the cultural, etc). This is an astonishing accomplishment but one that underpins – provides the imaginary foundation for – the various economies that I will discuss. Larry Grossberg (2011) has written about this as one of the organizing distinctions of ‘euro Atlantic modernity’ which provides a basis for thinking about how the appearance of the economy as disembodied is the result of political-cultural work that produces the paradox of ‘em-
bedded disembeddedness’. Although this separation of the economy is profoundly
significant for much economic, political and social thinking, it is perhaps equally
remarkable that it has been sustained and reproduced in the face of its problems,
perverse effects, contradictions and recurrent implausibility. Establishing this
space of the economic creates the conditions for things called economies to be
imagined in different ways, involving different architectures, elements, dynamics,
figures and embodiments.

The following section explores some of the imagined economies that have been
circulating in political, public and popular discussions of crisis – itself understood
as various forms of economic crisis – in the UK, although other places are neces-
sarily implicated, at least the ways in which the relations between places are
grasped as economic relationships: global markets; international financial systems
etc. The crises that were inaugurated in 2007-8 have had multiple effects, one of
which is to make ‘economy talk’ more visible as debates over the causes and con-
sequences of crisis – and how to respond – proliferated in political and popular
settings. This was obviously the landscape for ideological political work conven-
tionally understood (Gamble 2010; see also Clarke & Newman 2010) in which
different conceptions of the crisis contended to command and direct the political
field. But it was also a moment in which more everyday or popular understand-
ings became more visible and more contentious as anxieties, frustrations, and
doubts about authority and expertise also circulated – and which political projects
attempted to contain, enroll and articulate. As a consequence, what follows tries to
be attentive to the organized character of imagined economies – how they work as
economies – while also establishing the conditions for thinking about how they
might not work, how crises may unsettle their apparent coherence and how popu-
lar doubts might emerge in and around such instabilities.

The Economy as the Market

Perhaps the most salient imagined economy is that of the market. The market
identifies the economy as transactional, formulated in everyday terms of the econ-
omy as the site of shopping, choice making, free exchange and more. The market
itself is imagined as a mechanism, a dynamic, and an agent (the ‘invisible hand’).
As such, the market is both neutral (it has no built in biases, except against those
without the resources to take part in exchange) and virtuous (market forces pro-
mote the desirable outcomes of increased efficiency, innovation and continuous
improvement). The market is simultaneously natural and necessary: on the one
hand, it is taken to represent the default condition of human sociality (or least
modern sociality). On the other hand, it is necessary – without it, inefficiency
flourishes, social biases creep in, or political dogma rules. Thomas Friedman
(2007) has written compellingly about the rise of ‘market populism’ as the con-
temporary (Anglophone) imagining of the economy and the drive to universalize
it.
And yet we might note two quirks about the market economy. Despite its compelling qualities (natural, necessary, foundational, universal), it everywhere requires to be supported, nurtured, developed – while being protected from ‘interference’ – and these nurturing processes require the care-taking work of states. In this register, the market seems strangely vulnerable for such a powerful and dynamic force. Perhaps more strikingly, the crisis of 2008 revealed a deeper and more troubling sense of vulnerability: occasionally, it seemed that the ‘invisible hand’ had lost its grip. It became infected by strange attacks of the tremors or a sort of palsy – unleashing unpredictable and destabilizing failures of control and coordination. Elsewhere, I have suggested that such moments might reveal a degree of ‘gender trouble’ in the way markets are imagined (Clarke 2010). Normally, the market appears as a dynamic and virile force: exhibiting a powerful capacity for making things happen. In this guise, the market appears as a potent force suffused with masculine qualities. But in the moment of crisis, other qualities and characteristics came into view, looking rather like affective disorders. Markets appeared as a pale shadow of their formerly virile selves, no longer relentlessly expanding but slipping into a period of decline, decay and, above all, depression. Depression is an interesting concept in relation to markets because it condenses two rather different, but significant sets of meanings. On one hand, we encounter the hard evidentiary science of economics – in which depression refers to a specified trend in economic activity, measurable by a set of particular indicators. Depressions – like the Great Depression of the 1930s – are profound and prolonged slumps in economic activity. On the other hand, depression is also a powerful and widely used descriptor of particular mental disturbances or emotional moods. In the prolonged and proliferating condition of crisis, descriptions of markets as nervous, anxious, and unsettled became frequent signifiers of economic trouble and troubled economies. Markets appeared vulnerable and susceptible to bouts of panic and hysteria in which they are infected by a sort of viral irrationality. These mood swings of markets – moments of manic recovery offset by plummeting spirits – led to states of depression. In contrast to the virile, expansive and penetrative markets of the past, these enfeebled markets seemed to be discursively feminised. Their instability and irrational dispositions were recurrently coded in the language of emotional and affective conditions that are – in Western cultures – understood as feminine. These were markets that suffered from strangely Victorian ‘female complaints’: attacks of the vapours, or fits of hysteria. In contrast to the hard calculative logics that supposedly drove market expansiveness, contemporary markets appear to be excessively vulnerable entities.

The Economy as National Economies
Led by the important work of Timothy Mitchell, there has been a growing interest in how the economy was imagined and institutionalised as a series of national economies, each of which was understood as a closed and (largely) coherent sys-
tem, that was knowable, countable, potentially manageable and which could be compared to other such economies. This is the dominant modern form of imagining the economy as a national economy, borrowing, Mitchell (2007) suggests, a systems model from physics and a conception of the national space as a bounded entity from political theory. Despite the troubles associated with both of these conceptions (the system and the nation as coherent bounded space), the imaginary of a series of national economies has been a powerful foundation for economics, for national governmental preoccupations, for international relations and for the quotidian understandings of ‘our’ economy: its achievements and failures, its rise and fall, its needs and problems, its promises of future improvement. It remains a profound (if problematic) reference point for thinking economically. Mitchell observes that:

In the twentieth century, new ways of administering the welfare of populations, of developing the resources of colonies, organizing the circulation of money, compiling and using statistics, managing large businesses and workforces, branding and marketing products, and desiring and purchasing commodities brought into being a world that for the first time could be measured and calculated as though it were a free-standing object, the economy. Economists claimed only to describe this object, but in fact they participated in producing it. Their contribution was to help devise the forms of calculation in terms of which new kinds of socio-technical practice were organized, to monitor these forms of practice as though they formed a self-regulating system, and to put forward rival accounts of how the system worked. ‘Economy’ no longer referred to a way of exercising power and accumulating knowledge; it now referred to an object of power and knowledge. (Mitchell 2008: 1116-7)

This stable unit of economic calculation has subsequently been re-imagined as an element in a wider global economy, characterised by the twin dynamics of openness (the loosening of the boundaries of the nation space) and competition (between nations, but also between multi- and trans-national entities whose lack of national character marks them as both more modern and more powerful). This does not mean that the national economy has disappeared. On the contrary, it remains central to both governmental and political calculation. Its performance is extensively reported; news of its rising or falling fortunes is eagerly or anxiously anticipated; and its performance can be rated and evaluated comparatively and competitively. But the national economy is not what it used to be: its apparent solidity, boundedness and forms of closure no longer hold firm in the face of other economies and other economic dynamics. One critical axis of this re-imagining is the vision of an economy composed of entrepreneurial, competitive, dynamic corporations/organisations. The restless and unstable character of these organizations – and the relationships between them – changes the problematic of knowledge and calculation. However, that is not my main interest here; rather I focus on the strange paradox of entrepreneurial visions of autonomy. Strangely, these fundamentally entrepreneurial entities require increasing levels of public subsidy and support in order to survive, much less succeed. Many of the transformations of the welfare state (particularly in the UK) have involved the invention of new forms of
subsidy to capital, an angle of analysis that offers a different view of the welfare state as a mechanism of redistribution. Kevin Farnsworth has described this as a move from ‘social welfare’ towards ‘corporate welfare’ (Farnsworth 2012). A variety of changes, such as public-private partnerships, the outsourcing or subcontracting of services and the subsidization of low wage employment, involve forms of ‘income transfer’ to corporations who have become major ‘welfare beneficiaries’. Ironically, such transfers and subsidies seem to be free of the risks of undermining independence or creating moral decline that are associated with transfers to the poor.

This is an economy in which people are invited to imagine themselves as corporations in miniature: as entrepreneurial selves, or at least as hard working responsible families. It is worth noting the characteristic oscillation here between individuals and families, each of which is summoned at different moments as the fundamental building block of economies and societies. Indeed, such entrepreneurial individuals and hard working families form a crucial point of articulation between the economic and the social: here is a characteristic articulation of work, community and fairness offered by Labour’s Gordon Brown on the brink of becoming prime minister:

> The Britain I believe in is a Britain of fairness and opportunity for all.

> Every British citizen with every chance to make the most of themselves – every community fair to every citizen – if you work hard, you’re better off. If you save, you’re rewarded. If you play by the rules, we’ll stand by you.

> These are for me the best of British values: responsibilities required in return for rights; fairness not just for some but all who earn it.


This articulation of fairness as something to be earned is central to contemporary imaginings of the economy as an economy of work.

An Economy of Work

Both nationally and globally, being ‘economically active’ is a central and ever more avidly enforced thread of contemporary politics and policy. Being active or ‘making a contribution’ is understood as being accomplished through work or, more precisely, waged work. The drive towards ‘workfare’ (Peck 2001) or labour market activation (e.g., Van Berkel and Borghi 2008) involves extending the reach of waged work to groups that might once have been at least partially insulated from the enforced expectation of waged work (lone mothers, disabled people, the elderly who were conditionally supported through decommodifying policies). In the UK such groups have become the object of intensifying work expectations, driven by a conviction that the experience of work will cure all ills. To
engage in waged work is to become an ‘independent’ person (rather than a passive
dependent); it is to access a world of job satisfaction; it is to experience the satis-
faction of ‘making a contribution’; it is to engage in sociality rather than suffer
isolation; it is to become a good role model for future generations; and, of course,
it reduces the pressures on public spending.

Work is imagined as the engine of economic success (individual, corporate and
national). It is understood as the primary connecting device that links the econo-
my with social life (sustaining the family, enabling consumption, etc). Work is
expected, demanded and enforced (increasingly fiercely). This work takes many
forms – ideally it is the act of waged work, but workfare policies also value ‘job
search’, ‘preparedness for work’ and ‘work experience’: the ambiguous condition
of about-to-be-waged work (see the Financial Times’ discussion of a recent case
brought against the ‘unwaged slavery’ of the UK’s work experience scheme:
http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/429f2832-7501-11e2-8bc7-00144feabdc0.html#axzz2-P
EE09Qgy). One might argue that this fetishization of work involves a double
contradiction. On the one hand the intensification of commodifying logics visible
in the frantic desire to make people ready for work, or to substitute ‘workfare’ for
welfare, increasingly encounters settings in which work is less and less available,
an outcome linked to the propensity of governments to give up any claim to be
able to manage their economies or to make work. On the other hand there is an
ideological-discursive contradiction here between the rhetorical insistence on the
value of Work (or even ‘work experience’) and the increasingly contingent, frac-
tured, fragile and precarious world of employment that those arriving in the labour
market experience. But the fantasy of work rolls on, occupying a powerful organ-
izing role, as Weeks argues in the US context:

The category of the work society refers not just to the socially mediating and subjec-
tively constitutive roles of work but to the dominance of its values. Challenging the
present organization of work requires not only that we confront its reification and
depoliticization but also its normativity and moralization. Work is not just defended
on grounds of economic necessity and social duty; it is widely understood as an in-
dividual moral practice and collective ethical obligation. Traditional work values
those that preach the moral value and dignity of waged work and privilege such
work as an essential source of individual growth, self-fulfilment, social recognition,
and status continue to be effective in encouraging and rationalizing the long hours
US workers are supposed to dedicate to waged work and the identities they are ex-
pected to invest there. This normalizing and moralizing ethic of work should be very
familiar to most of us; it is, after all, routinely espoused in managerial discourse, de-
fended in the popular media, and enshrined in public policies. The ethic's productiv-
ist values are promoted on both the political Right and Left, from employers seeking
the most able and tractable workers, and politicians intent on moving women from
welfare to waged work, to parents and educators eager to prepare their children or
students to embrace the values that might best ensure their future economic security
and social achievement. (2012a; see also Weeks 2012b)

As Weeks and others have argued, the work ethic has proved one of the persistent
anchoring points for the social organization of modern capitalism. Waged work is
the mode of insertion – both real and imagined – into labour processes and social relations of production for many; it is the point of articulation – through the wage and the historic gendered division of labour – with the private, familial, domestic realm; and it is the device which distinguishes the included, the deserving and the entitled from those whose relation to social, economic and political community is more tenuous by virtue of their not working. As a consequence, it is recurrently deployed as a political device to traduce the workless, the shiftless, the scrounger, the cheat – all those who prey on the ‘hard working, responsible families’ understood as the foundation of the moral order.

The Economy as the City

A more specific variant of the contemporary national/global economy might be the *imagined financial sector*, in the UK in the form of the City, the City of London. As Doreen Massey (2007) has observed this is ‘the City’ which stands for the city of London and, in widening circles of representation, stands for the national economy and, we are regularly reminded, the national interest. The City earns its reputation, position and apparent power from a globalised economy, that which stands over, against and outside us... And provides the discipline and conditions of success and failure for the national and global economy. A City of London lobbying group mobilises this fusion of places (speaking as and for The City) in the following way:

**The CityUK:**

*Who we are*

TheCityUK champions the international competitiveness of the financial services industry. Created in 2010, we support the whole of the sector, promoting UK financial services at home and overseas and playing an active role in the regulatory and trade policy debate....

**TheCityUK has three major objectives:**

*Championing the competitive position of the financial and related professional services sector*

Focusing on tax (policy and rates), regulation (policy development and supervisory delivery), and skills (access to talent domestically and through immigration).

*Regaining the trust and confidence of the UK public and policymakers for the sector*

Demonstrating value to the economy of the jobs generated and tax paid – and also of the social utility of the sector.

*Supporting the business interests of members in chosen markets around the world*

Promoting the UK overseas as a world class centre for financial and related professional services.

http://www.thecityuk.com (accessed 28.08.2011)

As with other varieties of imagined economy, this is neither a completely stable nor uncontested vision. Even before the crises arrived, popular suspicion of the
City was well entrenched: for example, there was popular scepticism about people who are ‘clever’ with money; conceptions of bankers as ‘fat cats’; and a deeply embedded suspicion about the City as a critical element in North/South divide in Britain. As the extract from the City UK group implies, the financial debacle of 2007-8 destabilised old certainties and added new popular doubts, anxiety and anger to the older streams of scepticism: ‘regaining the trust and confidence of the UK public’ remains an interesting challenge, even if the policymakers have proved easier to re-enroll.

All of these imagined economies combine the claim to describe (this is what the economy is, it has these parts, it works like this, it is captured by this data, etc.) with the promise of a better future, to be achieved either through the normal self expanding dynamic (the logic of growth) or, more rarely, through the act of reform. If only we make capitalism moral, regulate the financial sector better, put bankers on the rack, or invest in the real economy, then we can all get back to normal. ‘Normal’ is itself an imagined condition, of course. One distinctive variant of this promise of progress is made visible in Jamie Peck's sharp comment on the dynamics of neoliberal political reason, which he treats as an always failing fantasy, but as a fantasy that tends to 'fail forwards':

Neoliberalism... has only ever existed in ‘impure’ form, indeed can only exist in messy hybrids. Its utopian vision of a free society and a free economy is ultimately unrealizable. Yet the pristine clarity of its ideological apparition, the free market, coupled with the inevitable failure to arrive at this elusive destination, confer a significant degree of forward momentum on the neoliberal project. Ironically, neoliberalism possesses a progressive, forward-leaning dynamic by virtue of the very unattainability of its idealized destination.... Beneath the mythology of market progress lies a turgid reality of neoliberalism variously failing and flailing forward... (2010: 7)

This is a helpful way of capturing a distinctive ideological and political dynamic, and this dynamic quality has clearly been in play in the efforts to establish neoliberal solutions to a neo-liberal crisis. But it is also a reminder that visions, projects and strategies are not without contradictions, tensions and antagonisms – and, as a consequence, they tend to be shadowed by doubt, scepticism and alternative imaginings even when their institutionalized dominance appears unchallenged. In the following section, I explore briefly two of the key words around which alternative economies have been imagined: real economies and moral economies.

**Real Economies, Moral Economies, Imagined Economies?**

Threatening the City as a way of imagining an economy as a financial services sector is also often contrasted with a different economy: the real economy. The Financial Times Lexicon defines it as: ‘The part of the economy that is concerned with actually producing goods and services, as opposed to the part of the economy
that is concerned with buying and selling on the financial markets’ (http://lexicon.ft.com/Term?term=real-economy). Such an apparently clear-cut distinction underpins much of the extensive written and online discussion about real economies, although this division of the economy into two parts is not entirely coherent or stable. Do concepts and measures of growth, productivity, profit and jobs belong in the ‘real’ economy? Do they only belong there? How are they articulated with the financial/virtual economy? Although such issues – and more – are extensively discussed, I want to concentrate here on the mobilisation of the idea of the real economy as a critical counter and point of reference for public and popular discourses on the economy (though I was intrigued to discover that it is also an organisational title for an economic development consultancy in the UK: http://www.therealeconomy.co.uk/index.php).

To me, the idea of the real economy evokes a strangely nostalgic imaginary, at least in the UK. It attempts to summon up the making of real objects, real commodities, in manufacturing processes (performed by horny handed sons of toil?). It references an economy that has been almost destroyed or at least displaced, whether intentionally or carelessly, by the financialised economy. The objects – the product of real labour – are available to be used, to be consumed, thus embodying authentic use value. As a result, they are virtuous rather than virtual. The real economy imagined in this way offers a certain sort of political-cultural leverage. It enables a critique of speculation, and the dominance of finance capital, as involved in a virtual, unreal and possibly anti-social economy. But it has some limits, too. Nostalgia is rarely a reliable foundation for a political mobilization (since it conceals the conditions and contradictions of its original referent) and this ‘real economy’ is certainly prone to reproducing the romance of work/labour as a central feature (Weeks 2012b).

This imagined real economy intersects in some ways with what E.P. Thompson called the moral economy, and I have recently been drawn back to this conception in work with Janet Newman on the politics and policies of austerity (Clarke & Newman 2012). Thompson’s use of the idea was located in a specific social formation and its disruption, producing a moment in which food rioters in 18th century England laid claim to collective understandings of how economic relations were structured by moral obligations. Rioters – and those who judged them – understood this field of moral ties as legitimation for public anger and action. The current instabilities of the dominantly imagined economy have made it more possible to pose questions about questions of whether the moral, political and economic can – and should – be related. We can trace these questions in the public discourses addressing the failures, betrayals, abandonments and irresponsibilities that seem to have been at stake in bringing about the present troubles.

The moral economy of the English crowd, Thompson claimed, involved cross-class understandings and sentiments about the social relations of food production and distribution that legitimated claims making and action (aka riot) about the
proper cost of basic food. I am not suggesting that an equivalent moral economy is now visible and certainly not one that is collectively articulated across classes. Nevertheless, it seems that fragments or echoes of such ways of imagining economies have reappeared on the landscape: albeit voiced by a diversity of actors. As a result, the present conjuncture is characterised by traces of heterogeneous imagined moral economies, in which different fractures of obligation, interdependence, and mutual imbrication have been named: selfish bankers, indulgent consumers, irresponsible public servants, evasive tax payers, incompetent governments and inept international institutions. These fragments point to two related issues. The first is a problem of boundary management: the economy, imagined as separate, turns out to be a leaky system. It is by no means self-contained, but appears to have social, political and moral conditions and consequences. The second is the tendency of dominant political discourses to try to capture and contain these instabilities in the language of morality. Although many political leaders expressed similar themes, few did so at the sustained length of French President Nicolas Sarkozy when he addressed the World Economic Forum in 2010. Here are some extracts from his speech:

The crisis we are experiencing is not a crisis of capitalism. It is a crisis of the distortion of capitalism.

Capitalism has always been inseparable from a value system, a civilization project, and a certain idea of mankind.

Purely financial capitalism is a perversion which flouts the values of capitalism. But anti-capitalism is a dead end that is even worse. There is no solution in anticapitalism. There’s no system other than the market economy.

But we will save capitalism and the market economy by radically reforming it – dare I use the word? – by giving it a moral dimension. I know saying this will raise a lot of questions…

What do we need, in the end, if it isn’t rules, principles, a governance reflecting shared values, a common morality? (Sarkozy 2010)

Here and in similar representations, the imagery of a (re-)moralised economy appears as a strategy for recognizing and containing popular outrage, anger and discontent. Despite the emphasis on the problems of moral and political direction, subsequent political discussions have tended to transpose ‘morality’ into more or less technical disputes about the best, most appropriate, or most easily achieved forms of regulation for the financial sector. Continuing forms of popular disaffection – from increasing scepticism and cynicism about both bankers and politicians to collective action against austerity politics and policies – suggest that such strategies of attempted containment and displacement have not been wholly successful.

Although they appear as different analytical standpoints from which to view the present crisis, both the ‘real economy’ and the ‘moral economy’ are also interesting alternative imagined economies. Like the imaginaries discussed earlier,
they provide accounts of how the economy works, does not work and should work. They ‘tell the time’ – narrating the imagined (and desired) orderings of the economy: its past, present and projected future. They rest on – and reproduce – the imagined separateness of the economy (even if they might be more attentive to its social effects). In short, they perform the same imaginative political and cultural work that is involved in the production and circulation of economic imaginaries.

**Conclusion**

In this article, I have tried to sketch a series of imagined economies that jostle together in the present. I think this field is important for three reasons. First, it suggests that everyday understandings of the economy may be more diverse than the usual references to dominant or hegemonic neo-liberal thinking. Second, the effort to establish particular imagined economies often encounters problems of coherence, stability and boundary maintenance. Third, maintaining the imaginary of a separate and superordinate ‘economy’ distinct from other domains looks like hard work, as the problematic conditions and perverse consequences of a ‘disembedded’ economy become more visible in times of economic, financial and fiscal crisis. Jessop has also pointed to some of these troubles in the world of imagined economies:

> by virtue of competing economic imaginaries, competing efforts to institute them materially, and an inevitable incompleteness in the specification of their respective economic and extra-economic preconditions, each ‘imagined economy’ (of whatever kind and at whatever scale) is only ever partially constituted. There are always interstitial, residual, marginal, irrelevant, recalcitrant and plain contradictory elements that escape any attempt to identify, govern, and stabilize a given ‘economic arrangement’ or broader ‘economic order’. Such elements can interfere with the smooth performance of imagined economies (and also provide a reservoir of semiotic and material resources to be mobilized in the face of instability or crisis). More significantly, underlying structural contradictions and strategic dilemmas and the inevitable incompleteness of any economic imaginary condemn all such economies en régulation to fragility and instability. (2011/2013: 6-7)

Such fragility and instability evoke the intensification of political and ideological labour that typically accompanies crises (Hall et al. 1978/2013). In the present, they are marked by the shifting and unsettled relationships between different domains – conventionally marked as the economic, the social and the political. As a result, lines of fracture and friction emerge as ‘economic’ relations, forms and processes are brought into new configurations. These are more visible as the would-be dominant economic imaginaries fail to cohere, stabilize or even make sense. Popular perceptions of broken ‘moral’ commitments and obligations – broken by corporations, markets and politicians – create conditions of possibility for political mobilization, even if these are largely being folded into the regressive discourse of earned/uneearned rewards and deserving/undeserving people by cur-
rent conservative neo-liberalisms, or into nationalist outrage about those others who come to take ‘our jobs’. Jessop points to the heterogeneity of economic imaginaries in any particular conjuncture, rather than just presuming the dominance of the dominant. This signals the problem of how to analyse this multiplicity – a problem elegantly stated in Raymond Williams’ insistence on thinking about the conjuncture as always containing residual and emergent elements alongside the dominant (as a counter to the temptations of ‘epochal analysis’ (1977).

This might also be posed as a question of whether these fractures and tensions point to a paradox of neo-liberalism? If we take neo-liberalism as, in part, a project to expand the scope and reach of the economic, subordinating the social and political to ‘economic’ logics in the process, does this project produce perverse conjunctural consequences? Do people fail to live these new imaginary relations to their emerging conditions of existence? Such dislocations might reflect both the thinness of these imaginaries and the increasing instability, fragility and precarity of their real conditions of existence. Some of the responses are what Williams (1977) would call ‘residual’: the persistence of concerns and questions that cannot be answered in the current dominant framing (e.g., the continuing pertinence of some aspects of welfarism and collectivism, an insistence on the obligations and responsibilities of governments, even a belief that economies contain or are enabled by mutual obligations and responsibilities). But there are also ‘emergent’ responses that try to imagine the possibility of other worlds in which the economy might be ordered differently, in which the mal-distribution of valued resources could be corrected and in which ‘the social’ was not imagined as both separate from, and subordinate to, the economy. These are threads of possibility that emerge at the point of imagining the economic, the social and the political differently. But what makes these emergent alternatives more interesting and potentially important is that they do not start from imagining economies. Instead they pose themselves on the terrain of the social: how can we live, how can we live together, how can we live with/in nature and so on. In the end, do they offer us ways of escaping ‘economic thinking’?

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**References**


Labour Against Capitalism?
Hegel's Concept of Labour in Between Civil Society and the State

By Anders Bartonek

Abstract
The concepts and phenomena of civil society, political economy and labour are ambivalent matters in Hegel’s political philosophy. They simultaneously contain productive and destructive potential in the realization of the political community. This article investigates Hegel’s concept of labour against the backdrop of his theory of civil society in order to bring forth the ambiguous role of labour in relation to the ‘capitalism’ of civil society. According to Hegel, labour is both economically productive and the activity by which the society and its members can transcend the mere capitalistic dimensions of society. Labour can therefore simultaneously be understood as capitalistic and non-capitalistic in Hegel’s political philosophy. The cultivating dimensions of labour in Hegel’s theory offer a counterpart to the mere capitalistic forms of labour. Labour can therefore be used as a promising platform for the discussion of the relation between economy and culture and for the revitalization of capitalism critique.

Keywords: Labour, Hegel, capitalism critique, philosophy of right, political economy, civil society.
Introduction

The concepts and phenomena of civil society, political economy and labour are ambivalent matters for Hegel (1770-1831) since they simultaneously contain productive and destructive potentials within the realisation of the political. Hegel early on perceived the potency of the liberal economic principles within the awaking civil society and its leading bourgeoisie, and he integrated civil society and economics as a relatively independent part of the state in his political theory. The productive potential of political economy, or rather the potential of its productivi-
ty, plays an indispensible role in his conception, making it possible to understand society as a common product of all members through societal labour and to grasp labour as the activity dialectically mediating all members of society through the division of labour, hereby making grounds for their mutual recognition. At the same time, the destructive threat of civil society consists in its loss of ethical life (Sittlichkeit) because of the predominance of egoism as the motivator for the ac-
tions of the (negatively) free individual agents.

In Hegel’s system, civil society is to be found as the mediator and difference between family and the state, where the family incorporates the idea and first im-
mediate form of ethical life and the state its fulfilment. In the state the difference between individuality and the common shall be entirely sublated, or, with Hegel’s words, aufgehoben. However, this phase of alienation incorporated by civil socie-
ty is necessary for the historical and dialectical formation of the state, and there-
fore the productivity of civil society must be acknowledged. With regard to this focus on the connection of political philosophy, history, political economy and labour, Hegel was an important predecessor to Marx. For example, Lukács (1948/1973) points out that Hegel’s philosophy was an indispensible source of inspiration for Marx and his theory of political economy, on the class struggle, and on the substantial role of labour for human culture and society.

This article investigates Hegel’s concept of labour against the backdrop of his theory of civil society (mainly according to the Elements of the Philosophy of Right from 1821) in order to bring forth its ambiguous status in relation to the ‘capitalism’ of civil society. Labour is, according to Hegel, both economically productive and the activity by which the society and its members can transcend the mere capitalistic dimensions of society and thereby become politically estab-
lished within the boundaries of the ethical state. Labour could thereby simultane-
ously be understood as capitalistic and non-capitalistic in Hegel’s political philos-
ophy. Labour, understood as an anthropological category, can generally speaking be seen as caught in the crossfire between economy and culture (also understood as an anthropological concept), especially as it is conceptualised as a part of Sitt-
lichkeit by Hegel. Sittlichkeit is translated into ‘ethical life’ in the English version of Hegel’s Elements of the Philosophy of Right, but Sitte also means tradition or custom. Labour, being an essential human cultivating act, can be viewed to be
both (1) an activity exclusively occupied by economy and its measures of profit, and (2) the activity by which humans turn human, namely by turning nature upside down (when ploughing the field), processing and refining the outer and inner nature and making it ‘human’, lastly cultivating themselves when together recognising each other in the product of their labour (Hegel names this Bildung).

At the same time Hegel can be said to resist this dichotomy: economically productive labour is also cultivating, it differentiates, refines and multiplies the needs, tastes, abilities and work methods of the individuals in society. Still, Hegel can also be understood to view economically and mechanical labour as threatening the cultivating dimensions of labour. In this sense, economy would be a form of culture threatening the cultivating dimension of labour. To summarise, labour can, departing from Hegel, be used as a promising platform for a discussion of the relation of economy and culture, and in particular to be formulated as a concept incorporating a critique of capitalism as culture-destruction and anti-cultivating and simultaneously as a concept able to revitalise the activity of cultivating itself. To show this is the aim of this article.

In the current discussion on the meaning and future of labour the positions often are dichotomized into the simplified alternatives of either criticising and rejecting or entirely embracing labour. On the one hand many a critique of labour seem to ignore or only in a minimal way acknowledge the important role that labour arguably plays and must play for human beings. But although a critique often is legitimate, here labour is considered only to be a problem. On the other hand, there is a widespread tendency in politics and political theory to uncritically define labour and full employment as the self-evident goal of society. Here, the current forms of labour are not questioned, labour is not considered to be a problem at all. To avoid these options I return to Hegel. As already sketched out, Hegel’s theory represents both an emphatic critique of labour in its sheer capitalistic forms and makes a strong case for labour as an indispensable act of cultivation. This is why Hegel can be made a useful resource for our current debate on labour and capitalism.

The Productive Negation of Civil Society

Hegel does not systematically use the term ‘capitalism’ (although the term ‘capital’ occurs in his texts), but it nevertheless seems possible to interpret his theory of civil society and the concept of ‘system of needs’ as an attempt to grasp the essence and mechanisms of the early capitalist society. Thus, analysing Hegel’s relation to civil society – containing both criticism and recognition –, can also be understood as an approach to Hegel’s implicit view on capitalism.

Hegel’s political philosophy is inherent in his philosophy of spirit, which on a macro level is divided into three parts: the subjective spirit, the objective spirit, and the absolute spirit. These parts are conceptualised as three phases of the entire
development of the *Weltgeist*, the World spirit, heading towards self-fulfilment and absolute self-knowledge. The political dimension belongs to the stage of objective spirit in Hegel’s conception, in which the spirit is incorporated and realised in different objective stages, institutions and forms. In *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* Hegel additionally divides the political into three dimensions: *Abstract Right*, *Morality*, and *Ethical Life* (Hegel 1821/1991). The part on *Ethical life* finally contains three chapters: on the family, on the civil society and the last on the state. Ethical life thus develops through three stages, where civil society is the middle part, at the same time the mediating concept and dynamic link between family and state. The family is conceptualised by Hegel as the first and immediate form of ethical life and ethical spirit, which is lost in civil society – in which individual freedom and egoism, and not solidarity, are the operating principles – and finally is re-conquered in the state, being the final *télos* of the political in Hegel’s philosophy. In this movement of ethical life, civil society plays the role of what can be called a *productive negation*. Civil society is for Hegel the systematically and dialectically necessary destruction of the community of family, a destruction, which makes the fulfilment of ethical life possible on the state level, that is, for the community on the whole. Ethical life must be destructed on the particular level (family) in order to be established on the common level (the state).

Civil society is also an important platform for the realisation of individual and personal freedom. Hegel considered himself being part of a time in which freedom already had become reality on at least three levels: (1) the reformation and its protestant subjectivity, (2) the proclaimed freedom and human rights by the Enlightenment and in relation to the French Revolution, and finally, (3) the economic and industrial revolution and its founding of the individual (self) interest (Ritter 1974; Riedel 1969 and 1974; Waszek 1988: 23). Hegel – according to his philosophical program of grasping his own time in concepts – acknowledged this emergence of freedom, and in his theory he was trying to favour its fulfilment. In order to establish ethical life on the state level, the individuals have to be set free from earlier forms of societal power relations. The split of family stages individual freedom in civil society, a freedom yet not the fulfilment of ethical life, but the necessary step headed towards it in the state. Hegel tries to evoke the development of ethical life from out of and with help from its loss in civil society.

In the chapter *System of Needs* in *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* the most mature version of Hegel’s theory of political economy can be found. Hegel was the only German philosopher of his generation showing interest in the English and Scottish Enlightenment and political economy (Hegel 1821/1991: § 189; see also Waszek 1988; Lukács 1948/1973: 26 ff., 501; Priddat 1990). Hegel was not only a defender of the state, but essentially a thinker and defender of civil society (Avineri 1972: 133; Riedel 1969 and 1970). A main achievement of Hegel’s political theory is to have integrated economic theory – in Hegel’s time being the most modern branch of theory adequate to modern and already real forms of society –
in a positive philosophy of the state. But Hegel also essentially transformed economic theory and its concepts and mobilised them philosophically (Lukács 1948/1973: 26 ff., 496). The concept of labour, for example, receives, as will be shown, a more substantial and cultivating meaning in Hegel’s theory. He remained not within economical criteria, although his philosophy was crucially inspired by modern economic theories of labour, division of labour and its dialectical production of the society as a system of needs. Without these theories Hegel would not have been able to design his philosophy of labour as a cultivating Bildung, which is a theory of the human self as a product of its labour. This is a form of labour that transcends the mere economic scope of labour.

Hegel conceptualises the system of needs as founded on the self-interest of individuals mediated within the division of labour. The concrete person or egoistic individual is the main principle and foundation of civil society. Every individual follows only its own interest, ignoring everything else. The individual’s relation to others is merely strategic (Hegel 1821/1991: §§ 182 and 187; see also Avineri 1972: 134). But nevertheless, the relation to other individuals is essential for it. Its needs are only satisfied in relation to and with help from the division of labour, that is, with the help from others. In reality the individuals are intertwined and anonymously interdependent with each other. Through the division of labour the individuals become more efficient and skilled within their speciality and the work becomes easier and its result more extensive. But this also increases the societal interdependence: no one can survive alone anymore. Hegel writes:

The concrete person who, as a particular person, as a totality of needs and a mixture of natural necessity and arbitrariness, is his own end, is one principle of civil society. But this particular person stands essentially in relation to other similar particulars, and their relation is such that each asserts itself and gains satisfaction through the others, and thus at the same time through the exclusive mediation of the form of universality, which is the second principle (Hegel 1821/1991: § 182; see also §§ 192, 198, and 200; Avineri 1972: 91).

Hegel is hereby acknowledging the achievement of Smith’s theory, recognising the formation of rational patterns within the constellation of seemingly randomly interacting egoistic individuals. Hegel recognises, with help from Smith, a dialectical transition in civil society and that the subjective self-interest is transformed into the contribution to the satisfaction of the needs of everybody. In so far as the individual is working for himself, he is also unintentionally working for everyone. Hereby a common and permanent social product is formed.

In this dependence and reciprocity of work and the satisfaction of needs, subjective selfishness turns into a contribution towards the satisfaction of the needs of everyone else. By a dialectical movement, the particular is mediated by the universal so that each individual, in earning, producing, and enjoying on his own account, thereby earns and produces for the enjoyment of others (Hegel 1821/1991: § 199; see also § 189 and Lukács 1948/1973: 516; Riedel 1970: 48 ff.; Avineri 1972: 146).
The egoistic actions of the individuals therefore have a different result than intended. They unintentionally run errands for the World spirit and work for his mission. The actions are only seemingly particular, but end in the creation of a common social product. In Hegel’s theory this is accounted for as the ‘List der Vernunft’ (cunning of reason) (Lukács 1948/1973: 550).

The principle of civil society is difference, not only as being the negation and difference between family and state (Hegel 1821/1991: § 181), but also as having a differentiating tendency (Hegel 1821/1991: § 191). The mechanisms of civil society have the merit, that they cultivate the individuals in differentiating and multiplying their needs and the means to satisfy them within the division of labour. Their abilities are refined (Hegel 1821/1991: §§ 182-208, especially § 191). But society, as civil society, is risking to fall apart, since the individuals are striving against the unity of the collective through their egoism. But for Hegel this is necessary for the dialectical movement to work: the stronger a negation is (and its cultivating aspects), the richer is the state resulting from it. Hereby Hegel tries both to acknowledge the mechanisms of civil society and to conceptualise them such as culminating in a political community transcending civil society (see Avineri 1972: 134). Hegel’s conception requires the loss of ethical life in order to regain it on a societal and higher level in the state. Hegel acknowledges Smith’s insight into the natural principles of society, namely that the individuals’ free and egoistic actions unintentionally result in a social common product and the wealth of nations. This dialectical transition, when the individual’s egoistic disregard of the common results in the formation of a refined collective, gives the civil society the function of a productive negation. Of course, for Hegel, this dialectical transition also means that the individuals must overcome their natural egoistic instincts and, thus, that the transition has to go further than in Smiths’ theory. The individual, being a member of the state, has to be aware of it being a part of society and its division of labour, and actively and consciously work for the sake of the whole. This was not a part of Smith’s conception. Nevertheless, for Hegel, the freedom of the individual and its egoistic actions – being the negation of the family’s community and the negation of ethical life as such – have a productive effect for ethical life, they establish and refine the common, mainly through labour. The negation is productive because it is not merely a destructive negation, but is rather an essential moment in a dialectically productive movement of ethical life. Ethical life develops because of this loss of ethical life, not despite its negation. Still, it is doubtful whether this transition can fully recover from the destructive effects of civil society. Even if the negation is productive precisely because it has a destructive dimension, it is difficult for Hegel to stage a full reconciliation between society and state. Therefore he systematically mobilises The Police and The Corporation as transition functions in his political philosophy (Hegel 1821/1991: §§ 231-256), trying to make grounds for the ethical life and non-egoistic community of the state by transcending civil society.
Following Arato, one can say that ‘Hegel’s social theory presents modern society both as a world of alienation, and as an open-ended search for social integration’ (Arato 1991: 301), but the question is: is it possible to mobilise the negation for the benefit of the whole? Exactly here one of the main questions for Hegel’s political philosophy gets distinct. How can modern individual freedom be developed in its own right without restrictions, but at the same time transcend itself and transgress into the fulfilment of ethical life in the state? Hegel’s idea is that the individual will transcend itself when developing and sharpening itself as person, not by softening itself. This would mean that the capitalism of civil society must destroy the immediate cultural forms of ethical life and community in order to help fulfilling them on a societal and dialectically mediated level. Hegel hereby makes this loss of ethical life meaningful. Being conceptualised as the mediator between family and state, civil society shall be risking ethical life in order to conquer it. In this context, labour is essential. Labour for Hegel is the founding principle of civil society and modern politics (Riedel 1970: 47). Through labour individuals form their society, history and themselves as self-conscious members of society. Like civil society, labour is to be understood in this twilight of destruction and reconciliation. Labour is productive only by risking the ethical life it unintentionally is developing. According to Hegel, labour at the same is supposed to overcome and negate this negation and therefore can be viewed to have a potential in overcoming the destruction. Labour as a cultivating activity inherits the destruction of nature and risking ethical life in civil society, but simultaneously holds the potential for creating a synthesising reconciliation.

The Ambiguity of Labour

The concept of labour is present in all of Hegel’s political writings, yet it plays an ambiguous role in Hegel’s conception. Labour (1) produces and plays an essential part in the loss of ethical life in civil society, but simultaneously (2) is given the potential of overcoming this loss and to lead society towards the reestablishment of Sittlichkeit. Labour in this sense is to be placed in between the loss of ethical life in civil society and in its direction towards the fulfilment of ethical life in the state. Labour in this sense is both capitalistic, insofar as it is motivated and driven by egoistic individual and anti-collective interests, and anti-capitalistic, since Hegel gives it an ego-transcending character, and is able to produce the common and not only is reduced to create and strengthen the economic particular. Labour analogously is on the one hand destroying cultivation and Sittlichkeit, but on the other hand it is a cultivating activity with the possibility to criticise and to transcend this destruction of culture. Labour, in the meaning of this cultivating activity, needs to deal with labour as a destructive force. This opposition corresponds to the relation between labour (1) as differentiating and particularising and (2) as speculative and unity-creating. Although these meanings are intertwined insofar as the first is a
necessary negation of the common in order for the common unity to be established, Hegel nevertheless has a hard time securing the productive constellation of these dimensions of labour: they are not easily reconciled. One the one hand labour in the first sense differentiates itself in multiple forms of satisfying needs in correspondence to the strengthening of individuality in civil society. On the other hand labour is the movement towards the common, through the necessary detour of the negation of itself. Labour as Bildung always means transcending the particular and forming the common (Hegel 1821/2004: § 187), which according to Hegel in part already is in play in civil society in the way that labour at least already unintentionally transcends the particular and creates society as the common social product. But as already mentioned, labour needs the help functions of police and corporation in order to reach state-maturity. Instead labour in the speculative and difference-transcending sense is installed through reason and bridges the gap of negation, although negation is a systemic necessity also here.

Labour, according to Hegel, consists in the realisation of an idea put into play by a working subject in the objective material, and returning to the working actor as a realised idea and results in a widened self-consciousness. The idea is alienated in the object – the actor gets frantically out of himself –, but is fulfilled through the rise from the object and the return to the actor. Labour is unity-creating in the sense that its end is to make the working actor self-identical, that is to sublate the negation of labour and create an again undivided subject identical with the object (Hegel 1830/2007: § 428). In his discussion of Hegel’s theory, Colón León points at the important differentiation between the product of labour – the concrete thing that is being produced; the formed and owned object – and the result of the labour process: the now self-identical subject itself as result of the sublated labour (Colón León 1993: 144). Kojève also points out that within Hegel’s concept of labour the working human being is transforming both the given object and transforming itself when transforming the object (Kojève 1947/1980: 52).

In order to understand this movement of the idea in and through labour it is necessary to analyze Hegel’s concept of labour all the way back to his early Jena writings and lectures, especially the lecture from 1805/06, known as Jenaer Realphilosophie. Here, Hegel defines labour as the activity through which an I or a consciousness is turning itself into a thing (sich zum Dinge machen) (Hegel 1805/06/1974: 219; see also Schmidt am Busch 2002). This means, that the subjective and still unproven idea of the human being, is transforming itself into a thing with objective existence through labour, when forming and objectifying itself in the object. Labour in this sense is the satisfaction of a need, where the satisfied need or instinct is ‘aufgehobne Arbeit’, that is, sublated labour. The will manifests and fulfils itself objectively through labour and when the need is satisfied, labour is not only over, but the subject relies now on the result of labour: being a refined subject. Labour contains here the immediate and individual relation to, formation of and consumption of nature, but also the incipient social la-
bour when producing tools: thus, when producing a tool, labour turns social, since the range of the tool transcends the need of the individual (Colón León 1993: 13).

In the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* the part on *Property* is important for understanding Hegel’s concept of labour within the objective spirit of the political. Hegel discusses the subject’s right to property and its way of taking objects into possession through labour:

The will alone is infinite, absolute in relation to everything else, whereas the other, for its part, is merely relative. Thus to appropriate something means basically only to manifest the supremacy of my will in relation to the thing and to demonstrate that the latter does not have being in and for itself and is not an end in itself. This manifestation occurs through my conferring upon the thing an end other than that which it immediately possessed; I give the living creature, as my property, a soul other than that which it previously had; I give it my soul (Hegel 1821/1991: § 44 Addition).

Property in this sense is particular, but the formation of the object is essential for the self-consciousness of the members of society.

In later passages in *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* also important for the understanding of Hegel’s concept of labour, he describes how the spirit only can overcome its objective and natural limitations by projecting himself into and forming the object and thereby giving himself and his idea objective existence. The *Bildung* of labour is the transition towards the liberation from natural existence. In labour the idea of the subject receives reality (Hegel 1821/1991: § 187). Within this *Bildung*, labour and the individual subjects strive and elevate themselves towards universality. Hereby, the particularity of labour is transcended. Labour is essentially a social phenomena for Hegel, corresponding partly to the egoistic principle of civil society and the division of labour. The common results from the egoistic individuals ignoring the common (Hegel 1821/1991: §§ 182, 189, 192, 196). But the *Bildung* and refinement of labour, making the individuals richer human beings and the society a highly developed one, consists in the more speculative and unity-creating kind of labour, taking a necessary detour through negation.

What can be said about the relation between these two dimensions of labour, namely the differentiating and particularising on one hand, and the unity-creating and speculative on the other hand? They clearly mark two different dimensions, but are also essentially intertwined. The speculative dimension of labour as *Bildung*, is already at work in civil society in the movement of particular labour towards the social and common product of civil society. It is also unity-creating in the sense that the working subject turns self-identical as a result of the labour process. But although labour in civil society is supposed to establish the common through, not despite, the differentiating of the division of labour, the particularising principle of civil society tends to jeopardise the capitalism-transcending potential of labour. Also, the labour of civil society tends to be mechanical and dumb. Still, as Riedel points out, labour has freedom aspects either way (Riedel 1970, 52). But in civil society, according to Hegel, the negative freedom is only a
formal freedom and therefore insufficient. It is clear that Hegel explicitly criticises labour as merely executed for individual reasons, although he acknowledges the fact that it indirectly has productive effects for the society as a whole. But labour still has difficulties to rise automatically from the differentiating principle of civil society. Therefore, as already mentioned, Hegel constructs various forms of help functions (Police and Corporation), in order to transcend civil society’s negation and make the individuals ‘members of the state’, conscious of, and active for the sake of the common (Hegel 1821/1991: §§ 257-360).

This bird’s-eye view is needed for Hegel in order for his evolving World spirit (Geist) to be able to transcend its objective dimension (consisting largely in the political sphere) and to reach its absolute dimension. I hereby return to the macro level of Hegel’s philosophy and his concept of the World spirit. A differentiation must be made between (1) the concrete individual act of labour, (2) the societal labour striving towards the state, and (3) the labour of the World spirit. In order to transcend the objective spirit as such (and the political), Hegel seemingly is forced to leave the concrete individual and societal forms of labour (including the state) behind in order to reach the highest form of the reason. Hegel therefore conceptualises the development of the World spirit as such as a process of labour, which has the same dialectical principle as every individual act of labour and the development of social labour, which in civil society is supposed to establish the link between the family and the state within Ethical life. The dialectic of concrete labour consists in the subject’s negation of itself in the object and the formation of it, resulting in the sublated negation and the establishment of the self-identity of the subject. The societal development from family to state has the analogue form of the family’s negation in civil society, which eventually is sublated in the state. Finally, the dimension of objective spirit on the macro level in Hegel’s system, containing the entire political philosophy of Hegel and being the negation and the real incarnation of the subjective form of the World spirit, is to be sublated into the absolute form of spirit. The objective dimension on a macro level corresponds to the concrete idea of labour as it is set into work (incarnated) in nature or an object on the individual level. The civil society is the objective and negative dimension on a societal level. These moments all represent the objective dimension. But in order to rise from its objective dimension, the activity of the World spirit is conceptualised as a labour equipping the spirit with the ability to return from its objective form, which is the negation of itself (the prior subjective form). This is the speculative concept of labour, which, according to Hegel, is manifested through the spirit of philosophy. This speculative concept is already at play in the self-identity of the working subject as the result of the labour process, but now it has the result of the absolute spirit becoming self-identical. Labour is hereby constituting and realising reason in the shape of Hegel’s World spirit (Arndt 2003: 15; see also Lim 1966: 87 ff.). Yet, although the concept of World spirit is necessary for the understanding of Hegel’s theory on the unity-creating aspect of la-
bour, it is not necessary to refer to it when developing the concept of the capitalism-transcending dimensions of labour; its dialectics is at play in every concrete act of labour as being the realisation of an idea.

To summarise, this conflict between the ‘capitalistic’ and particularising labour and the speculative and difference-transcending labour (both on a societal and macro-systematic level) can’t be dissolved easily in Hegel’s work. Both are clearly present in his theory, and they also are essentially interconnected, but hard to melt together entirely. The differentiating and negative dimension of labour is a systemic moment of speculative labour, being its productive negation. But civil society still strives towards the collective unity of the state. Yet, at best the particularising dimensions of labour should fully culminate in the unity of the individual self-identity, in the state and in the absolute spirit.

Conclusion

But how can labour be understood as a cultivating activity which incorporates a critique of capitalism? Firstly, with help from Hegel’s theory, the destructive and alienating aspects of labour are getting visible. When grasping the difference-producing principle of civil society, Hegel makes the problems (and merits) of civil society distinct. Additionally, through Hegel’s analysis, the inherent tension in labour is brought to light, that is, the tension between the destructive and cultivating aspects. According to Hegel’s thinking, these dimensions can’t be separated from each other: even a cultivating labour is changing and therefore in a way destroying objects and also destroying prior forms of the identity of the working individual. The moment of negation and difference is inherent in cultivating labour. In order to be a cultivating activity, labour has to produce the transcending of differences. The difference between these different dimensions of labour is that the cultivating labour is set to overcome the mere destructive aspect of labour. The working human being is supposed to be strengthened through labour, and not empty himself of energy.

This is also the case with society: it should be made stronger through labour. But because of the differentiating development of society through labour and its division, the risk for society to fall apart is present. Nevertheless, the transcending of differences has the consequence of labour transcending its economic dimension. Of course, labour is essentially economic, but it is not exclusively economic, and for Hegel, the individual must leave its mere economic motifs behind. Hegel defends the unity and identity creating dimensions of labour, which have the result of a capitalism critique. All forms of labour having this difference-transcending dimension inherit a capitalism critique since they stop to dwell in an unreflected individualist and anti-collective stand.

Still, Hegel’s collectivist political conclusion of the state can be questioned. May it be possible for labour to be cultivating without culminating in a collectivist
unity-model of the political as in Hegel? Yet, according to the reading of Hegel’s concept of labour in this article, capitalism critique must not end in a general critique of labour. The critique of capitalism and of certain forms of labour can rather return to the question of labour and emphasise its cultivating dimensions in order to attempt to oppose capitalism. Such a balanced position is needed today, simultaneously able to criticise labour and to emphasise its importance.

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References

Abstract

For many years, the concept of cognitive capitalism has been an important subject for elaboration, discussions, and polemics. In this essay, we will not summarize the various theoretical details of the debate; instead, we will try to clarify the political nature of the concept and examine what is at stake from a theoretical point of view. Then, we will give some provisional and explorative answers to some of the central questions on cognitive capitalism: What does it mean? In what sense is it useful as a tool for the struggles? What kinds of class composition and antagonist subjectivity are embodied in this concept?

First, we will explain why cognitive labour does not identify a particular sector of the class composition. We will use the term ‘cognitivization’ (becoming cognitive of labour) to elaborate on the process of redetermination of the whole class composition.

Secondly, we will summarize a genealogy of cognitive capitalism and its peculiarities. Based on our readings, it is not a stage of development, but the site of a new battlefield in the ongoing class struggle.

Thirdly, we will point out the tension underlying cognitive capitalism, i.e., the tension between cooperation and capture, autonomy and subordination.

Finally, we will point out the problem of re-thinking a central category from operaismo: the class composition.

Following this pathway, we can underline the main theoretical and political question: What are the points of rupture in cognitive capitalism?

**Keywords:** Cognitive capitalism, cognitive labour, operaismo, class composition, cooperation, capture, autonomy, revolution.
For many years, the concept of cognitive capitalism has been an important subject for elaboration, discussions, and polemics. In the essay we will not summarize the various theoretical details of the debate (see Vercellone 2006 or Roggero 2011); instead, we will try to clarify the political nature of the concept and examine what is at stake from a theoretical point of view. Then, we will give some provisional and explorative answers to some of the central questions on cognitive capitalism: What does it mean? In what sense is it useful as a tool for the struggle? What kinds of class composition and antagonist subjectivity are embodied in this concept?

It can be argued that a university is a good place to discuss cognitive capitalism but this is not dependent on its centrality as an institution of education. In fact, knowledge production is becoming more and more widespread via the ‘real’ and ‘virtual’ networks of social cooperation, and it is becoming less and less the monopoly of any institution. In addition, we cannot say that a university is a good place for discussion, because it is not. Instead, in the ‘global university’ (Ross 2009) we can observe the process of primitive accumulation of knowledge, the central commodity in contemporary capitalism. In the field of social cooperation, concepts are transformed into keywords in order for them to be appropriated and built into intellectual enclosures. After this, researchers who refer to those concepts pay a fee (at least a symbolic one, i.e., a reference) to the ‘owners’ of these concepts. Furthermore, in the academic writings, the collective research (the ‘we’) becomes individual property (the ‘I’). This is how the political economy of knowledge works.

The purpose of this short introduction is to make clear what the term ‘cognitive capitalism’ entails. This thesis rises from the struggles and political attempts to destroy the capitalist system. Mario Tronti gave a terrific explanation half a century ago:

We do not start from concepts. The starting point is the reality historically determined by the capitalist social-economic formation. For the Marxist, the object of the analysis is the capitalism. But the concept of capitalism presents itself at the same time as the concrete historical reality of the capitalist society. The object of study is at the same time the reality to fight. From here, from this positive contradiction, the happy drama of the Marxist theorist, who wants to destroy the object of its own study; even, he has to study the object just to destroy it: the object of his analysis is his own enemy. And this is the historically specific character of the Marxist theory: its own tendentious objectivity. This is the material situation of the worker, who has to fight against what he produces, and wants to eliminate the conditions of its own work, and to smash the social relation of its own production. (Tronti 1963: XXXV)

It is only by starting from the struggles and coming back to the struggles that the concepts can be embodied and become expressions of the creative potentia of the multitude. This means that there is no theoretical practice outside the political practice. From a revolutionary point of view, there is no production of knowledge
that is not immanent to the living labour composition and its historical determination. This is a methodological problem, but with an immediately political point.

On this basis, we will only try to give some stenographic and introductive answers to the aforementioned questions, and to various points of criticism of the concepts that have been made over recent years. There is a central point in this debate: the notion of class composition. Operaisti elaborated the distinction between technical composition, based on the capitalistic articulation and hierarchization of the workforce, and the relation between workers and machines, and political composition, the constitution of class as an autonomous subject. Operaismo forged these categories in a very particular context, marked by the space-time coordinates of the Taylorist factory and Fordist society, and consequently a specific figure of the worker, i.e., the ‘mass worker’. When we talk of the deep changes in the forms of labour and production (summarized in the concept of cognitive capitalism), it is clear that we have to rethink the concept of class composition. In which ways? This is the question that we will try to pose at the end of this article: we have not yet precise answers, but our task is at least to provide some possible basis for this collective research.

1.
We will start by clarifying what we mean by cognitive capitalism and cognitive labour. These terms do not refer to a new stage in the historical process that is supposedly marching towards the transition beyond capital, its Aufhebung (in Hegel’s terms, the dialectical contradiction of overcoming and at the same time preserving). Therefore, cognitive capitalism is not a new stage in the historical process of moving beyond capitalism nor is it the final goal in overcoming capitalism despite the fact that some readings of contemporary capitalism risk arguing this (see for example Gorz 2003). Cognitive labour does not identify a sector of the technical composition of labour such as the ‘knowledge workers’ or the ‘creative class’, or the forms of labour in specific areas of the world. The cognitization (becoming cognitive) of labour is a global process which implies a new quality of the capital relation, and the specific forms of contemporary exploitation and class antagonism. In this process, knowledge is not only a source (raw material) but also a means of production, and its mode of production can qualify the forms of accumulation and the contemporary class composition at a global level. To use Marx’s words in Einleitung: ‘In all forms of society there is one specific kind of production which predominates over the rest, whose relations thus assign rank and influence to the others. It is a general illumination which bathes all the other colours and modifies their particularity. It is a particular ether which determines the specific gravity of every being which has materialized within it’ (Marx 1993: 107). Nowadays the cognitivization of labour is this ‘general illumination’, that explains all the specific elements, new or old, that are determined or re-determined by that process of exploitation and struggle.
Various scholars contest the idea of the passage to cognitive capitalism because there are still factory workers. On the one hand, talking of cognitive capitalism does not mean asserting the disappearance of factories and factory workers. The point is that factory work itself is changing in this new ‘general illumination’, when knowledge-as-commodity becomes central in the new paradigm of accumulation. That is to say, factory work is changing its role in the capitalist hierarchy of accumulation, and it is changing its forms of organization (the Taylorist technical division is no longer the dominant one). In fact, the underlying idea of this kind of analysis often risks arguing for the existence of a ‘normal’ work and a normal form of exploitation, coinciding with the industrial exploitation. On the other hand, to contest the passage to cognitive capitalism in this way means negating the possibility of a periodization, i.e., the historical determination of struggles and capitalist development. In the same way, one has to negate the passage to industrial capitalism because the artisanal or the agriculture workers do not disappear. In brief, talking of cognitive capitalism and labour does not entail imagining a unique form of work, but it points out the hegemonic lines of accumulation and exploitation. Of course, there is a co-presence of different times and forms of work, but they get their specific common physiognomy in the general illumination of the cognitivization process.

There have been some scholars talking of ‘plural capitals’ (Chalcraft 2005), which is a suggestive but quite problematic concept. In fact, there are no plural capitals, because there is only one capital, i.e., a total (not at all totalitarian) social relationship that subordinates and hierarchizes the specific and peculiar relationships. We can say that talking of ‘plural capitals’ does not make sense, because the capital is constitutively plural in that it feeds on heterogeneous forms of labour and production. To be stenographic, capital is a mode of production that designates value to different forms of production. Moreover, the concept of plural capitals risks negating the possibility of a unification of the struggles within and against the capitalist social relationship, that is, ab origine, a global tendency.

2.
Capital is a social relation, or rather an antagonistic social relation. Many critics of the operaismo and post-operaismo revolutionary practices fail to see this antagonistic social relation. They see only a subject of the history, i.e., the capital; since it has the power, you cannot start from the living labour point of view. From this perspective, there are no struggles or autonomy, but only total dominium and heteronomy. This is a sociological rather than political point of view; it is the point of view of power, and not of the working class. It is the image of totality, and we know that this is pure ideology.

So, what is the genealogy of cognitive capitalism? Didier Lebert and Carlo Vercellone trace it through the following three processes that determined the crisis in the Fordist regime of regulation: ‘1. The critique of the scientific management
of work […]]; 2. The expansion of welfare guarantees and collective services […]]; 3. The constitution of a diffuse intellectuality as a result of the “democratization of teaching” and of the elevation of the general standard of education’ (Lebert & Vercellone 2006: 29-30). Therefore, the transition to cognitive capitalism is not a result of the simple necessities of development that are internal to the system. On the contrary, it is the result of a fierce period of struggle that threw Fordism into crisis. Again, Lebert and Vercellone explain the conflictual relationship between the two terms that compose the concept of cognitive capitalism:

1) The term capitalism designates the permanence, within the metamorphosis, of the fundamental variables of the capitalist system: in particular, the guiding role of profit and of the wage relation, or more precisely the different forms of dependent labor from which surplus value is extracted; 2) the cognitive attribute brings into relief the new nature of labor, of the sources of valorization and the property structure upon which is founded the accumulation process and the contradictions which this mutation generates. From this perspective, what matters is to grasp the historicity of the knowledge phenomenon, identifying its polyhedral dimension and the contradictions that characterize its dynamic. (Lebert & Vercellone 2006: 22)

To assert the ontological primacy of class struggle over capital development means claiming the irreducible partiality of the point of view. It also means pointing out the character of the specific capitalist social relation: the working class is the potentia that wants to exercise power; capital, on the other hand, is the power that exploits potentia. The former is the master and the latter is the slave. However, there is no possible dialectical Aufhebung between them. In fact, the dialectic, which also necessitates the universal subject, dies in the irreducible partiality of the workers’ struggle. There is only the actuality of autonomy and the possibility of break and separation.

Cognitive capitalism is a reaction to the global working class insurgency of the 1960s and ‘70s. It is a reaction to the struggle and sabotage, the flight from the chains of the factory and waged labour. Does this mean that we have won and communism exists despite the appearance of a capitalist society? This is another current critical view of operaista and post-operaista thinking, the incurable optimism of the will. The problem is that often this critique risks losing sight of the Marxian concept of capital as a social relation, that is to say, the antagonist ambivalence of the processes of capitalist development. In fact, there is a constitutive duplicity in all Marxian concepts; they are also placed in a relation of force determined by resistance and command, cooperation and exploitation, living labour and dead labour. These abstractions are historically situated and embodied in specific collective subjects and power relations. In a famous chapter of Capital (Chapter 10: ‘The working day’; see also James 2009), Marx (1977) explains how the struggles over the length of the working day force the masters to innovate and restructure the productive organization. There is never a unilateral development. There is always the class struggle that moves the capitalist social relation.
The problem now is to strip this method of any possibility of a historicist reading, i.e., the idea of an objective arrow of historical development. We have underlined the idea that heterogeneity is a peculiarity of global capital, and a constitutive aspect of the contemporary living labour composition. However, within the capital’s heterogeneity there are some hegemonic lines of force that recompose the process of accumulation and command, i.e., it is, following on from Marx, what we term the ‘general illumination’ or tendency. This is not a deterministic outcome of the history and its so-called ‘stage of development’, but a dependent variable of the class struggle. Indeed, we stated above that cognitive capitalism is not the last stage of capitalism; we should now say that the tendency is a set of differences becoming based on the present composition of forces. Therefore, its elements are continuously composed, decomposed and recomposed by a concatenation of points of continuity or discontinuity. Therefore, the tendency is to identify a field of non-progressivist possibilities within the framework of the heterogeneity of the composition of living labour and the differential temporalities that capital captures and translates in the empty and homogeneous language of value. The struggles and the relation of the forces decide the prevalence of one or another. The line of tendency, thus, does not indicate a plane of irenic or objective development; on the contrary, it is the identification of a battlefield and its antagonistic forces.

3. The concept of capture needs some explanation. Our hypothesis is that capital is less and less able to organize the cycle of productive cooperation ‘upstream,’ and increasingly it has to capture the value ‘downstream’. In fact, when knowledge becomes central as a source and means of production, there is a transformation in the forms of accumulation, and there is a change in the relationship between living labour and dead labour. Of course, according to Marx, knowledge was crucial too, but due to its objectification in capital, it became completely separated from the worker. The incorporation of the knowledge of living labour into the automatized system of machines entailed the subtraction of labour’s capacity or its ‘know-how’ and expertise (Marx 1993, see the famous ‘Fragment on machine’). Today the classical relationship between living labour and dead labour tends to become a relationship between living knowledge and dead knowledge (Roggero 2011). In other words, the category of living knowledge refers not only to the central role of science and knowledge in the productive process but also to their immediate socialization and incorporation in living labour. Romano Alquati (1976) had already anticipated this process in the 1970s, thereby prefiguring the rise of a new intellectual proletariat. On the one hand, the cognitive worker is reduced to the condition of the productive worker, and, on the other hand, he tends to become partially autonomous from the automatized system of machines. This leads to a situation in which the general intellect is no longer objectified in dead labour (at least in a
stable temporal process). That is, knowledge can no longer be completely transferred to the machines and separated from the worker. The previous process of objectification is now overturned as the worker incorporates many of the aspects of fixed capital. He incessantly produces and reproduces, vivifies and regenerates the machine. At the same time, a permanent excess of social and living knowledge continuously escapes dead labour/knowledge.

In this framework, there is a necessity to reduce living labour/knowledge to abstract labour/knowledge, that is, the imperative to measure work despite the objective crisis of the law of value (see Negri 1979, and Vercellone 2010), forces capital to impose completely artificial units of time. To use Marx’s words, it is a ‘question de vie et de mort’. The law of value does not disappear, but it becomes an immediately naked measure of exploitation, that is, a law of surplus value. It has to capture the value of the production of subjectivity. As Read argues, this is ‘in both senses of the genitive: the constitution of subjectivity, of a particular subjective comportment (a working class which is both skilled and docile), and in turn the productive power of subjectivity, its capacity to produce wealth’ (Read 2003: 102).

Therefore, the political problem is not to explain the truth of Marx’s words, but to re-think Marx’s analysis in the context of the contemporary transformations of labour and production. Indeed, in Marx’s time, the general intellect was really fixed in the automatic system of machines. Since the 1960s and 1970s, there has been a process of subjectivation of general intellect, and a continuous re-appropriation of the dead labour from the living labour.

4.
The traditional Marxists urge us to pay attention because cooperation is not something that takes place autonomously. In fact, there is a long tradition of what Rosa Luxemburg (2003) called the ‘Marxism of the universities chairs’, that is to say, the attempt to reduce the reading of Marx to philology, disembodied from the struggle and the class compositions. Nowadays, as noted at the beginning of this essay, this tradition takes the form of enclosures of knowledge (the Marxist school, the French thought, the Italian theory, etc.), makes their claim as private property and earning rent. On the contrary, they see exclusively the heteronomy of living labour and the autonomy of capital, the only and invincible master of history. However, these critics miss the target. When we say that there is a partial autonomy of living labour/knowledge (i.e., the autonomy within and against the capital social relation), we are stressing the changing of the socialization of the forms of production. In the collective study and co-research in the Olivetti industry at the beginning of the 1960s, Romano Alquati (1975) pointed out the emergence of a new definition of unproductive labour: this category is no longer useful from a technical point of view, but it is from a political one. Unproductive labour is a function of control and means of capturing of living labour. In fact, facing the
socialization of production, the company has to multiply its hierarchical roles, they are useless in the organization of the productive cycle but they have the political goal of creating divisions and segmentation within the working class. This is the autonomy of living labour. Of course, it is relative (the capital command does not disappear), but it reveals the consequence of overthrowing the process of accumulation and the loss of ability to organize the productive cycle. Mainly, it reveals how production is becoming common of production; production is currently entirely based on the process of social cooperation that capital has to capture but is less and less able to organize.

When we talk of the common we are not referring to a natural good; it is always a matter of production. More precisely, it is concerned with substance and that which is at stake in production relations. On the other hand, talking of the common does not mean celebrating the incipient coming liberation. In fact, the common has a double status (Roggero 2010). It is both the form of production and the source of new social relations; it is what living labour/knowledge produces and what capital exploits. This tension between autonomy and subordination, between self-valorisation and expropriation, draws the lines of the battlefield of class antagonism nowadays. In other words, suggesting that production is becoming common does not coincide with an objective process of liberation because the capture of the common is the new form of capitalist exploitation of living labour. To use these categories in a provisional way, we could say that there is partial autonomy in the technical composition of class, but the problem of the autonomy of the political composition of class remains. Moreover, this autonomy cannot exist in a strong sense without destruction of the capitalist apparatuses of capture.

Now, when there is a deep changing of the relation between constant and variable capital, a sort of partial re-appropriation of the machine from the workers, and knowledge becomes central in the socialization of production, is it still possible to use the concepts of technical and political class composition? Our answer is: yes, but we have to revise them. The embodiment of a growing part of constant capital in the living labour/knowledge certainly does not mean a deterministic line of liberation. It produces terrific ambiguous effects, for which the sufferance goes with the potentia; the pathologies created by the internalization of the command continuously segment the social cooperation. In a certain way, based on the centrality of subjectivity in the contemporary forms of production and capture/accumulation, the political composition comes before the technical composition. To put it another way, the technical composition sustains the mechanisms of segmentation of the workforce and its differential inclusion in the labour market within a context in which the general intellect is embodied in the cooperation of living labour/knowledge.

The goal is to understand how the stratification within the technical class composition becomes a dispositif of the production of subjectivity. From this point of
view, concepts such as ‘knowledge workers’ or ‘creative class’ are not only socio-
logical, but also political. They aim to produce a process of identification of the
workers in competitive sectors, and a segmentation of a common composition.
The main problem that needs to be addressed is how collective processes of dis-
identification from this sectorial belonging, and identification in a common com-
position can be created. We also need to re-think the relationship between tech-
nical and political class composition, or the production of a common composition
against the capitalist segmentation and exploitation. This is not a matter of con-
sciousness, but a material process of the struggle.

5.
Finally, the question that we must ask is what is the material base of the break
with capital, that is to say, the revolution? The base is precisely the materiality of
class composition, in the tension between autonomous subjectivation and capital-
ist command. The problems of the revolutionary organization are entirely within
this antagonistic tension. The base is the relation between forces of production
and relations of production. This is not, as some critics have suggested, a re-
edition of a dogmatic Marxist argument confusing historical materialism with
historical determinism. To accuse the Marxian concept of modes of production of
being a form of ‘economism’ means abandoning the materiality of the social rela-
tions. It means having an ‘economistic’ interpretation of the concept of produc-
tion. According to this point of view, the capital is no more a social relation, but
only one among the many actors that society must control. We must ask where the
non-capitalist relations come from if they do not germinate within and against the
social relationship. Is it from a metaphysical event, from the abstract conscious-
ness of the intellectual, or from a secret reason of history? We are completely in
the reign of utopia. Nevertheless, the flipside of utopia is the image of a totalitari-
an capital; there is no autonomy but only heteronomy, there is no resistance but
only command. Adieu revolution!

In fact, production is radically changing and is more and more based on, and
innervated by, the common. As underlined above, the relation between forces of
production and relations of production is a non-dialectical one: it is a relation be-
tween potentia of the common and capture, a relation of force without the possi-
bility of synthesis and mediation. This is the material basis of the actuality of rev-
olution. This will not happen following the spontaneous line of the forces of pro-
duction, but it depends of the capacity of organizations and the living labour’s
struggle. It will not be a peaceful development of class composition, but the col-
lective break from the capital apparatuses of capture. It is a problem of class re-
composition and rupture with the command.

At this stage, the two critical stances of my analysis should be quite clear. On
one side, there is a reading of global capital through the re-propositioning of the
dialectic between the centre and the periphery. The former shows the image of its
own future, according to a progressive line of development. The second stance is a critique of this historicist idea and considers heterogeneity as a constitutive element of the contemporary living labour composition. Coming from this critical approach, there is a risk of concluding that what we call a common composition is impossible. In this way, talking of heterogeneity becomes a trap. This risk coincides with the simple description of the class stratification, that is to say, a sociology of the capitalist segmentation. Therefore, the differences are certainly irreducible to homogeneity, but they can find the space of their potentia and freedom in their common composition. There is, thus, a radical difference between universalism and the common; the common is the base and the product of differences and multiplicity, it is never the starting point as imaged by the Enlightenment and socialist traditions. It remains, however, what is always at stake in the struggle.

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Notes

1 In the text I use the plural first person because the contents of the article are part of a collective research and common theoretical and political debate. This collective research has precise names: UniNomade (www.uninomade.org), Commonware (www.commonware.org), and edu-factory (www.edu-factory.org). This is just a methodological and political point: the production of knowledge is never individual, but is always immanent to a process of cooperation.

References

The Alternative to Post-Hegemony:
Reproduction and Austerity’s Social Factory

By Kylie Jarrett

Abstract
In the transitions to advanced liberal States and post-Fordist economic paradigms, it is argued that the distinction between work and sociality has become blurred. This marks the emergence of the “social factory” where sociality is industrialised and industrialisation has become increasingly centred on immaterial, social activity. It is further argued that this regime has generated a new articulation of socio-economic relations based on biopower and systems of control alongside the irruptive agency of multitude. Consequently, it is often suggested that the concept of hegemony can no longer adequately explain manifestations of power and resistance. The argument is that we live today in a state of post-hegemony. This paper challenges the theoretical and pragmatic underpinnings of this position at a number of levels, arguing that the lived politics associated with the imposition of Austerity economics across Europe, but particularly as manifest in Ireland, undermine the assertion that hegemony is no longer a relevant conceptualisation of power dynamics. In particular it uses feminist thinking to challenge the epochalisation inherent to arguments of post-hegemony, arguing instead for a return to engagement with the reproductive logic of hegemonic discipline.

Keywords: Immaterial labour, hegemony, activism, feminism.
Introduction

When global financial markets collapsed on their ephemeral underpinnings in late 2007 for some this was the inevitable exposure of capitalism’s contradictions and limits. It was hoped by many on the political Left that from the ensuing fiscal crisis would emerge an alternative economic or, ideally, social system. I write this though from Ireland in 2013 where this is far from the case. Instead of life in a new socialist utopia, Irish citizens struggle under imposed ‘austerity measures’ that in six years have reduced available public funds by €28.5 billion through spending restrictions and the introduction of taxes, levies and charges (The Irish Times 2013). These cuts have been made in order to service a socialised debt accrued by State guarantees of failing private enterprises within the Irish banking and finance sectors.

Dominant in the public discourse of Austerity Ireland is the primacy of ‘fixing the economy’ over and above all other concerns such as social welfare, public service provision or social equity. Perverse pleasure is taken in receiving positive commentary in the quarterly compliance reviews of the European Union/International Monetary Fund/European Central Bank (the Troika) that have overseen the imposition of Austerity (a nominalised agent in most discourse, hence the capitalisation). Through a ‘successful’ return to international bond markets in July 2012, Ireland has become the poster child of the wider Eurozone’s resilience and model for the effectiveness of Austerity in restoring stability to national markets.

However, the effects of these measures on individuals, communities, or Irish society are not commonly encountered in political discourse (Titley 2013). This is despite Irish Central Bank figures indicating that 1 in 10 homeowners are in financial distress and facing repossession (The Irish Times 2012; Pope 2013), where already mismanaged public services such as health and education are unable to function effectively in their reduced budgets (Burke 2010) and where reductions in social welfare payments and services to vulnerable citizens such as carers, the disabled and the unemployed have increased levels of poverty and deprivation (Caritas Europa 2013). A survey by international charity Oxfam (2013) indicated that in 2012 one in four Irish people were left with €100 or less each month after covering necessary bills, taxes and charges, with a further 602,000 left with no disposable income at all.

While there is public protest against these measures and the socialisation of debt more generally, political unrest in Ireland has been muted compared to other countries in which similar Austerity models are being instituted. Writing in the Greek Left Review, Irish academic Helena Sheehan describes Greek protestors chanting, ‘We are not Ireland. We will resist’, commenting: ‘It stung. Those of us who are resisting felt acutely our failure to mobilise sufficient numbers to put up
the resistance the situation required’ (2013: n.p.). There seems little but the orthodoxy of neoliberal finance capitalism at play in mainstream Irish politics.

In coming to terms with these events in my adopted nation, I increasingly need to invoke the concept of ‘hegemony’. Only the maintenance of some generalised consent explains the widespread compliance with the regime of Austerity recognised by Sheehan. However this runs counter to various contemporary theoretical trends shaped by insights of Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze, but particularly as articulated in the work of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, in which hegemony has been relegated to a historical footnote, supplanted by regimes of biopower, systems of control and the dynamics of communicative capitalism. It is argued that in the ‘social factory’ of biocapital, in which the boundaries between life/culture and alienated labour have been blurred, also lie re-organised political economy and governance systems beyond power exerted through mechanisms that sustain hegemony. According to this argument, today we live (and theorise) in a state of ‘post-hegemony’, where biopower is exerted through mechanisms of immanent communication rather than disciplining discursive representation and in which the articulation of difference associated with counter-hegemony has been defused as a form of political resistance (for instance Swiffen 2009; McStay 2011; Beer 2009; Arditi 2007). It is presumed or argued that the concept of hegemony has lost its purchase and can no longer serve as an explanatory tool for how power and/or social antagonism manifests.

Contrarily, I suggest that we cannot fully understand, and therefore intervene, in contemporary political economies and societies unless we take into account the reproduction of dominant dispositions, ideologies and through that, the maintenance of the capital relation. We cannot engage politically unless we factor in the disciplinary reproductive logic of hegemony. This paper will therefore criticise the concept of post-hegemony as articulated within discussions of the social factory, multitude and regimes of biopower. In particular it will focus on the epochalisation inherent to these arguments that obscures the long history of the exploitation of biopower. This aspect of my argument draws on feminist insights into the importance of reproductive labour, and takes inspiration from Angela Mitropolous’ (2012) underscoring of oikonomia and generational lineage, in order to reassert the role of hegemonic reproduction in the social factory. While not seeking to resolve the problems of how best to generate counter-hegemonic resistance, struggles over Austerity in Ireland will be used as an example of how understanding hegemony continues to be a vital tool for an engaged politics.

Biopolitics and the Social Factory

arguments about the contemporary social factory and post-hegemonic power have been spun. Foucault traces the emergence of a form of governance based not in the right of seizure exerted by a sovereign power but in the administration, management and optimisation of populations conceived as a social body. This power works through two techniques. The first is associated with disciplining the capabilities of the machinic body (emphasising individual corporeality) to maximise its capabilities. The second is focused on the supervision of the ‘species body’, effected through series of interventions and regulatory controls at the level of the population (Foucault 1976/1998). Foucault associates biopolitics with the development of liberalism as a framework of governance and with the emergence of modern biology and its notions of ‘self-regulation and self-preservation’ (Lemke 2011: 48). In particular, he emphasises the importance placed on ‘human capital’ within the economic logic of neoliberalism and the consequent focus of social and cultural policies such as education on ‘the more or less voluntary formation of human capital in the course of individual’s lives’ (Foucault 2008: 228). It is through mobilisation of both these techniques for exerting power that life processes, intimate interpersonal behaviour and individual morality have become legitimate and viable objects of socio-political intervention and been incorporated into systems and techniques of governance.

While the concept of biopolitics has been developed or used variously in divergent fields (Lemke 2011), relevant for this paper is the relationship of a Foucauldian inflected concept of biopower to contemporary Marxist critiques recognising the increasing importance of immaterial, affective, communicative and/or cognitive inputs in the circuits of capital. Many Marxist theorists associated with the Autonomia political movement and theoretical paradigm, but in particular Hardt and Negri (2000: 2005: 2009), mobilise a similar understanding of the incorporation of life into mechanisms of power. Mario Tronti’s term ‘the social factory’ is used to describe the conclusion of developments associated with post-Fordism through which various life processes, once deemed exterior to the commodity relation, have become integral to the economic calculations of capital (Negri 1989). Maurizio Lazzarato (1996) offers the examples of software, audio/visual production and advertising as emblematic industries where the cognitive and affective investments of workers and consumers alike add intangible value to commodities. The socially meaningful practices of digital media consumers of products such as YouTube, Facebook or computer games exemplify this trend as these constitute unpaid content, but also generate revenue through transformation into consumer data that is extensively mined and sold to advertisers in the form of the audience-commodity (Terranova 2000; Fuchs 2008; Dyer-Witheford & de Peuter 2009). This industrialisation of sociality also takes the form of the ‘presence bleed’ associated with mobile communications technologies that blur boundaries between work and intimate personal life (Gregg 2011). It can also be found in the logic of ‘workfare’ programmes, lifelong training initiatives and in
the expanding phenomenon of unpaid corporate internships (Ross 2013). In these instances, often pleasurable and (quasi-) voluntary social activity manifests the alienating, expropriating and commodifying logics of industrial capitalism (Negri 1989).

The social factory is also associated with the socialisation of industry in that there is an increasing reliance on social relationships and cognitive capabilities within factory walls. Great importance is attributed to non-material processes such as communication and affective interaction in the contemporary workplace. This is recognised in economic calculations of ‘human capital’ that include the intellectual and affective property embodied in the capacities of workers. Even in manufacturing and primary industries, increasing computerisation of industrial processes has foregrounded so-called ‘soft’ skills, particularly those associated with symbol manipulation, intellectual achievement and interpersonal communication. In this context, labour-power (as potential energy) is no longer only associated with the force of the living body but with subjectivity, cognition and affect (Virno 2004). This incorporation of social skills into capital in both traditional leisure and paid work contexts signals the increasingly blurry boundaries between sociality and industrialised processes. As Dyer-Witheford summarises the ‘world of the socialized worker is thus one where capital suffuses the entire form of life’ (1999: 81).

The concept of the social factory describes the logic of the 2013 Irish tourism initiative The Gathering (http://www.thegatheringireland.com/), designed by the State to attract the tourism and investment dollars of the broad Irish diaspora. This campaign encouraged communities and individuals to create events to be attended by international guests or visiting expatriates, attempting to enrol the entire population in crafting an entertaining celebration of normative Irish culture and traditions. The tag line of the campaign – ‘invite them home’ – directly refers to interpersonal relationships. In doing so, it encapsulates the incorporation of sociality within a national economic plan to increase tourism numbers and generate domestic employment in tourism-related ventures, as well as to build potentially lucrative business linkages. According to government data released at the Irish Economic Forum (Merrionstreet.ie 2013), tourism numbers grew by an extra 291,000 visitors between January and August of 2013, up 6.5% from the same period the previous year. This included an increase of 16.5% in US visitors, most closely associated with the Irish diaspora. Noted in the report were business opportunities emerging from strengthened links with this diaspora and also increased civic pride and social capital, with ‘73% of those polled said organising a Gathering had inspired people to work together to the benefit of the community’. In its intermingling of interpersonal relationships and social and community cohesion with quantified assertions of economic value, The Gathering embodies the subsumption of the entire Irish social body into a capitalist logic.
But in contemporary Ireland it is in Austerity that the social factory is exemplified. This regime blurs life and work not only by demanding an effective extension of the working day as each individual labours for less pay and/or longer hours, regardless of productivity. Its logic also permeates non-work aspects of life from the biological – as public medical care becomes more expensive or laborious to access due to cuts in medical services – to the affective – as family-based care labour becomes pressured by cuts to carer allowances and respite care facilities, the imposition of longer working days, and reduction of real incomes through increased taxation and charges. Through claims by current Taoiseach (Prime Minister) Enda Kenny that ‘we went mad borrowing’, or those by former Tánaiste (Deputy Prime Minister) Brian Lenihan that ‘we all partied’, individual consumption decisions, coded as moral choice, become the collective cause and, by implication, the solution to the economic crisis (see Kennedy 2011; Titley 2013). Indeed the cultural ‘morality’ of various indebted states has become a key component of recent European governance in which countries involved in bailouts are represented as having immature cultural systems that promote irresponsibility and idleness (Mylonas 2012). A commitment to probity across all facets of life, to stoicism in the face of physical and/or emotional pain, is demanded by Austerity economics. Austerity is a ‘whole of life’ phenomenon. Austerity is the social factory.

The End of Hegemony?

Despite the relationship to state economics depicted here, the social factory is nevertheless associated with the decline of power exerted as hegemony. As Negri writes, the socialised worker is ‘a producer, but not only a producer of value and surplus value; s/he is also the producer of the social cooperation necessary for work’ (1989: 80, original emphasis). Drawing on Marx’s notion of the general intellect, Hardt and Negri (2005; 2009) expand upon the agency of this cooperation, attributing a degree of autonomy and immeasurability to social production that generates powerful tensions in the processes of capital (2009: 270). There is therefore a contradiction between the needs of capital and the qualities of socialised labour, and it is from this tension that Hardt and Negri generate their optimistic view of the radical potential of such work. They suggest that the excessive energies associated with cooperative, socialised production may manifest as a multitude – a heterogeneous collectivity – with the power to generate a common pool of knowledge and most importantly activity in contradiction of capitalist structures. Biopower can thus be associated with the systems of population management identified by Foucault but also with the emergent, potentially transformative agency of workers: it is implicated in radical critiques and political activism as much as with fears of containment and contamination by corporate and state interests.
The political agency, and management, of multitude is typically associated with regimes of post-hegemonic control rather than regimes of hegemonic domination. Deleuze’s (1995) reflections on the politics of control have been central to this position. He argues that contemporary social systems are ‘no longer exactly disciplinary’ (1995: 174) in that they do not operate through confinement but instead through constant communication that generates a system saturated with the dictates of power – a state of control or, as Hardt and Negri would suggest, Empire (2000). Deleuze’s position underpins Nicholas Thoburn’s (2007) advocacy of a post-hegemonic Cultural Studies. Drawing on the work of Laclau and Mouffe, Thoburn typifies hegemonic power as the construction of a system of equivalences that are always only partial. This in turns suggests the potential for transformative politics in the creation of alternative or broader chains of equivalence within the network of relatively autonomous social relations that constitute the realm of politics. However, for Thoburn, this model fails to appreciate the concept of the social factory and its negation of the relative autonomy of social spheres and, subsequently, the potential for alternative politics to emerge from the cultural and social superstructure (see also Swiffen 2009). He argues that social change can only emerge from critical interrogation of, and changes to, the relations of production such as those associated with multitude rather than from changes in structuring discourses as in counter-hegemonic resistance.

Other arguments about post-hegemony draw on the distinction Foucault makes between disciplining techniques and the techniques of biopower in *The History of Sexuality*. Scott Lash (2007) outlines the qualities of this ‘mutation’ in the exertion of power. He claims that the extensive politics of hegemony have given way to a politics of intensity characterised by four key qualities. The first is a transition from the epistemological regime, where hegemony was enacted through the Symbolic realm in the form of discourse, to an ontological regime of power. Domination, and resistance, Lash says, increasingly occur in the Real, which is ‘not at all knowable through cognitive judgement’ (58) but only through intensifications of affect. Consequently, the ontological being is no longer only a site of resistance but also one of domination. ‘In the age of hegemony, power only appropriated your predicates: in the post-hegemonic present it penetrates your very being. Power, previously extensive and operating from without, becomes intensive and now works from within’ (59).

Following from this is Lash’s related argument that there has been a shift from a regime of ‘power over’ to ‘power as generative force’. Here he draws on Hardt and Negri’s use of the term ‘potentia’ to describe power associated with ‘force, energy, potential’, indeed with life itself (59). This self-organising vitalism is that captured within the biopolitics of immaterial labour, as well as with multitude as a political force. Rather than being imposed from above as in hegemony, power ‘comes to act from below: it no longer stays outside that which it “effects”. It becomes instead immanent in its object and its processes’ (61). In post-hegemonic
contexts, power’s determining ethics are therefore generated from inside the empirical facticity of the Real and the vitalism of the body. Accordingly, and related to Derrida’s argument, Lash suggests there has been a shift from an extensive politics of collective representation based in the normative models of the Symbolic to a regime of immanent, intensive communications. Power is not enabled by discursive representation of its legitimacy but through the immediacy of the performance of its functions in a society of control in which distinct spaces of discipline have collapsed. It functions through a ‘reflexive and autopoietic self-production’ (Lash 2007: 66; McStay 2011) that is chronically generative of social order. Thus, in Lash’s estimation, although ‘it takes place increasingly through the media, domination was never so immediate. So unreflective. So without a separate sphere of discursive legitimation’ (2007: 66).

Hegemony in Practice

Upon completion of his description of the mechanisms of post-hegemonic power, Lash notes: ‘The observations above do not really do justice to the power-as-hegemony position’ (68). In the context of his argument, this acknowledgement is curious but it is accurate. As Johnson (2007) argues, the description of post-hegemony Lash and others espouse inadequately represents the complexity of society even while drawing important features of post 9/11 societies into a theoretical frame. What puzzles Johnson is that the end result of this theorising ‘is viewed as the end of hegemony rather than as a new hegemonic moment’ (2007: 102). I have the same concern that these conceptualisations inadequately capture the ways power in practice continues to mobilise disciplining discourses to sustain hegemonic ideologies. On a pragmatic level, it seems difficult to understand both the politics of Austerity and the resistance to it emerging across Europe without recourse to the idea of hegemony, and in particular without referring to the construction of alternative discursive formations. An example from Ireland will illustrate.

Central to the politics of the Irish Austerity State is the argument that ‘there is no alternative’ (TINA) to Austerity generally and, more recently, to the reduction of public sector costs in order to meet budgetary benchmarks imposed by the Troika. Thatcher’s famous but simple expression of assumed consensus has widespread purchase across the Irish media and in public discourse, appearing explicitly and implicitly in the lead-up to Budget announcements, in the limited discussions around debt default or in the general framing of the decision to socialise bank debt (Politico.ie 2010; Brennan 2010). The constant reiteration of TINA naturalises debt and Austerity measures as simple ‘common sense’, part of the organic background of contemporary politics and thus beyond critique. Consequently all questioning of Austerity, and even of particular measures, is cast as irrational. As Titley (2013) describes, dissent or the proposition of alternatives is
constructed as taboo for it is seen to dent market confidence, raise spectres of unrest and show a limited grasp of reality. In political discourse in Ireland, to question the imposition of Austerity is simply not sensible.

That there is no alternative to Austerity can only be described as a hegemonic discourse and arguably the hegemonic discourse of contemporary Ireland – Titley refers to it as the ‘ur-mantra’ (2013: 199). This normalising and normative declaration of ‘common sense’ establishes a singular view of economic circumstances and solutions, renders contrary positions illegitimate, and in turn legitimates material manifestations of social power by the Irish State and its agencies. This declaration has material effects as it is the logic upon which the social and economic order is organised, providing the legitimating framework for a series of brutal national Budgets that have had very real consequences for individual citizens and the social fabric. At the same time, it is also encountered repeatedly at a representational level in the discourse of media commentators, politicians and of the general population who, even while rejecting particular economic proposals, nevertheless accept that cuts must be made. Contrary then to arguments that control is exerted in the social factory only and primarily through the Real, power exerted through symbolic means is also alive, well and effective in Austerity Ireland.

The discursive properties of power relations are also demonstrated in acts of resistance. In 2013, an alliance of public sector workers emerged in Ireland challenging the imposition of another reduction in wages and, importantly, further degradation of labour conditions. This coalition was constituted by emergency service and health care professionals involved in the 24/7 Front Line Services Alliance, various groups of educators, and diverse sets of office workers associated with the Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union. It set out to mobilise workers to reject an agreement between the government and public sector unions that traded continuing employment security for increased hours, reduced conditions and direct pay cuts. Coming after a previous reduction of wages and conditions, the goal of this proposal (to which, it was claimed, there was no alternative) was to save a further €1 billion from the public sector pay bill by 2015.

Contrary to the positions of their own union executives, this coalition of rank-and-file union members not only argued for rejection of the proposal on economic grounds, but also articulated an alternative narrative about the nature of the cuts. Protest was articulated around principles of collective solidarity – ‘Do not vote for someone else’s pay cut’ become one of the rallying cries – and groups were united in a refusal to accept that these cuts were an indisputable necessity. The effects of reduced conditions on the ability of public sector workers to actually serve the public, an argument absent from formal and mediated discussion of the proposals, also became a feature of these protests (for instance, Workers’ Solidarity Movement 2013). While the position taken by this coalition did not challenge a key structural feature contributing to Austerity – the socialisation of private bank debt.
its defiance of the consent assumed in TINA, along with its emphasis on social effects, marks a war of position with dominant ideas.

This coalition bears some of the characteristics of multitude in that this is a temporary, irruptive alliance of emergent, grass-roots movements with a diversity of politics and goals. But this heterogeneous multitude was nevertheless an organised coalition who actively sought solidarity between varied union members and temporary points of consensus from which an alternative narrative was generated. Organisers used social media and face-to-face meetings to articulate their point of difference from institutionalised discourses and this ‘old-fashioned’ grass-roots campaign was initially successful, with a wide spread rejection of the proposal across many unions in the ratification vote. In light of this organised resistance, the government was forced to re-enter negotiations with unions, producing yet another proposal marginally reducing the cuts and changes to conditions. At the same time though, the State also engaged in an overt exercise of symbolic violence, successfully passing legislation to impose by fiat greater pay cuts and reduced conditions upon members of any union who failed to vote for acceptance of the revised proposals. Confronted with this aggressive tactic, it is perhaps no surprise that in a second vote in September 2013 all public sector unions except one ratified the proposal.

Even though emerging from Austerity Ireland’s social factory, this alliance of public sector workers is comprehensible only as an example of counter-hegemonic agency. In the context of TINA, the quite literal withdrawal of consent to the further imposition of Austerity measures by public sector workers was the manifestation of a direct challenge to the hegemonic logic of the Irish State. By also attempting to shift the discourse to questions of the effect on public services such as health, education and policing, this coalition proposed a new framework for conceptualising Austerity. That the government was forced into an overt exertion of its coercive power in order to counter the growing validity of this counter-hegemonic position indicates not only the existence, but also the effectiveness and viability, of counter-hegemonic organised action. The degree of symbolic violence needed to repress this resistance shows this protest to be a small victory for anti-Austerity campaigners, albeit a pyrrhic one.

This example also emphasises the importance of activism in relation to symbolic dominance. Even agreeing with Thoburn and Deleuze that the important site of struggle is production relations does not preclude the existence of various cognitive, discursive and affective structures that materially support those relations, and as such may serve as important sites for marshalling resistance. The struggle of Irish public sector workers is certainly over material conditions but just as certainly contains symbolic dimensions. The shift from framing reductions in labouring conditions as an indisputable economic necessity to an unnecessary, socially damaging intervention continues in the ongoing industrial action by the only union to reject the revised agreement – the Association of Secondary Teachers, Ire-
land (ASTI). Despite Government threats of compulsory redundancies for unionised workers, and a concerted mediated campaign to describe this resistance as socially irresponsible (see Malone 2013; O’Regan 2013; O’Rourke 2013 for example), ASTI members and their supporters continue to point to the detrimental effects of the demanded reforms on the education of young people (Wall 2013; McGuire 2013; Dunphy 2013). In this example, the struggle may be occurring in the Real and is about material conditions, but it also contains non-material, cognitive elements that are primarily about redefining the meaning of Austerity. How much purchase these counter-hegemonic arguments will secure in the long-term is unknown, but currently they are serving as an anchoring and rallying point for this particular struggle to change material conditions.

In other national contexts, the practicalities of resistance can similarly be associated with counter-hegemonic struggle. Costas Douzinas’ (2010: n.p.) description of the 2008 anti-austerity ‘riots’ in Greece as an ‘event’ fundamentally other to ‘politics as usual’ draws on ideas of multitude. Nevertheless he still claims that the continued effectiveness of this campaign relies on a return to more traditionally organised political negotiation by a vanguard, albeit with ‘new politicised subjects and the re-arrangement of the rules of political participation’ (n.p.). After the irruptive power of multitude, real political change requires engagement with some organisational structuring, including leaders charged with articulating a counter-hegemonic position (Thorburn 2012). As Couze Venn suggests about other plural political movements: ‘A sense of hegemony and counter-hegemony is still ambivalently at work … motivated by the exigencies of practical politics’ (2007: 122). It is at this practical level of heterogeneous anti-Austerity political activity – where actors must organise against prevailing ideologies and structures – that the concept of post-hegemony fails to offer a convincing interpretive framework.

The Problem of Consent

This inability to capture lived reality lies in the failure to address in the foundational principles of post-hegemony the question of consent and how that is secured or lost. What is typically described instead is totalising domination by the constant communication of a biopolitical machine. This is Lash, Thoburn and Deleuze’s position for instance, but when placed in the context of even the limited Austerity protests described above, this does not make sense. While the TINA discourse may penetrate the entire social body, it cannot be evenly distributed. If there was only a regime of control, protest such as that of the Irish public sector workers could never emerge. Indeed, it is difficult to understand how the agency of multitude is ever able to actively generate a counter politics unless the illegitimacy of dominant conditions is first experienced and alternative modes made conceivable, forcing irruptive energy in particular directions.
Unless a population has been rendered entirely passive, the stability of even a pervasive system of control, such as that associated with biopolitics, needs to be reproduced and perpetually secured. Without such mechanisms for establishing consent, or for imposing discipline where consent is not forthcoming, there is only power’s exhaustive penetration that in turn leaves limited or no capacity for resistance of the type emerging across European states. In Austerity Ireland, the constant repetition of TINA is one such tool, asserting a culturally desirable social position, and, in casting alternatives as absurd, providing negative reinforcement as well. It simultaneously assumes hegemony, and asserts discipline. In Lash’s argument however, a close correlation is drawn between social reproduction, disciplining and hegemony at the same time as this is rejected in favour of what can best be described as an immanent subjectivation at the level of the individual body and Self. However, there seems little difference between the post-hegemonic subject for whom legitimation ‘is no longer separate from what it is meant to legitimate, it becomes automatic’ (Lash 2007: 66) and the disciplined subject who has internalised social norms so that they align themselves voluntarily with the needs of power. Lash’s depiction ignores Althusserian insights and (mis-) represents hegemony as a form of domination always imposed by external institutions rather than as an effect of subjectivities fundamentally shaped by the interaction between each socialized individual, their affective and biological propensities and the normative structures of their contingent sociopolitical context.

Thus, while biopower may work to ‘establish life and to penetrate all of its aspects in order to rule it’ (Atzert 2006: 63), the properly Foucauldian, or perhaps Weberian, question of what brings an individual to accept domination by any governance structure must still be asked. If the exertion of power is to be made sensible and/or contestable there must be mechanisms that legitimate, or fail to legitimate, the exploitation of an individual’s biopower so that an individual or group can become complicit with, or seek to challenge, that relation. Consequently, determining what discursive mechanisms secure consent, particularly at the level of disciplined subjectivity, and how they may be disrupted remains a core political project, but one that cannot be articulated in the framework provided by post-hegemony.

Continuity of Hegemonic Discipline

It is notable that most articulations of the post-hegemonic position were published in 2007, just before the global financial collapse and the imposition of new socio-political-economic regimes of Austerity across a variety of advanced liberal countries. The post-crash moment though is marked by overt mechanisms for asserting and securing the social order and greater, more obvious struggles of position such as those manifesting in the alliance of Irish public sector workers and, in particular, in the use of legislation to quash this protest. But as this example also demon-
strates, there are multiple forms and gradations of control simultaneously being effected within Austerity states. Both coercive policing (punitive legislation) and subjectivation at the symbolic level (TINA) are being used to sustain hegemony. The systems of communication and affect described by Lash and Thoburn are also in play – the extensive penetration of TINA works at the level of fear – but these are merely the mobilization of one suite of techniques working alongside, sometimes in opposition, sometimes in concert, with hegemonic discipline, counter-hegemonic articulations of difference, and the imposition of coercive violence. Thus while the techniques, goals and struggles of any given socio-political, economic or cultural moment may take on new contours, and the particular qualities of the ideal subject shift in accordance, this does not mean the end of political domination through hegemonic discipline (in whatever multiple forms that may take).

It is this continuity between hegemonic discipline and the conditions of the biopolitical social factory that I wish to underscore as I draw attention back to the reproductive logic of power relations and the necessity of understanding those in order to generate alternative political positions. Such continuity is rarely recognised for a key assumption of post-hegemony theories is of an epochal change from hegemonic regimes of symbolic domination to post-hegemonic regimes of biopolitical control. Indeed, it is only in the maintenance of the idea that there has been such a seismic shift that allows for the claim of a fundamentally transformed relation of power and the insistence on this as post-hegemonic. As both Mitropoulos (2012) and Thomas Lemke (2011) argue, this is contrary to Foucault’s theoretical framework in that it tends either to posit directly, or imply obliquely, ‘historical succession and systematic replacement’ of techniques of power, rather than the ‘simultaneity and interconnectivity of heterogeneous technologies’ (Lemke 2011: 74). Governance through biopower, even if taken as somehow not involving hegemony or discipline, can be ‘but merely one element among others’ (Foucault 1976/1998: 136).

Moreover, the supposed shift to post-hegemonic society is also premised on a fundamental and false binary between ‘productive’ and ‘reproductive’ activity – between ‘invention and discipline’ in Lash’s reckoning. He says: ‘If the hegemonic order works through a cultural logic of reproduction, the post-hegemonic power operates through a cultural logic of invention, hence not of reproduction but of chronic production of economic, social and political relations’ (2007: 56). This is also contrary to Foucault’s ideas. Despite the distinction he may have drawn between discipline and regulatory population control in The History of Sexuality, in his model of power discipline is inherently productive, generating the knowledge categories, states of being and subjectivities inhabited by its subjects. Indeed he argues that it is only through such a productive capacity that a particular power relation can become established in liberal models of governance. It is an unfortunate consequence of the canonisation of the idea of a passage from conditions of
confinement to one of biopolitical control (Mitropoulos 2012) that the creative capacities attributed to reproductive disciplining activity by Foucault have been lost.

But more importantly there is a historical inaccuracy in assuming that a clear division once existed between realms of sociality and those of capitalist accumulation, so that it is only now in the context of the social factory that power and economic relations are able to permeate the social and ‘work from within’ (Lash 2007: 59). As many feminist researchers and sociologists of economics have informed us, domination has never been confined solely to the realms of the social nor relations of production to those categories of activity organised around the wage relation. Throughout the history of capitalism there has been a necessary co-existence of affective, immaterial, biological and/or cognitive labour with those forms of work identified as ‘productive’ (see Dalla Costa & James 1972; Fortunati 1995; Federici 2004; Zelizer 2005; Hochschild 1983/2003). The obvious example is that unpaid reproductive, affective domestic labour has provided the structural foundation upon which the capitalist economy has been built. The implication that capitalism has until recently impacted only within the walls of the factory denies the already social labour of women and men that has contributed directly and indirectly to capitalist relations. Feminist theories of labour tell us that it is certainly not new that power exerts itself through living matter and affective relations.

Yet, in discussions of contemporary biopolitics, it is quite common to see only a brief, perhaps token, mention of feminists such as Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James who, in the words of Kathi Weeks (2011: 123), ‘opened the door to a new conceptualization of the structure of capitalist social production, to which the category of the social factory was an early contribution’. Their contribution to understanding labour is typically raised and then dismissed in favour of a statement of the novelty of the social factory, both as a theoretical construct and as a lived reality. Thus, while I may have claimed earlier that Austerity Ireland functions as a social factory, the same is true of the ‘Celtic Tiger’ Ireland that predated and precipitated the economic collapse and of any precursor version of Ireland under capitalism (or indeed colonialism). Each has demanded and received the incorporation of various aspects of social life into its economic logic.

The dramatic growth of Ireland’s Celtic Tiger years for instance was not only a fiscal project, but also involved the re-organisation of cultural and social norms (see Kirby et al. 2002; Coulter & Coleman 2003). The entire social fabric was penetrated by the economic logic of that era and inevitably personal and domestic relations incorporated the social and cultural instabilities and personal desires demanded by the structures of high-finance capitalism. This involved an orientation away from the localised logics of established social institutions such as the Catholic Church to international markets and the entrepreneurial social, economic and physical mobility associated with them (O’Riain 2000: 183; Peillon 2002). Cultural norms perpetuated the desire for high levels of individual consumption and
for the property ownership that fed Ireland’s housing boom. Appropriate personal attitudes were also policed, with Taoiseach Bertie Ahern musing in a 2007 speech to the Irish Council of Trade Unions that he didn’t understand people who were critical of the economy and wondered why they simply didn’t commit suicide (RTÉ 2007). To live (at all) in the Celtic Tiger was to put your labouring body but also your desiring self uncritically to work in generating and perpetuating its economic logics. The same absorption of social, cultural and interpersonal life into the economic system is true of any socioeconomic formation in which base and superstructure mutually reinforce each other. As Ryan says of her studies of the life-choices of Irish people between 1999 and 2001, individual choices and economic values, public and private spheres, ‘cannot be considered in isolation from each other’ (2003: 155).

It is fundamentally false then to assert that the incorporation of biopower is an entirely contemporary phenomenon that, ipso facto, requires a radically transformed relation of power. When the already existing incorporation of bodies and subjectivities into capitalist regimes are taken into consideration, to suggest that regimes of biopower necessarily require the exertion of power or resistance in forms other than hegemony becomes untenable. Biopower and biopolitical control clearly have taken, and still can take, the form of hegemonic disciplinary power and counter-hegemonic struggle.

Reproduction and Genealogy

If hegemonic discipline is compatible, if not co-extensive, with governance of the social factory, and if consent is still necessary to establish and maintain a system of control, then we would do well to reinvigorate our investigation of these techniques and technologies of power. In particular it becomes important to understand hegemony as involving processes of subjectivation through which legitimacy is generated, maintained and normalised but which are not encountered as alien forces. It is to explore the Althusserian subject who is already implicated in ideology and ‘fraught with the paradox of capture’ (Beller 2013: 182; Althusser 1971/2008). In this I am echoing Mitropoulos who, while recognising the important contributions made by Autonomist readings of Marx, also suggests a need to explore issues of restoration and reproduction in contemporary capitalism. She says that such analysis must be ‘accompanied by closer attention to the specifically genealogical character of the persistence and/or re-imposition of capitalism, that is to say, of particular forms of sociality that are also the modes for the legitimate redistribution of property and right’ (2012: 92).

Mitropoulos advocates continued investigation of those processes that assure generational lineage, a metaphor which, by drawing upon concepts of biological reproduction, focuses attention upon the reproduction of capital within familial, domestic relations: oikonomia. This reproduction is more than the generation of
living creatures. It is also about the reproduction of subjectivities and the orientations conducive to the perpetuation of social roles, including ‘demarcations of race, gender, sexuality and nation’ (200) that constitute ‘the productive labourer’. Mitropoulos draws our attention to a question associated clearly with the interrogation of hegemonic domination: what is being restored at the frontiers of capital? She depicts colonisation not as dispossession but as involving the installation of proper capitalist order over ‘all those instances where the legibility of property rights is (or has become) acutely uncertain’ (113). Wherever capital is re-imposing limits, such as in the symbolic violence inflicted on non-compliant public sector workers in Ireland, it is demanding ‘the restoration of genealogical lines, in their simultaneously sexual, legal and economic senses’ (113). The question then to be asked of political practices such as the imposition of and resistance to Austerity is

the extent to which they expand the conditionality of the genealogical or make other ties viable. What forms of generation – beyond the genealogical nexus of race, sexuality, citizenship, class and gender, that is, beyond the adhesions of desire to re-production of capitalism – might be furnished with plausible infrastructures in the composition of political demands for reform or movements for radical transformation? (114).

While she does not use the term here, these questions are about tracing the mechanisms of hegemonic domination, legitimation and antagonism. For an activist politics, her framework begs us to ask what alternate subject positions or forms of agency are being articulated in the varied discourses of Austerity whose generative potential might be capitalised and expand upon for transformative purposes? A lead can be taken from Douzinas’ (2013: 137-154) mapping of the various transformations of subjectivities in a range of anti-Austerity protests in Greece that attempts to understand how people came to temporarily or permanently abandon the control of biopolitical capitalism. In the Irish context, there are lessons to be learned from the emergence of a diverse, but organised, political agency within protests against public sector pay cuts, as well as the nature of the individual subjectivities collected within. Located outside the genealogical lineage of the Irish State, their own trade unions and widely mediated popular opinion, what moved these workers towards experiencing and expressing that resistance is important to understand. Did it emerge from an economic rationality as further pay cuts threatened lifestyles, or did the illegitimacy of dominant thinking develop from ideological, affective or even professional concerns, amplified by particular agents? Knowing this process will allow us to see how, when and why the reproduction of hegemonic ideas fails and so provide activists with tools for instigating such failure. It seems important to understand empirically how these individuals manifested a ‘plausible infrastructure’ of resistance, both materially and discursively. Tracing the generation of these subject positions will provide political ground
from which further meaningful and urgent resistance can be stimulated and organised.

The Return to Hegemony and Social Reproduction

To return to questions of hegemony and social reproduction in this way is about recognising the embedding of all subjects in a rich array of cultural and social institutions that fundamentally shape that subjectivity and give form to political agency. It is about acknowledging the genealogical question of ‘to whom and what we owe our existence’ (Mitropoulos 2012: 93) rather than merely willing a return to a mythical autonomous, unified, self-possessed subject who exists prior to capitalism (or ideology generally) (Weeks 2007: 234). It is about identifying the dominant arrangements of power/knowledge in order to re-arrange them so we can generate new subject positions that articulate resistant politics.

And despite the exploration of acts of resistance here, a focus on the reproduction of hegemony also addresses how, despite assumptions about the emergence of progressive politics from multitude, a population can remain more or less complicit with economic and political regimes that damage society. This returns us to life in the social factory of Austerity Ireland and to the sense of failure Helena Sheehan finds in the passivity of the general population. To understand this political context, it is important to identify the mechanisms legitimating hegemonic ideas and perpetuating consent. An obvious site to explore is the astonishingly complicit mainstream broadcast and print media of Ireland in which state economic orthodoxy is rarely challenged and which provide an ideal site for the reproduction of Austerity ideologies. It may be possible to relate the colonial legacy of social and economic dependence on higher-order cultural institutions such as the Catholic Church to the widespread compliance with now secular equivalents such as the Troika. The deep enmeshing of Catholic morality in everyday Irish life and social systems may be that which enables claims that ‘we all partied’ to effectively chasten and discipline a population. It may also be possible to identify the less intense material immiseration felt by middle-class Irish citizens relative to their Greek counterparts to account for disparities in the intensity and extensity of struggle against Austerity’s economic logic. Which of these socio-historical, socio-economic and cultural conditions, or combinations of any or all, have produced the hegemonic legitimacy of Austerity Ireland is not entirely clear and much more extensive investigation than I can offer in this theoretical critique would be required to grasp the inter-related mechanics that have produced the relatively compliant subjects of contemporary Ireland.

What is clear though is that to attempt to understand the politics of Irish Austerity without recourse to the concept of disciplining hegemony is to fail to understand them in their specificity, or to provide useful grounds for intervention. The concept of multitude fails to provide access to mechanisms for motivating social
change outside of the elusive properties of emergence within the general intellect (Camfield 2007; Thorburn 2012). For those like Sheehan who are urgently seeking to mobilise a vulnerable population to bring about material political change, this is too much of a tenuous proposition on which to hang such pressing hopes. Identifying mechanisms of social reproduction as proposed above draws attention to sites where that reproduction is incomplete or partial and which therefore can be leveraged in antagonistic struggle. But this can only happen when we discard the concept of post-hegemony and immanent control and instead understand the affective and logical genealogies of contemporary political subjects. Further empirical interrogation of the incomplete reproduction of dominant ideology, as it is manifesting in the alliance of Irish public sector workers for instance, can offer insight into how and when cracks in legitimating discourses appear and how those fissures can be rearticulated and organised in the production of counter-hegemonic narratives and, ultimately, of effective resistance to Austerity. We need to ask not only how subjects are produced but, after that, how they may be alternatively articulated. Such work is vital for those of us seeking to manifest change in the economic politics of Austerity.

Finally, I want to assert that the renewed focus on mechanisms of social reproduction advocated here should not be dismissed as ‘merely cultural’ analysis. Drawing a cue from Butler (1997), I want to reject the implication that understanding processes of subjectivation is somehow not properly Marxist or nothing to do with economic equity and the redistribution of material resources. The production of subjectivity is elemental in maintaining the structures of capitalism and there are profound material consequences and causes of the various subject positions we (are called upon to) occupy as citizens, consumers, activists, workers, individuals, family members, etc. As Johnson (2007: 99) says: ‘Hegemony is not about cultural politics only. There can be no rule by cultural means alone. Yet culture enters into every move of the powerful or those who seek emancipation.’ The failure to recognise that the social factory, and the contributions to capital this term encompasses, has a very long history has obscured the entwined relationship of material conditions and symbolic frameworks. Attendance to the practices of hegemonic power and the regimes of legitimacy within a culture forms part of a materialist analysis and is just as urgent in the biopolitical social factory as ever. It is certainly necessary in Austerity Ireland.

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Compulsory Creativity:
A Critique of Cognitive Capitalism

By Steen Nepper Larsen

Abstract
Contemporary capitalism can be labelled cognitive capitalism. In this dynamic, demanding and extremely transformative mode of production, knowledge becomes a strategic force of production and an important commodity, while concepts and ideas become items. This article sheds light on some of the implications of the emergence of a cognitive capitalism. In response to modern oxymorons, such as compulsory creativity and mandatory originality, this article offers various attempts to interpret and criticise how human inventiveness and a whole range of externalities get attuned to economic and market strategies, depriving them their natural, social and individual qualities. The aim of this article is to renew and sharpen a critique of the new type of capitalism and to foster some normative bricks that might be able to inspire alternative ways of thinking and living.

Keywords: Cognitive capitalism, creativity, critique, commodification, immateriality.
Introduction to Cognitive Capitalism

...the capturing of positive externalities and their validation in the creation of private profit.


In modern capitalism, it is a *conditio sine qua non* that the dedicated human resource manager (HRM) encourages employees to do their best and release their human potentials for the benefit of the company. The human employee is comprehended as an active good, always capable of achieving more. In other words, the worker is an itinerant catalogue of dormant potentials and competences, an asset possessing extra resources, and the whole human being goes to work in flesh and blood.

The so called positive externalities, which are initially placed outside the productive sphere, such as desire, passion, compassion, language creativity and communication, and the common goods, such as sun, wind, rain and even pollination, are all of major economic interest and become integrated into private production. As levers for accumulation and profit, the non-economical phenomena get economised. Both human nature and the patterns of social interaction invoke immense interest, and attempts to attune both of them to the company’s mission get implemented. In fact, according to Moulier Boutang (2007/2011: 20, 104, 146-147), the current challenge of cognitive capitalism is to capture and fertilise these externalities (also defined as the ‘travail gratuit’ or ‘free work’), which lie in wait outside production and beyond the economic sphere.¹

The workers become equipped with specially designed CV narratives. They all wish to possess suitably unique qualities, so that they will prove irreplaceable when the next merger or rationalisation process takes place. The work force has become personalised, and the work individualised. Society no longer consists of nameless, unskilled and easily interchangeable ‘hands’, but of a growing proportion of highly refined and valuable knowledge workers.

Whereas the company is absorbed in branding on large-scale markets for enforced attention economy, the workers have to invest huge amounts of energy in effective and strategic personal branding. The message is the same everywhere: perform and compete, or go away and get lost!

At all levels, there is an increasing demand for the renewal of intellectual skills. Workplace-related courses are being offered and consumed at a rate never seen previously. From the factory floor to middle managers and top management – everybody has to accept the demand for inventiveness and have the courage to change old habits. And it is never acceptable to claim that one knows enough. Authorities that look backwards or worship tradition seem to be traces from an ancient and obsolete past.
Connectivity, change, renewal and innovation have become four important concepts and ideologies for private enterprise and state administration and, if the employee is not engaged in a continual development process, he or she will soon be displaced.

The HRM agent is a kind of a midwife, at the same time an intervener and a gentle redeemer. The employee has to be creative and original within an ever-present triangular framework, whose demands are: self-realization, self-development and self-governance.

Working today involves navigating contract steering, result expectations and documentation claims. Besides this, there is an on-going evaluation process directed towards everything and everyone. The watchword is lifelong learning from cradle to grave. Everyone seems to have an obligation to be creative. All around the imperative sounds: Be creative! Like an inevitable fixated truism, it is claimed that not only is it possible to be creative, but that everybody ought to be creative. Imperceptibly and wordlessly, this compulsion gets transformed into an inclination.

The workaholic Dane stands on the threshold of cognitive capitalism in which good ideas and productive thoughts can be transformed into gold at the stock exchange. There is currently extensive global competition to attract the best brains. Knowledge becomes a strategic force of production and an important commodity. Concepts become items with different price tags attached, and originality is desired and demanded at all levels and in all sizes. In the current international division of labour, it has become our ‘obligation’ in the affluent part of the Western hemisphere to produce and sell concepts, programmes and steering systems in order to survive and ‘cope’ effectively with the big thing called globalization.

Increasingly fewer people work in material production (making clothes and shoes, breeding pigs and cows, collecting mushrooms and cabbages) whilst increasingly more people deliver immaterial goods (experience and attention economy products, designs, knowledge devices). As seen from its own eyes, tomorrow’s capitalism is clean, clever and smart. The polluting production and ‘dirty’ jobs are exported to other regions where the labour force is cheaper.

The aim of this article is to shed light on some of the implications of the emergence of a cognitive capitalism. In the midst of modern oxymorons like compulsory creativity and mandatory originality, this article presents various attempts to interpret and criticise how human inventiveness and a vast range of externalities get attuned to economic and market strategies, depriving them of their natural, social and individual qualities. The focal point of the text is to analyse the relation between creativity and capitalism in order to articulate a critique of cognitive capitalism and to foster some normative bricks that might be able to inspire alternative ways of thinking and living. This article also discusses the etymology of central concepts like creativity and innovation and analyses recent Danish political discourse on creativity claims.
The Performative National Competitive State

The state has become a nationally competitive state, and, if we briefly analyse the texts that advocate the policy of the *zeitgeist*, we learn that the 400 members of The Danish Innovation Council (who, incidentally, were hand-picked by the government), proudly proclaim in the report *Innovative Danmark* (Innovative Denmark) that approximately 90 per cent of Danes use their own ideas and take initiative at work without being led top-down. ‘It is getting close to a total mobilization of the creativity of the workforce’ (2005: 9 my translation). The report employs a simple and commercial definition: ‘Profoundly, The Innovation Council defines innovation as something new, which has a value at the market place’ (2005: 40 my translation). The logic is simple and compelling: 1) Creativity is a spark plug for 2) innovation, making it possible to renew and increase output on 3) the market, thereby increasing the company’s success at the micro-level and enabling Denmark to become a ‘winner nation’ at the macro-level. One, two, three – jump: the same formula for the individual and for the nation, both welded into the same compulsive contemporary teleology.

The International Thomson Business Press produces a collection of books called *Smart Strategies Series*. In this series, one finds Neil Coade’s congenial definition of creativity in *Be Creative. The Toolkit for Business Success*: ‘My definition of creativity is the bringing into existence of a product or service which is the outcome of imaginative thinking’(1997: 1).

Once again, creativity gets situated in the invisible mental depths of the magnificent and attractive *black-box* of the human’s capacity to think. On the following page, a simple model with two important and typical inferential arrows can be studied: ‘Creativity (idea generation) → Innovation (new product/process development) → Market (product launch)’ (1997: 2). Coade condenses the very same logic that the politicians and the wishful Danish councils currently tend to canonise.2

In the report *Danmarks kreative potentiale: kultur- og erhvervspolitisk redegørelse* (A review of Denmark’s creative potentiality), produced by the Erhverv-og Kulturministeriet (the Ministry of Business Affairs and the Ministry of Culture) in 2000, it was already stated that enhanced global competition in experience and attention economic products demanded an intensified collaboration between the business and the culture sectors.3 Culture and art are understood as an inevitable ‘source of creativity and innovation in economic life’ (2000: 18 my translation). The need to establish creative and inventive alliances between culture and business springs from the fact that the talent to tell good stories, the will to develop new design products, and the skills to honour man’s immaterial needs have become important competitive parameters for the domestic business. ‘The global waves of changes’ and the new markets require injections of creativity: ‘For many, creativity is the key to invent new ways to be able to communicate to the

The Danish nation state and the government – in spite of the political strategy and ideology to let the market sphere decide without political interference – seem paradoxically to have once more found an ambition (See Larsen 2002a). The tendency is no longer a clear de-governmentalisation, but rather a national competitive re-governmentalisation, thinking and acting according to a large concern model. The state is deeply engaged in a giant human resource management experiment. The neo-liberal revival wishes to mobilise the dormant potentials of all inhabitants, and the technocratic fantasy strives to render the nation’s resources transparent. At the same time, the focus shifts from the citizen to the consumer, while quasi-market relations show their faces. Society risks getting distorted and falling into decay. The preference of the consumer is viewed as the Archimedean point, and the market is seen as the meta-truth of societal interaction; however, it is impossible for the market to solve all problems. Demanding and fastidious consumers able to buy cannot function as the privileged central perspective of society.

Contemporary capitalism is an invisible and complex society without a centre; a society lacking self-confidence in long-term substantial and rational planning. The phantasmagoric market ideology attempts to compensate for this unspoken truth. The market functions as a paradoxical tranquiliser.

Beside many other aspects, the market is colour blind to the fact that there is no identity between knowledge and money, neither between innovation for sale and innovation as such, nor between creativity and effectuate production destined to strive and long for a profit telos.

**Oxymorons**

How is it possible to form critical thought in the midst of this consensus-loaded and confused landscape? The will to philosophise has its origin in human wondering, and philosophy is love of wisdom and the will to question the apparent obviousness. Facing the highly effective, conflict-laden modern work life and its many short-lived buzzwords, it is impossible not to wonder. It is a challenge to launch a critical diagnosis of contemporary values and idioms. In the words of the philosopher Hannah Arendt: ‘A life without thinking is quite possible; it then fails to develop its own essence – it is not merely meaningless; it is not fully alive. Unthinking men are like sleepwalkers’ (1971: 191). The meaningful and vigilant life is intimately interwoven with the possibility to think, and it is the determination of philosophy that it ‘can transform occurrences outside yourself into your own thought’ (1971: 166). Critical and awaking thinking has its point of departure in a
curious questioning and interrogating of ‘the manifestations of thinking in everyday speech’ (1971: 176).

First of all, it appears to be the case that many words are on the move, and their meanings are going through radical transformations. For the philosopher, it is important to become acquainted with the parents of the new. Therefore, he or she is always preoccupied with studies in the field of the diverse history of words and ideas.

The word ‘creative’ baptises the ability to make something new and unexpected. It has a Latin origin: *creare, creatum* – create, creating. Innovation and innovative mean renewal and renewing (respectively), and, once again, the sources are Latin: *innovare, innovatio*. Classic metaphysical theology claimed and believed that God created everything out of nothing – *creatio ex nihilo* – and without his unfathomable omnipotence nothing of what exists would ever have become as it is. Today’s innovative strategy planners declare that man, as the crown of creation, possesses precious inner creative potentials, which the company and the nation have a right to demand are released. God’s almighty creativity has been spread out and has become a democratic right and compulsory potential. At the beginning of the 21st century, every human being has to function and navigate on the unholy marketplace as a profane god (written with a small g) and realise the potential gifts in a productive and convenient way. The traditional concept of God takes God to be infinite, eternal, unalterable, independent and omniscient. Today, the downscaled and profaned self-deification is interpreted as historical, alterable, provisional, dependant and divided into partial knowledge-keepers; but, first as foremost, it is interpreted as insecure and contingent.

Only those who obey the obligation to be creative can hope to out-perform the ambitious, competitive and threatening Chinese and Indian workers. The modern man has to master his self-governing competences and take the responsibility to act; being destined and doomed to freedom and with the technologies of the self, he/she has to ‘foster’ a strategic optimisation of the self. People become private ‘users’ (consumers) of eugenics (via scanning, genetic mapping, or pre-natal embryonic research) and, in the long run, they create humans that are desired and affordable, forcing them to become their own semi-religious and self-centred creators in the workplace and in the societal sphere.

Denmark has to adjust itself to become the world’s most innovative society. The Danes have to be mobilised and optimised. One has to notice the martial and calculative metaphors of the present vocabulary. The premises seem to be that the global competitive fight is an open war in which only the strategically best will survive.

According to Karl Marx’s intriguing and paradoxical view, work in the productive sphere is both a necessary evil and a primary human need. In today’s laborious society, the former has almost vanished as a weak memorial trace, at least in post-industrial capitalism. Instead, the biggest evil now appears to be the societal
fate of not being usable or exploitable. Unemployment is directly related to a loss of recognition, to social and economic catastrophe and, not least, to individual fear and anxiety.

Secondly, it is astonishing that contradictory terms come about in the first place. According to rhetorics, contradictory phrases such as ‘hate-love’ and ‘sour-sweet cream’ are labelled oxymorons. Creativity is charged with a mixture of inclination and compulsion. The unconditional claim: Be creative! is such an oxymoron. The desire and the propensity to be creative gets intimately adjusted to the company’s strategic interests in creativity. It thereby becomes difficult to know precisely where the individual use value of creativity stops and the exchange value of the original and creative talents begins. In principle, people today are nearly always at work; not simply because they can always be reached by email and mobile phones, but also because they try to invent creative solutions to workplace problems and tasks even when they are officially off work. In ‘Answering the question: What is Enlightenment?’, Immanuel Kant famously wrote that a person is incapable of managing his own affairs and lacks autonomy if he does not know how to use his own intellect without being led by another (Kant 1784/1991). Today’s normative rule of conduct must be: A person is incapable of managing his own affairs and lacks autonomy if he does not know how to use his creative potentials and innovative skills without being led by another.

Thirdly, it is necessary to reflect upon the question of how contradictions and conflicts can be grasped and studied in a consensus-ridden society. It could be argued that, when knowledge, thinking and creativity are treated like commodities and handled as limited resources, there is something wrong in the state of Denmark, for knowledge is in principle never a private property nor a limited resource. Just like language, love and happiness, knowledge grows whilst being spent and spread. Perhaps it is even against the nature of knowledge to treat it as a commodity with a price.

The Creativity Concept

The Dictionary of The History of Ideas states: ‘The proliferation of meanings of the word ‘create’ [...] have been extraordinary: ‘causing to grow’, ‘ability to produce’, ‘ability to call into existence’, to construct, to give rise to, to constitute, to represent, to invest, to occasion, to form out of nothing’ (1973: 577). But it is doubtful if the anchor place of this active verb (to create) and the noun (creativity) can be conceived as an inner, mental property and character of the individual. Both George Herbert Mead (1934: ‘Section 28. The Social Creativity of the Emergent Self’) and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1996: 1, 8, 23) support this critique and emphasise that creativity has less to do with personal potentials and more to do with social dynamics, contextual options and claims, and that creativity stems from practical situations and unforeseen events. However, in spite of this,
people continue to talk about themselves and their fellow men as if they all possess potential resources, waiting day and night on stand-by. To comprehend the value of innovation simply as its market value is also a dangerous reduction. Imagine if innovation – and creativity – were free to deal with something beyond the market place – like wisdom, beauty, experience, curiosity and happiness – and help harsh work routines to disappear and qualitative use values to materialise.

In the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* § 49, Immanuel Kant writes: ‘The imagination (as a productive cognitive faculty) is, namely, very powerful in creating, as it were another nature, out of the material which the real one gives it’ (1790/2000: 192). In the paragraphs that follow, Kant defines the concepts ‘talent’ and ‘genius’ and proclaims that man is not predestined to imitate and copy. Man is namely both autonomous and ‘schöpferisch’ (the old German word for being creative).

Many years earlier, Kant wrote: ‘Creation (Die Schöpfung in German, Larsen) is not the work of a moment. After creation made a beginning by producing an infinity of substances and materials, it is efficacious with constantly increasing degrees of fecundity throughout the total succession of eternity. Millions and numberless millions of centuries will pass, during which new worlds and new world systems will constantly develop and reach completion, one after the other, in the expanses far from the central point of nature […]. Creation (Die Schöpfung, Larsen) is never complete. True, it once began, but it will never cease. It is always busy bringing forth new natural phenomena, new things, and new worlds’ (Kant: ‘Part Two. Section Seven: Concerning Creation in the Total Extent of its Infinity Both in Space and Time’ in *Universal Natural History and Theory of Heaven* (1755/2000: no pagination). It is worth noticing that Kant anticipates man’s ‘destiny’ in contemporary capitalism while portraying him as the second creator doing a never-ending job (‘always busy bringing forth new natural phenomena, new things, and new worlds’) on Planet Earth. In the pre-modern world, God was the only creative force and, though man was created in his image, he was created (*natura naturata*) and not creating like God (*natura naturans*). In the modern world of cognitive capitalism, man has to be creative to avoid being dismissed from the workplace.

Taking a quick glance in three different international dictionaries that give voice to general historical consensual definitions of creativity, one can envisage that the concept is connected to the co-term ‘originality’ and is loaded with the power to break routines: ‘When original thinking is desired, assumptions should be questioned and routines broken’, and ‘Originality is, after all, the most widely accepted dimension of creativity. Creative things are always original’ (*International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioural Sciences*, 2001: 2893 and 2894). ‘Creativity (Latin), ‘creative power’, ability to original creative analysis and structuring of the material and social environment (Hillmann: *Wörterbuch der Soziologie*, 1994: 451-452). ‘Creativity, the ability to make or otherwise bring
into existence something new, whether a new solution to a problem a new method or device, or a new artistic object or form’ (The New Encyclopedia Britannica, 1992: 721)

But upon examining its etymological roots, denotations and connotations of the concept of creativity also lead to two entries stating that creativity always has to solve concrete problems in pragmatic settings. Creativity is first and foremost divergent thinking and contextual awareness: ‘Creativity (psychology) that aspect of intelligence characterized by originality in thinking and problem solving. Creative ability involves the use of divergent thinking, with thoughts diverging towards solutions in a number of directions’ (Collins Dictionary Sociology, 2000: 119). ‘Cognitive theories of creativity focus on the intellectual structures and processes that leads to insights, solutions, and ideas that are original and useful’ (International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioural Sciences, 2001: 2892). In line with these definitions, it can be said that contemporary cognitive capitalism does not celebrate creativity in itself (an sich), but its ability to produce ‘original and useful’ material goods and immaterial commodities (such as ideas, knowledge and brands).

Cognitive Capitalism and Creativity

Capitalism seems stronger than ever, and its ability to transform and commodify social relations does not encounter many obstacles. However, it appears as though its base – the private commando over surplus production – is crumbling, because it is utterly dependant on concepts such as knowledge, creative body-thoughts, invention, linguistic fantasy, culture, confidence, sanity, engagement, democracy and communicative action.

Although industrial capitalism transformed living labour to dead labour on a grand scale (via an externalisation of the experience and knowledge of the workers to be encapsulated in the machines and the technological steering-systems), immaterial and cognitive capitalism seems to be immediately dependant on living labour, and not least to the unpredictable and attractive creativity bound to human existence and intelligence, as its primary source of value.

The economic autistic indication of value tends to become the measure of everything, even though it is destructive and impossible. Only time will tell whether there are built-in absolute borders in and for cognitive capitalism and whether it will be its own Totengräber (gravedigger). For the time being, capitalism does not appear to be fragile. In the meantime, I will dare to draw twenty alternative views of societal development and contrast them to the scenarios stemming from the one-eyed utilitarian-neoliberal model.

Today’s capitalism takes advantage of ‘the exploitation of living immaterial labor’ (Hardt & Negri 2000: 29). The challenge is to establish how this exploitation and suppression can be opposed. Such a critique has to challenge and pro-
voke contemporary cognitive capitalism and its new regime of accumulation, whose motto – taken from Marx’s first volume of *Capital* (1867/1976: 412) – remains: ‘Accumulate, accumulate! That is Moses and the prophets!’

**Man’s Ideas and Productivity Generously Foster and Feed Capitalism**

Productive relations delimit and restrict the free development of productive forces. When knowledge is treated as a strategic resource, a commodity and a private property, when creativity becomes a compulsion and a competitive parameter of the nation state, and when innovation is stripped of any qualitative content and only estimated for its market value, it is not out of the question to examine whether or not Marx’s point is still valid and possesses imaginative power.

Man’s ability to produce knowledge and the capability to foster creative and innovative social processes are absolutely necessary for the development of productive forces. But these capacities are governed by private ownership, by the merciless market and by the strategic-political performance paradigm. And besides, everything happens in the holy name of self-realisation and becomes subdued to the dominating logic of strategic behaviour of the subject.

The majority of productive forces (though admittedly not all of them) might be developed more freely without these ownership relations and economic and political rationales. Inherent in knowledge, creativity and innovation, there seems to be something transgressing. It is immanent in the ‘nature’ of knowledge that it must be divided and shared and not just restricted to an exclusive and private object. Everybody ought to have access to knowledge and, the more it circulates, the more it grows. The same holds for happiness and love. None of the three disappear while they are given away. In principle, though not in real life, we already live in a post-scarcity society.

**Creativity is more than Fuel for Capitalism**

Both as a theoretical concept and as a concrete social and individual praxis, creativity has to be rescued and donated its own right without focusing primarily on its potential economic possibilities and implications. Its non-economic existence has to be defended. It cannot simply be accepted that all diverse non-economic phenomena always-already and servile have to become parts of an economic machine. Knowledge, creativity and innovation are like critical and normative voices in a hyper-rationalised and hyper-economised world. The perpetual ambition of this article is to allow a cool analytical way of thinking cope with and line up beside a warm critique of society in order to renew the concept of critique and to shed light on the differentiations inhabiting a diagnosis of the contemporary society’s values and norms.
No position of discourse or interpretation is ever neutral. The task is to intervene in the public sphere and to fertilise possibilities for an open, international debate on society’s development.

Critical research is a passionate and advocating affair with which critical judgements intertwine.

Rather refreshingly, Paolo Virno writes, ‘Der Mensch ist ein Lebewesen, das Imstande ist, seine Lebensform zu verändern, indem es von gefestigten Regeln und Gewöhnheiten abweicht’ (2007: 244) (‘Man is a living creature capable of changing his life-form when he deviates from the strict rules and conventions’), and he continues by providing a precise definition of creativity, which contrasts other broader and vaguer definitions. He states, ‘…die Formen des sprachlich artikulierten Denkens, die es erlauben, das eigene Verhalten in einer kritischen Situation zu verändern’ (2007: 246) (‘…articulated thinking in a lingual form, which makes it possible to change one’s behaviour in a critical situation’) (see also Hentig 1998/1999). Notice that Virno understands creativity as something situated and context-bound and, at the same time, as a qualitative and existential force to change the situation and oneself. This understanding establishes a distance to the airy and abstract figures of pure potentialities that neoliberal spokespeople and cognitive capitalists often idealise and refer to.

To Rescue the Concept Creativity

Imagine if it were the lions who branded delicious boxes of human flesh from distant countries, if the sharks displayed diving-trips down under, or the eagles offered guided tours to the Alps. Picture the scene in which you were unable to create possible worlds in language and were denied the opportunity to expand your taste experiences and regions. Imagine if you were destined to cud-chewing, day and night, for centuries, for ever.

In order to rescue the concept of creativity, one must recollect the knowledge and wisdom from a vast field of thought, including philosophical anthropology, evolutionary biology and cognitive semantics. The human species is plastic, curious and creative: ‘nature plus’, develop a ‘second nature’, which is not reducible to one type of nature.

To be a human being is to be changeable by nature, but it was never written into human genes nor inscribed in human linguistic patterns that there had to be a compulsory creativity within cognitive capitalism. The wise words of Kant have to be remembered: man is the animal equipped with reason, motive and argumentation, and capable of saying no.
Biopolitics and Bio-counter-power

A rescuing critique of the phenomenon of creativity interlocks the anthropological specificities of man with the unpredictable social dynamics we inhabit, maintain and come to change. Creativity is far more than an inner mental resource, an outer strategic trump, an element within national educational planning or a convenient lever to enhance the effective economic competition.

Capital establishes widespread connections to the talkative and listening person embedded in everyday life, active in the work sphere and an eminent language user, having to live in the overbearing interlaces of the experience economy, bio-politics and life-economics.

The ‘old’ capitalism laid violent hands on the common grounds and fields and expelled the original inhabitants in order to breed flocks of sheep to acquire wool for production (Karl Marx wrote about these so-called enclosures in Chapter 24 of the first volume of Capital (1867/1976)). The valorisation of capital spread through diverse materials such as grain, cotton, venison, coal, iron, gold, diamonds, ivory, fish, whales, water (transformed to steam and energy); not to forget productive child labour and the efforts of the working masses.

The ‘new’ capitalism does not differ radically from the old one when it comes to principles, nor the diverse movements through matter, bodies and souls, but it also benefits from the fact that schools and families socialise youngsters to function as productive and flexible cogs in the industrial and virtual machines (see Gorz 2003/2010 and Larsen 2011). The individual is tremendously effective in disciplining his or herself to wage-labour and being creative on his/her own initiative or on command. Therefore, capital finds always-already available and keen workers who are willing to help capital blossom, and capital knows how to address and meet man’s cognitive and productive skills and consumptive desires. It seems to be attractive to join the show with the biggest yield. But we should not forget that capitalism has other faces: child prostitution, trafficking, drug dependency, powerful monopolies and oligarchies, wars on oil and other precious and strategic resources, excessive fishing and harvesting, weapon production, and unhealthy food (to give a few examples).

Mental Capital and Neuro-capitalism

The animal with the large brain is convenient for capital. Capital is dependant on many ‘things’ that are initially difficult to capitalise without striking a blow (even though it happens all the time and often under cover). Just to mention a few: life, air, water, ideas, dreams, hopes, love, happiness, sunshine, respect, confidence, passion, ethics, will, fear, collaboration, interaction, language, communication, compassion, curiosity, empathy, knowledge, beauty, help, events and unpredictable and thinking bodies. Despite this, capital attempts to commodify these exter-
nalities or to transform them into something that can be recognised within an economically coded horizon. Capital seeks to reterritorialise what has been deterritorialised or risks slipping away from its field of action. The modern *enclosure* vocabulary deals with copyright, patents and various agreements on whether or not it is legal or illegal to try to headhunt important and knowledgeable ‘workers’ from various companies. Cognitive capitalism is profoundly dependant on human knowledge and creativity and it views mankind primarily as a potential resource. This human potentiality seems to summon paradise on earth, but it has its costs and dark sides.

When creativity gets attuned to the needs of production, the human ability to shape something new gets moved from the playground, the art schools and the educational settings. Besides this, it is not only the entrepreneur, the manager, the leader or the devoted, strange and lonely inventor who has to be creative in today’s society. The expectation is that we all have to come up with creative solutions and ideas at the speed of light in order to direct the invisible cognitive, creative and innovative processes to be realised with a visible market effect.

**Transformation of the Concept Creativity**

Creativity used to be conceived as an anthropological capacity, as a renewing force in society, as an integrated part of a successful human self-realisation project and as a potential for opposition and resistance. Critical thinkers even saw creativity as something to be rescued from capital(ism), market and state. Today it seems to have become ‘something’ we are destined to fertilise in a life-long perspective. Compulsory creativity gets directly interwoven with neo-liberal steering techniques like evaluation procedures, control and contract measurements (Larsen 2004). Creativity – talents for serendipity and unforeseen decision-making – become appreciated assets and commodities. The task is to design and produce material and immaterial goods to honour the insatiable demand for new products, experiences and entertainment. The creative outcome can be coined ‘customised thought-items’.

Previously, creativity was conceived as an external factor, occasionally being capable of servicing production and functioning as an economic lever. Now creativity has moved up front, where it plays the role of the first priming composition of the food chain in the accumulation process. In the rich and spoiled part of the Western hemisphere, nobody ever seems to question that one must live on creativity, or else die.

The powerful creativity discourse can be depicted in a scheme in which ‘quotations’ of the anonymous contemporary creativity lingo are inserted:

- Creativity is inexpressible, rare, irrational, groundless – beyond measuring, intention and planning (‘Creativity cannot be predicted, either it is there or not there’).
Creativity gets fertilised; it could be described as a fragile and brittle plant (‘The creative young talents have to be raised and cultivated’; ‘The creative talent was blossoming’).

Creativity is a gift; rare and precious (‘This creative employee is outstanding’).

Creativity is a resource; a field for vivid economic and political interest (‘Creative economics’; ‘The creative resources of the nation has to be mobilized’ – like the striking assertions and mantras mentioned at the beginning of this article).

Creativity is reserved for certain groups (parts, segments) of the population (‘The creative kid’; ‘The creative class’; ‘The creative leader’; ‘Artists and architects are creative’).

Creativity as a property of teams and interwoven with social relations (‘The creative Brazilian soccer team’; ‘Denmark as a creative nation’).

In general, creativity is valorised in a positive way and is actively related to praiseworthy events and acts that manage to surprise and please us. Creativity is situated in someone and expressed in something, and, in cognitive capitalism, people apparently do not mind committing themselves to the naturalist fallacy: creativity is able to do something; creativity therefore ought to do something.

Creativity is a trigger, ignition and dormant potential. Creativity is an utmost viable process phenomenon. It brings something new into existence; it changes the world and its inhabitants. Creativity is a richly connoted dynamic noun. It deals with and implies changes of forms and states, transformation and energy transfer.

How to Act as Homo Intellectus and to Form a Culture of Generosity?

This is a transformation phase celebrating profane determination. Homo intellectus is selected to bridge the gaps between creativity, innovation and the market in a number of intelligent ways. It has become the optimum meaning of capitalist cognition and its presupposed destination to take care of a direct transformation from idea to earning, from thought to invoice.11

Two counter-moves seem possible: 1) Exogenous counter-power, demonstrating that a sizable amount of creative skills and innovative solutions do not primarily have to facilitate the market. This praxis of resistance tries to liberate the human streams of energy and place societal needs higher than private economic ones. 2) Endogenous counter-power. Many waking hours are spent at the workplace or in educational institutions, following dreams and exposing creative skills. It is also worthwhile fighting in this sphere, ‘even though’ one might get a higher wage and better marks by remaining passive. The critique of cognitive capitalism cannot afford to pretend to be ‘holy’ and pure in advance; it is not enough to stand on the side-lines.
Reflective governance has become systemic reason and internalised ‘nature’. Bio-power and bio-politics get fused as empirical reality and existential tonality for those who fulfil their duty (and more) towards it. In order to not to get swallowed or lose one’s freedom to think and move, it seems important to learn to read the signs, to notice the differences and to acknowledge the resemblances between the dominating governance and management rationales. Some of them have to be laid bare, some to be ‘hacked’ (de- and refunctionalised), some even have to be fought against. Attempts at counter-thinking have to be strengthened. Contra-productive capitalism – using violence, power and smart strategies to economise with non-economical features – has to be publically undermined. Knowledge belongs – like language – to everyone and no one (see Larsen 1995). Today, a ‘Kultur der Generosität’ (culture of generosity) is missing, along with the power to lift itself far beyond the strategic exchanges of equivalences and the linguistically masked and dressed up exploitation of man’s creativity.12

The passion for non-utilitarian thinking must be guaranteed the best conditions and the right to have non-regulated experiences must be protected. It becomes a lifelong task to fight abuse of externalities: thinking, knowledge, being together, carnal pleasures...and creativity. Like Marx, it is necessary to continue to criticise the societal machine when it digests the knowledge worker without anyone protesting. Back in 1850-1860, what used to be the activity of living labour suddenly seemed to become a result of the activity of the machine. Today, most of us never have to be attached to noisy and unprotected machines. The production and extraction of surplus value happens much more smoothly and gently when we work, network and learn. Previously, the factory and dangerous Spinning Jenny expressed a clear language of exploitation; today, forms of suppression and exploitation are much more subtle and delicate. They even become something as strange and incomprehensible as internalised ‘nature’.

**A Civilizing Influence of Capital?**

The knowledge-intensive (e.g. intellectual) workforce possesses a use-value as well as an exchange-value dimension. The use-value for the carrier and owner of the potential intellectual workforce consists of an opportunity to position oneself as a powerful player on the labour market with a high exchange value – in an actual and virtual joyful capability to be able to form the world’s matters and signs.13 The use-value for the buyer of the highly skilled, educated and trained workforce is ‘densified’ in its ability to contribute to value production, by way of the valorisation of capital.

To protect the use value of one’s own knowledge and skills and to try to give it another telos than the one governing production and market affairs might be one sort of resistance opportunity.
But quite many of these types of workers appear already to be so privileged that they feel it gets close to an autonomous and meaningful hobby to master and pursue their daily work. When going to work donates life meaning and fosters pride in what is accomplished and created, implying that one receives recognition, it might be the case that modern work has been so recognisably humanised throughout the last part of the 20th century that what Marx once labelled ‘the civilizing influence of capital’ has been an active player behind the backs of the wage labours.

However, it should never be forgotten that cognitive capitalism feeds on the productive passions and creative impulses of the workers, like Yann Moulier-Boutang documents and many current critical voices testify.\textsuperscript{14}

Creativity does not have to be inscribed in influential business models (like Coade’s cyclical model described above). Instead of igniting technological innovation and being directed towards the market, creativity can try to break away from this beaten track and be engaged in strengthening social ties and inventing new ways of doing things. Instead of doing the job to maximise the production of exchange value creativity, inventiveness and serendipity can donate new use-values, civilise the feeling of togetherness, and find new ways to qualify the productive forces to serve mankind. The challenge is to treat and honour creativity as a friend of excellence and a power to liberate social processes, instead of seeing it simply as a money-making device.

A critique of cognitive capitalism calls on both knowledge and perceptions to be able to differentiate, judge and navigate a concrete situation. To critique is not simply to equate expressions of distaste or to point derisively at something one dislikes. Creative critique is \textit{Möglichkeitssinn} (a German word for the skilled sense to find and shape meaningful opportunities) and a conceptual form-determination of what has to be criticised. Critique gets activated by the phenomenon that needs critique.

\textbf{Marx’s Eternal (?) Actuality}

Marx’s words in \textit{Grundrisse} (1857-1858/1973) are still valid. It is not wealth, understood as accumulated exchange value, command over other people’s work and private ownership to ever more circulating capital that gives society its real measure and quality: real wealth is the elaborated individual productive force and the free and self-determined time in which one can live like a human being.

But Marx has to be supplemented: contemporary cognitive capitalism does not possess a sole and exclusive right to annex creativity, which is exposed individually in indeterminate singular form, or in the social field in various plural forms. Creativity is more than and different from a simple lever for further accumulation and strategic and national politically induced competitive, market and production-related behaviour. Creativity is not an object and not a fixed tool. Neither is crea-
tivity to be grasped as a rational, intentional, voluntary and inner-mental potentiality. Creativity is subjected to certain borders, for man did not create the Big Bang, the cosmos, nature, evolution, life or death – or even for that matter him- or herself – with consciousness or creativity.

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Notes

1 See Larsen (2008) for a categorical attempt to conceptualise and criticise cognitive capitalism. A thorough presentation of Moulier Boutang’s critical thinking is also to be found in this book and in Kristensen and Larsen (2008).

2 As well as the Innovation Council, a so-called Globalization Council has been formed.

3 At this time, the Danish Government was not like it is today, nor was it liberal-conservative (as it was in 2005); in 2000, the government was social democratic and social liberal. It should therefore be noted that consensus manifests itself across the political spectrum when it comes to how to comprehend and treat creativity as primarily an ignition with tremendous economic implications. See Larsen (2006 & 2012).

4 The neologism cognitive capitalism can also be interpreted as an oxymoron, through the direct connection between something living, organic, thinking and human and a societal exploitation and accumulation form. The oxymoron stems from the fact that capitalism on its own is not able to be creative; only human beings, alone or as parts of social networks, have the capacity to be creative.

5 See Henriksen’s interview with the author about the historical roots and the actuality of the creativity concept (2011).


7 Moulier Boutang (2007/2011: 163): ‘Without the power of the living (le vivant, human activity) which is radically distinct from machinery and from coagulated dead labour, none of this can take place’. He continues to describe how cognitive capitalism benefits from invention power of the cooperation between large numbers of brains. Today exploitation is, ‘basically, not that of the consumption of labour power, but its willingness to make itself available’, and ‘its capacity to provide answers to non-programmed questions’.

8 Sloterdijk (2007: 171) sheds light on how modern thought strives for and gets attracted to ‘unendliche Möglichkeiten des Auch-anders-sein-Können’ (‘infinite possibilities of also-being-different’).

9 In Empire, Hardt & Negri (2000: 407) assert that the creative power of the multitude (its multiple posse) is currently being suppressed. Its virtual force to free creation beyond the demanding exchange forms of money and capital is being blocked off by Empire. According to the authors, collective resistance does not lie dormant; it is brewing irresistibly. ‘By the virtual we understand the set of powers to act (being, loving, transforming, and creating) that reside in the multitude’ (Hardt & Negri 2000: 357). I do not think it is necessary to accept this grand profane narrative and utmost peculiar semi-sacred emancipation story of the multitude
(see Larsen: (2002b)) to accept the argument that creative talents could take other prosperous forms if they were not subdued by capital/the state/Empire.

10 It has to be emphasised that a lot of people never get the opportunity to be creative, neither in Denmark nor abroad; they still have to do what they are told. Furthermore, quite a few are expelled from the work sphere, suggesting that their potential creativity is unlikely to be seen. This happened to be the slogan of the Ministry of Research (full name: Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation) in Denmark until 2011.


12 Lazzarato (2004: 190): ‘Contemporary capitalism does not arrive with factories, these follow, if they follow at all. It arrives with words, signs and images’.

13 Lotringer (2004: 6): ‘The more creative and adaptable the workers are – the more self-valorising – the more surplus of knowledge they can bring to the community at large […]. Everything has become “performative” […].’ See also Larsen (2008), and Kristensen and Larsen (2008).

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Dictionaries

You are Not a Loan: A Debtors Movement

By Andrew Ross

Abstract
Written from the participant perspective of the author, the article documents the debt resistance movement that is one of the enduring offshoots of Occupy Wall Street. Addressing the household debt crisis in the wake of the financial crash, it focuses in particular on student debt, approaching an aggregate 1.2 trillion in the U.S., with defaulters numbering in the tens of millions. The emergence of The Occupy Student Debt Campaign is analyzed, along with the initiatives of its successor, Strike Debt, including the Rolling Jubilee and the Debt Resistors Operations Manual. The article concludes by arguing that debt will be the frontline of anticapitalist struggles in the 21st century, just as the struggle over wages dominated the twentieth century.

Keywords: Populism, Occupy Wall Street, financial crisis, movement activism, student debt, financialization.
Introduction

Debt activism has been one of the most striking manifestations of anti-capitalist sentiment in the years since the 2008 financial crash. Because the crushing levels of household and public debt affect all but the wealthiest slice of society, anti-debt organizing has assumed a populist tone all across the industrialized world. In this essay, I will analyze some of these populist tendencies, drawing on my own experience in the debtors’ movement that sprang up along with Occupy Wall Street (OWS) in the fall of 2011.

The prairie-fire momentum of OWS in its heyday was an open invitation to commentators looking to proclaim another people’s awakening in the vein of the U.S. populist movement of the late nineteenth century. In the wake of the 2008 crash, popular protest fomented elsewhere – in the Arab Spring and the anti-precarity agitation all across Europe – but the American populace appeared to be in a deep slumber, as if a spell had been cast by the necromantic bankers who had seized control over Washington policymakers. Occupy’s exuberant outbreak, taking its cue from the “Wisconsin uprising” in the spring of 2011, and the Spanish summer of the indignados, was the long-awaited response to the financial crash three years earlier. Its leading slogan – “We Are the 99%” – was a direct expression of populist sentiment, summoning up the broadest of coalitions in its assault against the centers of financial power.

Indeed, the first time I heard the chant of “We Are the 99%,” I had a flashback to a story I had heard about William Jennings Bryan, the god of midwestern populism. Bryan, going into the hard-fought presidential election of 1895 with a full head of steam, was invited to talk to students at Yale. His audience was hostile, and at one point, he scornfully declared that “ninety-nine out of every hundred” of them were “children of the idle rich.” At which point, the crowd started chanting “Ninety-nine! Ninety-nine! Ninety-nine!” and he was forced to leave the stage. Bryan was surely wrong to describe their parents as the “idle rich.” Many of them had been energetically engaged in class warfare of their own for some time. Much of their wealth flowed from active manipulation of the credit extended to the debt-burdened farmers on whose behalf Bryan inveighed so vociferously against the gold standard he proclaimed was about to “crucify mankind on a cross of gold.” Family farmers in their frontier sodhouses, tenant sharecroppers in the South, and artisans looking to reclaim their self-mastery were all drowning in the sea of debt created by the citadels of finance in the East.

Bryan lost the election, but the populist upheaval he led was clearly defined by the spirit of debt resistance. The Gilded Age saw levels of income inequality unparalleled until the last decade or so. Is it any surprise, then, that Occupy, and its Strike Debt offshoot in particular, was propelled, once again, by the great injustice of populations delivered into servitude by the lords of credit? Will the renewed
attention to the burden of indebtedness blossom into a coalition of class fractions, with anything like the wide appeal that nineteenth century Populism generated?

The Progressive movement, which coopted the energy of the Populists, was borne along by elites, like Theodore Roosevelt, who saw that reforms were needed if the power of financial capitalism was to survive intact. As Don Fabrizio, the Sicilian aristocrat in Lampedusa’s *The Leopard*, laconically put it: “If we want things to stay as they are, things will have to change.” Today’s counterpart is the celebrity investor, Warren Buffett, who openly acknowledges that the 1% has been successfully waging class warfare for some time, and that plutocrats like him should be paying more of their share of wealth in taxes. Indeed, Buffet, in his 2004 annual report to Berkshire Hathaway’s shareholders, warned that the U.S. was becoming more of a “sharecropper society” than an “ownership society” (Noon 2005). Buffet’s position, which could be described as “speaking truth from power,” is a familiar structural response to economic populism, and his proposed solution – tax increases for the super-rich – takes the form of a minimal concession: *We will pay more taxes but only as long as you don’t tamper with the system by which we lay our hands on the wealth in the first place.*

Few economists would dispute Buffet’s admission that this system of wealth accumulation had served his class very handily. Analysts who have investigated Occupy’s claims about the 1% have concluded that, of all the factors responsible for the upward redistribution of wealth, financial manipulation of debt ranks very high (Saez 2012). But the imposition of debt is not just a mode of wealth accumulation, it is also a form of discipline and social control, with acute political consequences. This was most notable in the case of the IMF “debt trap” visited upon so many postcolonial countries as part of Cold War client diplomacy. In the global North, debt has been institutionalized for so long as a “good” consumer asset that we forget how homeownership was promoted as an explicitly anti-socialist policy in the U.S. in the 1920s. Subsequently, the long-term mortgage loan became the basis of anti-communist citizenship; William Levitt, the master merchant builder, pronounced that “no man can be a homeowner and a Communist.” In the postwar decades, a first class citizen was someone who had entered into a long-term relationship of debt with a bank (a circumscribed ethnic population, given that most people of color were denied access to mortgage loans). Over time, the threat of a ruined credit score effectively limited the political agility of our “nation of homeowners.”

Each slump in the housing market serves up a dose of discipline to the little people who believe they can successfully break into the speculation game so long monopolized by financial elites. But the most recent crash in 2008 revealed a much deeper crisis of household debt – a calamitous nexus of interconnected liabilities, stemming from the inability to make payments on several fronts, from healthcare bills, student loans, and consumer credit. 76% of American households are now in serious debt, and one in seven are being pursued by debt collectors.
Nor are those without personal loan agreements off the hook. Municipal debt has been structured in such a way that its costs are now routinely passed on to the most vulnerable populations in form of public employee wage cuts, slashed services, and regressive taxation (Larson 2012). In towns across the country, predatory Wall Street lending practices are producing, albeit on a small scale, the kind of austerity policies visited on electorates in Southern Europe, and global South populations before them under the regime of “structural adjustment.”

Because of its possessive reliance on the almighty dollar, American government debt bears little resemblance to the sovereign debts of the Eurozone countries that are being held in the grip of austerity. Nor does household debt bear any resemblance to public debt. Nonetheless, the claim that ordinary people have somehow been living beyond their means has been cynically marshaled in the imbroglio over raising the “debt ceiling” on Capitol Hill in order to introduce deficit-reduction measures that pass on the mounting costs of wars, regressive tax cuts, corporate welfare, bank bailouts, and ill-guided monetary speculation.

In the years since the financial crash, the disparity between the generosity shown to Wall Street (more than three trillion dollars of public money spent already, with an additional $12.2 trillion committed by the U.S. government) and the conspicuous lack of relief for household debtors has made it quite clear whose debts are expected to be honored and whose are not. Occupy’s debt resistance activists were able to draw on a profoundly felt sense of injustice when we began our work in the fall of 2011. In the absence of any relief, we judged that the conditions would likely ripen for a full-blown debtors movement.

Debt-Financed Education

If such a movement emerges in the years to come, the student debt crisis and the activist response to it will prove to have been a key trigger. Even in the immediate pre-recessionary years, when debt was still considered a worthy asset and employment a plausible prospect, it was easy to see that the mounting student debt burden was a formidable obstacle to any smooth passage for students into the upper strata of middle-class economic life. When the aggregate burden surpassed consumer debt in 2011, and then reached the 1 trillion dollar threshold a year later, alarmist talk about the student debt bubble became a regular feature in the business media.

From the outset, Occupy locations around the country filled with harrowing public testimony about the agonies and tribulations of student debtors. Many found solace in pungent slogans like “Banks Got Bailed Out, We Got Sold Out!” Tumblr and other websites swelled with the stories of others who felt too constrained by guilt to stand up in the face-to-face agora of Occupy. This public ritual was a way of exorcizing the shame that privately afflicts debtors, and defaulters especially. The act of casting aside the shame and humiliation that accompanies
indebtedness (especially acute for borrowers aspiring to enter the middle class) was an important kind of “coming out” for debtors, and it has been a powerful affective component of the political moment. The alternative—suffering the consequences of debt and default in private—is a thinly documented trail of tears, leading to depression, divorce, and suicide for ever increasing numbers. By 2012, the average student debt was more than $27k, having doubled since 2007. Defaults had also doubled in that same period of time. Of those who graduated in 2005, 41% are either delinquent or in default.

As a college professor, I had known for several years that my paycheck depends on my students going deeply into debt, often for decades to come. But like my colleagues, I chose not to dwell on it, a decision that seemed justifiable given that faculty salaries have been stagnant as a whole for some time now. We are hardly to blame for skyrocketing college costs. Yet, knowing that my students were trading a large chunk of their future wages for the right to walk into my classroom, did I have additional moral duties toward my students? Did I share any of the responsibility, or blame, for their decision to pile on loan after loan? Was I obliged to speak out against the profiteers who were plying them with high-interest credit?

Despite my own ambivalence—faculty have little to do with the fiscal affairs of their institutions—I felt compelled to respond. In November 2011, I helped to launch the Occupy Student Debt Campaign (OSDC), which invited debtors to pledge to refuse payments after one million others had signed up. Millions were already defaulting in private, and so our pledge offered a more self-empowering way of taking action and focusing public attention on the issue. Attracting pledgers was not easy—the morality of paying back debts still runs very deep in our society. Ironically, one million debtors did default, privately and not collectively, over the course of the year. While our pledge was premature, I learned a lot about the psychology of debtors in the course of our campaign.

On one of my campus visits, a student told me how her father had been laid off, and the family had fallen behind in its mortgage payments. A co-signer of her loans, for which the family home was collateral, her father had also been using home equity loans to pay some of her college bills. That source of credit was now closed off, and the family’s balance sheets were deep in negative territory. At the same time, her parents were landed with some of her grandmother’s hospital bills. To bring relief to a household that had been hit by what she called “a perfect storm of debt,” she had considered dropping out. Instead, she had turned to her two credit cards as an alternate source for funding her degree, opening up yet another door for creditors to come knocking. Fading fast were the college dreams of her younger sister. Newly graduated from high school, she was about to join her mother on payroll at their local Wal Mart supercenter to help tide over the family.

This student’s predicament was a lesson to me in the interdependency of debts, especially those related to the cost of maintaining basic social needs—in housing,
health, and education. Foreclosing the future of young people is a callous act, and a self-destructive path for any society. But allowing Wall Street financiers to feed off their predicament is beyond any moral compass.

In contrast to reform initiatives calling for loan forgiveness (the guilt-laden term suggest the debtor has done something wrong), our OSDC campaign favored a write-off of current student debt, in the jubilee tradition, whereby elites periodically forgive unsustainable debt burdens. But this single corrective act by itself won’t alter the formula for the debt-financing of education. So the campaign adopted some principles aimed at reestablishing an affordable education system. On our rough estimate, it would only take $70 billion of the federal budget to cover the tuition costs at every two- and four-year public college. This happens to be the sum which the Pentagon wastes annually in “unaccountable spending,” according to a recent audit. That comparison alone shows just how skewed our national priorities have become since the era of the GI bill, when the doors of higher learning were opened to working class families. If the U.S. is to have any kind of durable middle class in the 21st century, then it will have to join the long list of countries – including China, Mexico, Brazil, France, Argentina, Germany – that manage to provide free public education at the tertiary level.

In addition, OSDC argued that education loans should be interest-free–no one should profit from them. So, too, all universities including private ones, which benefit from public largesse in all sorts of ways but not least through the federal loan program, should adopt full fiscal transparency. Students and their families surely have a right to know how college administrators spend and allocate their tuition checks.

U.S. campus activism against tuition hikes and indebtedness was sporadic but insistent in the year following the debut of OWS. The most high-profile actions in North America occurred in Quebec, where the student movement won widespread public support in their ultimate victorious campaign to combat tuition increases. The Quebecois symbol – a red square – and the accompanying slogan, carrement dans le rouge (squarely in the red), were quickly adopted by education debt resist- ers in the U.S. The Occupy group All in The Red, staged several (casseroles) marches and actions in New York City in solidarity with their counterparts in Montreal. In Mexico, the Yo Soy 123 student movement mounted a powerful public protest against political corruption in the period before and after the general election, while Chilean students successfully sustained several months of strikes in opposition to top-down efforts to privatize higher education.

**Striking Debt**

In June 2012, several Occupy groups (OCSD, Occupy Theory, and Occupy University) sympathetic to the student resisters, formed a new Strike Debt initiative (www.strikedebt.org), aimed at building a debt resistance and liberation move-
ment. The Quebecois red square was reinterpreted to signify the four corners of debt – education, healthcare, housing, and credit card – and a new slogan was rolled out: “You Are Not A Loan.” We held a series of “debtors’ assemblies” every Sunday in New York City parks. Largely unstructured, these were open invitations to speak out. The crowds were small enough for public intimacy, and the atmosphere, while informal, was electrifying. It was heart-rending to hear speakers bear witness about how debt had blocked their aspirations and forced them into decisions they regretted. Many spoke of depression, some of divorce, while others described the kind of future – owning a home, having children – they believed was now hopelessly unattainable. Parents stood up to agonize about their responsibility, as co-signers, for the loans of their now unemployed offspring. A fellow activist reminded us of an even more harrowing predicament: she had contracted a life-threatening ailment, and the bitter prospect of dying young was sharpened by the knowledge that her low-income parents would inherit her debts. Another expressed shame of another kind: to discharge his debts quickly, he had taken a job in the finance industry, but was sickened by the predatory nature of the loan-making he was asked to work on.

Strike Debt quickly amassed a nucleus of committed activists, some of them from the drastically reduced OWS core. By September 17th (S17), Occupy’s anniversary, the weekly Strike Debt assembly had emerged as one of the strongest OWS tendencies, with aspirations and a sense of momentum that did not rest on, or simply look back to, the achievements of the Zuccotti Park phase. On S17, we launched our first public service project, the Debt Resistance Operations Manual (DROM), based on collectively research conducted in the course of the summer. Written in plain English, it offers practical advice to debtors of all kinds about how to escape from beneath their debt burdens and evict the power of creditors from their lives. While it condones individual action, the DROM also encourages collective acts of debt resistance as the only way of rectifying the inequalities generated by the debt economy.

Conceived as an act of mutual aid, the DROM has circulated far and wide. A second, expanded edition was produced, and it is being translated into other languages, and customized, in other countries, for economic landscapes that differ from that of the U.S. (Debt Resistance Operations Manual 2013). Making available this kind of advice is part of our commitment to public education about how the debt system functions. Wall Street’s self-serving response to criticism is that the finance business is just too complicated for lay people to understand. Every public revelation about how the system is rigged helps to erode the powerful ideology that loans always have to be repaid. This belief – that loan repayment is a highly moral test of personal responsibility – is the glue that holds the financialized economy together.

Our second project, the Rolling Jubilee, offered a more innovative kind of public education. This campaign raised money to buy distressed debt for pennies on
the dollar. Instead of collecting on the debt, as the collection agencies do, we abolished it, relieving debtors of all obligations. The Rolling Jubilee proved a phenomenal success, raising $500,000 in a matter of weeks. Given how cheaply debt is sold on the secondary market, that sum will allow us to eliminate up to ten million dollars of debt. Debtors would be surprised, but elated, we hoped, when the letters from Strike Debt begin to arrive, informing them they no longer have to worry about medical bills they have been unable to pay. More generally, this “people’s bailout” helped to expose the predatory nature of this murky marketplace. How many borrowers, hounded by collection agencies, knew how cheaply their harassers had bought out their loans? How many knew that original lenders get to “charge off” their defaulted accounts and take a tax break – another kind of bailout – before bundling them into portfolios for sale on this shadowy, secondary market?

More profoundly, our Rolling Jubilee team received tens of thousands of messages from people whose spirits were raised by this example of mutual aid in action. Their heartfelt messages reminded us that political change rests on emotional stirring among ordinary people, just as much as it is driven by debates among full-time progressives. The Rolling Jubilee was not designed as a feasible, long-term solution to the debt crisis in and of itself. Instead, it was a “bailout by the people, for the people,” a chance to offer others support and solidarity where the government has failed them. Debt relief, by any means necessary, is a lifeline to desperately overburdened people.

Just before the launch of the Rolling Jubilee, other Occupy remnants sprang into gear to bring relief to the communities hardest hit by Hurricane Sandy. The spontaneous self-organization of Occupy Sandy proved to be more rapid, flexible, and effective than anything provided by government agencies. Not a few concluded that local, community-minded initiatives of this sort were the best expression of the Occupy ethos of mutual aid, and proof that the Zuccotti Park prototype could be spun out into a resilient outreach program, far beyond the traditional OWS constituency. Strike Debt organizers played a leading role in setting up and running field operations, and our research report revealed how other sources of relief in the form of loans, offered through FEMA or from private banks, would drive the victims further into debt – a classic case of disaster capitalism in action. Models for debt-free reconstruction were floated at community meetings.

Both the Rolling Jubilee and Occupy Sandy generated immense goodwill, and their example sparked new ideas and action plans. Relationships were established with European anti-debt groups (Citizen Debt Audit Platform in Spain, and Democratie Réelle Maintenant in Paris) committed to fighting austerity policies or to conducting citizen audits of sovereign debt. Faith communities, in particular, responded with enthusiasm to the Rolling Jubilee, sensing an opportunity to revive the biblical tradition among their own congregants. Strike Debt chapters began to spring up in other cities (and in the U.K), and the New York organizers set
forth a long-term goal of building a “debtors union” with national, and even international scope.

Reclaiming the Future We Need

There are many ways to “strike debt”: demanding all kinds of people’s bailouts; collectively refusing to pay illegitimate loans; targeting and shutting down collections agencies or for-profit colleges; regulating loan speculators out of business; reinstating limits on usurious interest rates (which were struck down in the late 1970s); fighting for free education and healthcare; defending foreclosed homes, and more. But these “strikes” need to be accompanied by constructive alternatives. The result of debt cancellation, even on a mass scale, will be negligible unless it was coupled with a far deeper restructuring of our economic system around socially productive credit. That is the prize our eyes are on – an alternative economy, run for mutual benefit and not for profit.

Progressives don’t always see why organizing around debt should be a priority. After all, it is the Right that traditionally harps on debt, and is currently using deficit reduction as an excuse to push through cuts to public goods provisions it has labeled as “entitlements.” Yet, to paraphrase Marx, people do not get to choose the conditions under which they make history. Most of us are in hock because life-sustaining necessities are increasingly debt-financed. Nor is debt resistance disconnected from more staple progressive concerns like campaigning for higher wages. There has always been a tight relationship between wages and debt—from the debt peons and debt slaves of antiquity to today’s transnational migrants, toiling to work off their transit and recruitment fees. For most people today, debts are the wages of the future, and can even be seen as a form of wage theft. Moreover, given that predatory lending of all sorts—from subprime mortgages to payday loans—disproportionately affects low income and people of color communities, debt resistance naturally dovetails with broader struggles for racial equality and economic justice.

Strike Debt and our allies believe that the struggle over debt is one of the frontline conflicts of our times, and that the new version of the American Dream will be to live free of debt. Initiatives like the Rolling Jubilee are a glimpse into that future, and are showing us – once again – that the first task of any political movement is to meet and touch people where they are. Through our work, we have learned that the popular appetite for debt refusal exists, no less than the desire for an alternative economy. Indeed, debt refusal may be the only way of salvaging popular democracy. The historical record shows that oligarchies have developed out of democracies when the creditor class is allowed to dictate policy, creating the conditions for debt peonage and slavery (Hudson 2011).

“Odious debt” is the legal term applied in the case of authoritarian rulers borrowing without citizen consent and for their personal benefit. But the scope of
odious debt should surely be extended to individuals and households targeted by predatory lenders in unjust ways. In addition, when populations are compelled to privately debt-finance the provision of basic social goods, we might consider these to be “anti-social debts,” what the Chinese call the “three mountains” of education, housing, and healthcare, all weighing heavily on the shoulders of the people. Their explosive growth is more and more perceived in Beijing as a threat to that country’s stability. In the U.S., our inability to meet these costs has been turned into a source of lavish profit for the finance industry. Any representative government that permits banks to impose these harms on an unprotected populace has all but forfeited its democratic legitimacy.

When capitalism has exhausted its capacity for profit-taking in the present, it circulates ever more paper claims on the future (Dienst 2009). Financialization is a way of appropriating our future time and labor far in advance of how and where we choose to conduct our lives. If we are to have the future we need then we will first have to reclaim the future from the creditors.

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Notes

1 Todd Gitlin (2013) was only the most prominent of those who placed Occupy within the lineage of US Great Awakenings.

References

What Difference do Derivatives Make?
From the Technical to the Political Conjuncture

By Randy Martin

Abstract
In the aftermath of the great bailout of capital in 2008 (and still ongoing) finance has often been seen as external and parasitical to the real economy. Instead, finance and other forms of capital have become more closely articulated and interwoven. A critical social logic of the derivative is offered here, following on Marx’s analysis of the commodity, to consider what is meant by dominance of finance, what difference finance makes and the politics of debt. The derivative provides key insights into the apparently detached process by which money seems to beget more money, and at the same time discloses the internal socialization and interdependence that is at the root of a politically generative mutual indebtedness.

Keywords: Derivatives, financialization, debt, socialization, capital, commodities, Marx, sociology.
Introduction

The capitalism in which finance prevails presents all manner of challenges – at once conceptual and political. In what follows, a critical look at derivatives will provide a portal through which to engage the antinomies of finance. Derivatives give form to that contradictory relation between the move to money as such, and the moves deeper into social materiality and interdependence. Unpacking derivatives, not simply as a technical device of finance, but as a key to the social logics and relations that inhere in the current conjuncture of capital, will address three cardinal riddles of finance. First, what does financial dominance mean for an understanding of how capitalism works (or doesn’t); second, what historical difference does this prevalence of finance make; and third, how to understand the social and political implications of the preponderance of financial debt?

Following Marx a critical social logic begins with the way wealth presents itself, today most emblematically in the form of the derivative, an instrument for pricing risk, and then moves to the mutual interdependence, now evident in debt, which discloses the historical agency of associated producers. Analytically speaking, the internal logic of the derivative shifts attention from understanding the world selectively on capital’s own terms to value instead the labor that is constitutive of society; the socialism that is immanent to capitalism. Before moving to the three conundrums of finance, some conceptual groundwork needs to be established regarding crisis, Marx and the meaning of derivatives.

Contrasting Crises

The financial crisis evident in the implosion of subprime lending and the subsequent bailout of certain corporations did much to fix attention on the politics of debt without yielding much by way of unity of analysis or course of action. Rather, two contrasting vistas are evident. In one, finance seems to exist in a world apart from most people’s everyday lives. In this realm, money is made from money, seemingly out of thin air that never comes down to earth. Finance in this regard is speculative, fictitious, metaphysical and immaterial. And yet from that very ground upon which finance supposedly does not tread, people are feeling great pain, not least because they are collectively paying for what has been taken from them, in this case trillions in public monies being used to underwrite the rescue of purportedly deserving capital. This is the other perspective on finance that is identified as all too real: it bites, cuts, makes itself felt and known in every nook and cranny of experience the world round. These material effects are not restricted to public sacrifice for private gains, but extend to all manner of weighing what is worthy and valuable, from childrearing, education, healthcare, retirement; really any kind of life outcome to which people might be oriented. From
this perspective, far from being an unproductive deviation from the actual economy, finance is as real as it gets.

For long-time critical observers of these dynamics, all this might look like business as usual. Capital accumulates by denying access to means of subsistence that subsequently forces labor into mutual association, as was a consequence of the feudal enclosures of the European peasantry that extended from the 13th to the 17th centuries (Perelman 2000); then flees the demands that are made from any other than itself on the surplus that results (Brown 1987); and furthers the compression or annihilation of space by time (Harvey 1999). The complication would come if this flight is one from the commodity itself. Accordingly, capital is no longer productive, but cannibalizes itself (Soederberg 2011). Bypassing the hidden source of its wealth, labor power, it becomes merely speculative, and replaces surplus value with a series of bets in which the gain of one is the loss of another in a game of zero-sum. This is one understanding of what Marx called “fictitious capital,” the promissory notes that serve as “capital for the banker,” used for multiple loans in excess of actual deposits, that he saw as at once, “illusory” bearing its own “laws of motion” and representing the capital of “the public” as its own (Marx 1894/1967b: 463-75).

Like much in Marx, there is more to the story than a technical distinction among forms of money and capital. Not only does capital socialize labor – interchangeable and interdependent--but finance is a means by which capital itself is socialized, what he termed concentration and centralization, or the elimination of private property within capitalist relations:

This result of the ultimate development of capitalist production is a necessary transitional phase towards the reconversion of capital into the property of producers, although no longer as the private property of the individual producers, but rather as the property of associated producers, as outright social property. On the other hand, the stock company is a transition toward the conversion of all functions in the reproduction process that still remain linked with capitalist property, into mere functions of associated producers, into social functions. (Marx 1894/1967b: 437).

Whereas for any individual financial hedge there appears only a winner and a loser, for capitalist accumulation as a whole, the realms of production where surplus value is made, and circulation where value is realized, move closer together. Seen from the perspective of the socialization of labor and of capital, the expansion of finance would variously disburse, implicate and elaborate relations of production and circulation internal to one another. More specifically it could be said that finance poses precisely this contradiction; namely, between what appears as capital for itself, money that makes money through speculation or pure circulation, and capital for (or really through) others that generates all manner of mutual entanglement, encumbrance, and debt in multiple forms and consequences. Most simply put the politics in Capital lies in how to get from mutual interdependence to free association; from debt as a burdensome chain, to indebtedness as a basis for creating society by and for those who collectively generate its wealth.
Marx’s Mutual Indebtedness

How might this double movement be understood, toward what appears as the merely speculative on the one hand, and heightened indebtedness (with its attendant ambivalent meanings) on the other? Here, it makes sense to follow Marx’s lead in his analysis of the commodity in the opening chapter of Capital, something at first sight easily understood as a thing-in-itself, that abounds in metaphysical niceties, which turn out not to be metaphysical at all, but direct us toward an understanding of the social basis of wealth and of life together. The commodity bears the labor that made it possible, but the single commodity is but a moment of an immense accumulation, not simply of capital, but of human activity treated as if it existed for and through its capacity to generate a world of exchange, one where the subsistence of each is contingent upon and mediated through an expansive, profit-taking universe of commodity production.

What Marx termed the “society of producers” laboring populations that exist for and through one another is the social basis for the alternative logic that lies within and against capitalism, its immanent condition of socialism (M Brown 1986). Much of course disrupts, displaces and redirects the political trajectories of this immanence; no particular outcome or trajectory is guaranteed. Mutual social indebtedness is for capital, an often intolerable excess of accumulation, in particular when expressed as calls for justice, equality, or new demands that emerge from various social movements that make their own claims on society’s wealth.

This in a nutshell is the internal contradiction Marx finds in the accumulation of capital, that the pursuit of wealth in the form of burgeoning quantities of commodities also expands and deepens the interdependence and capacities to express the social from those very populations that capital depends upon but disavows and denies. The terms of political contestation are formed between capital’s denial of its debt to labor and labor’s recognition of its own mutual indebtedness. While productive activity goes by many names today, more and more labor continues to be performed – albeit under various guises and conditions, as those activities that comprised social reproduction and intellectual labor (the so-called knowledge economy) become increasingly integral to the overall accumulation process. The ascent of finance needs to be understood in the context of this expanding realm of the kinds, scope and scale of activities – both across the globe and within the recesses of the human psyche – that constitute the continuation of the immense accumulation that drives capitalism.

Derivatives Now

If the commodity itself proliferates where capitalism initially prevails, derivatives lead the charge when finance dominates. Derivatives can be construed narrowly as technical instruments of contemporary finance, but also as emblematic of the
complex of historical logics of motion and social relations that shape present circumstances. In the first, technical sense that obtains within financial services, derivatives are conventionally understood as contracts to exchange a certain amount of something at a determinate future time at an agreed upon price. For example, a furniture manufacturer in Europe is making tables for a U.S. retailer that will be ready in six months and will charge a million Euros at an exchange rate of a euro and a half to the dollar. But should that rate change if the dollar appreciates or goes up against the Euro, the manufacturer stands to lose money when the tables are ready for shipment. The agreement to exchange at a fixed rate acts as insurance that hedges against this risk. By so doing, the risk, or possibility of a deviant but predictable outcome is also priced through a contract that can be exchanged, and therefore becomes an instrument of investment. The sale of tables can be subject not only to currency fluctuations, but also to the possible cancellation of the order, or a bank’s inability to pay, or any number of other circumstances for which derivative contracts can also be generated. Each potential failure to execute the contract at full notional or face value can be hedged through a derivative contract. As a consequence, the sum total of all derivative contracts far exceeds the actual or underlying price of the assets being traded. As global transactions have increased, more and more kinds of risk are priced – from exchange and interest rates, to changes in temperature and the weather. The total notional value of derivative contracts between parties and traded on exchanges has grown enormously (some 25% per year in the past twenty years) to stand now at over a quadrillion and a half dollars or nearly twenty-times the world’s gross domestic product (Bank of International Settlements 2012).

While derivative contracts for agricultural prices have been in existence for thousands of years, derivatives in their current guise date from the seventies and began to be traded extensively on formal exchanges in the 1990s. The quantity of publicly traded derivatives is exceeded by Over the Counter contracts made directly between parties. The contracts do not terminate the exchange; only small percentages are actually paid when they come due. Rather, the contracts are kept open or in ongoing exchange through what are called clearinghouses. The result is a continuous circulation of debt instruments and a further integration of local production into global markets. The advent of increasingly complex mathematical models since the early 1970s when Merton, Black and Scholes crafted the first formula for pricing derivatives, and more and more computational capacity to process ever more intricate trades more quickly are among the technical factors that has driven this process of expansion (Finel-Honigman 2010).

Of course this standard account from within finance treats growth and expansion as axiomatic to continued business activity. Investment entails risk, techniques have been devised to ameliorate that risk and even profit from it, supply meets demand and growth results. In this regard, derivative markets are just like every other, and while the notional values are extraordinary, the actual amounts
outstanding through derivative exchanges is considerably smaller ($27 trillion at the end of 2011, and the trades themselves generating revenue in the tens of billions), and less than global markets for financial assets like bonds or stocks, which together exceed $200 trillion (McKinsey 2011). What makes derivatives significant is that they trade in risk, but also manufacture risk; they disclose the internal logic of financial expansion as well as the social entailments of mutual indebtedness. Hence, like Marx’s account of the commodity, starting with derivatives gets us to the internal workings of social interdependence that is the basis for society. As with Marx, this basis is ultimately social and not economic, it is immanent and not causal; it is an internal relation, and not a platform upon which the rest of society is built.

The trick for any critical analysis of finance is how to get from the technical to the social and historical aspects (LiPuma & Lee 2004). Staying within the technical finance remains tautological and deterministic, to say nothing of exclusive to those who make the deals and master the mathematical models. Money that makes money avoids labor, and is either magical in doing so, deceitful in swindling people who do not know any better, or so complex that this world must be left to the experts. The result is a highly moralistic approach to finance, a wishful impetus shared across the ideological spectrum to punish the transgressors and bad actors, and to set things to right by reasonable regulation. As scandal follows scandal, such moralism does little to rectify what has taken place or reveal much about how the malfeasance persists – a few apples will be pruned and the orchard can return to its prior splendor. Here a critical social logic of derivatives can be more fruitful analytically and politically.

There is a rich and varied Marxist literature on the precipitants and consequences of the financial crisis (Albo, Gindin & Panitch 2010; Foster & Magdoff 2009; McNally 2010; Panitch, Albo & Chibber 2010; Wolff 2009) where the failures of accumulation provide the occasion for a stirring call to political mobilization. Marxist analysis of financialization also provide searing accounts of a profit squeeze (Tabb 2012) or a speculative syndrome of “Madoffization” (Monaghan & O’Flynn 2012), while the question of how mutual indebtedness itself might create opportunities for political mobilization is left open. The events of recent years have made what were taken as special insights into potentially public considerations – this at least has been the tantalizing if unrealized promise of crisis. Clearly there have been all manner of responses from the rebellions in the Arab world to mobilizations of students and Occupy activists to similarly global displays of reaction whether Tea Party or coarsely labeled fundamentalisms. The riddles of what to make of the present, of what continuities and ruptures are evident, of what opportunities are present have now become especially freighted and call for further attention.
Financial Dominance

Two general claims are made for finance – roughly speaking a synchronic one that it dominates or colonizes other spaces of social and economic life, and a diachronic or conjunctural claim that this power of a particular kind of capital is relatively new and has been consolidated over the past forty years. The distinction is of course heuristic, there is no clear demarcation between what belongs to space and what to time, yet it remains useful to conceive of how financial logics are asserted throughout society and how they have come to be. There are several measures of what dominance entails. The most general would be the value of assets held by financial versus industrial firms, as this would be a standard indicator of how economic activity is distributed. Since the early 1970s, the vault of financial activities has exceeded the value of industrial products (Guttmann 1994). On the eve of the financial crisis in 2007, 40% of profits came from financial services, up from 7% at the end of the Second World War (Krippner 2011). The impact on the global economy of the failure of collateralized debt obligations tied to subprime mortgages is taken as further evidence of the extent to which finance prevails over productive activity. This increasing prominence of financial motives and markets is described as financialization (Epstein 2006). Dominance however is a stronger claim than relative growth or redistribution from one sector of the economy to another. Rather there is a sense that finance colonizes or orients all other activity. This comports with other accounts of a post-industrial society, in which the emphasis on producing physical or material commodities centered on key industries of steel, oil and automobiles gives way to immaterial or nonphysical entities (Bell 1973; Moulier Boutang 2011).

While these broad indicators are useful in drawing attention to the increasing space occupied by finance, they may not go as far in clarifying what this shift signifies. The notion that the locus of economic activity has moved from one sector to another is belied by the increasing integration between industrial production and circuits of credit and debt that are part and parcel of the recent ascent of finance. The most profitable division of General Motors came to be its financing of automobiles through the General Motors Accounting Corporation (GMAC, now Ally Bank). A similar trend held for General Electric, through GE Capital. Yet in neither case is this simply a matter of shifting from industrial production to finance, but rather an extension of credit to labor to compensate for declining wages and benefits, and integration through firms of various operations of capital.

Marx had observed the tendency for increased concentration or monopolization of a given line of business in fewer and fewer enterprises, and a centralization of various economic activities among ever-larger conglomerates (Marx 1867/1967a). He saw finance, then expressed through the emergence of the joint stock corporation, as furthering this socialization or interdependence of capital as well as the associated functions of the producers. Cars and refrigerators are, after all, con-
sumer products--use values that are realized not simply over the duration of their operation, but over the period in which they are paid for with interest. Labor’s capacity to serve as a medium of circulation for this credit economy renders it part of the realization of value but also of the extension and elaboration of financial services. Participation in these debt relations means that labor is also exposed to and must manage the risks that these markets bear. Labor is thereby exposed not only to risks of unemployment, declining wages, or ill health that emanate from work; now it is subject to risks of capital circulation and realization, to which it provides a second shift, as deferred wages, but compelled to pursue for access to expanded costs of reproduction like education and retirement. The labor of this second shift consists of all the research, information, and deliberation that adds value and maintains circulation for financial capital. Expanding these terms of participation, as was the case for home ownership through subprime mortgages, subjects labor more fully to the circulation of capital and its volatile processes of realization.

Labor’s incorporation into the circuits of realization of capital points to the way in which financialization is itself a framework for crafting new frontiers of accumulation internal to capitalist social relations. Just as colonialism and enclosure of common feudal lands forced populations into market relations that channeled them into wage labor, and consumer markets and personal credit delivered workers to the products of their production, financialization extended the risk operations of capital to labor within the very spaces of social reproduction, the home, school, health care, retirement, once treated as separate and secure from market machinations. Just as for capital, financialization does not simply transfer production into circulation but brings the two closer together, not only consumption and activities of social reproduction, but the activity of labor itself becomes part of larger financial circuits (Martin 2002).

The Social Logic of the Derivative

The social logic of the derivative has a special role to play in rendering capitals commensurate with one another. The derivative not only subjects local production to global market vacillations, but places labor in the crosshairs of potential risk exposures. Indeed, part of the reason that unemployment has remained so stubbornly high after 2008 is that employers are using their existing work force as a buffer against future or potential market risks, like increased taxes, tightening credit, or a change in the regulatory environment. The reluctance to hire is then translated back to the existing workforce as an expectation of higher productivity. Indeed, increased profit rates have been extracted through productivity demands that make labor bear these market risks (Bryan & Rafferty 2006). The derivative in this respect does not simply hedge against a potential outcome, but treats that possible future outcome as something that can be acted upon in present real time.
These protocols of risk assessment are not therefore restricted to the operations of financial services, but have become a more generalized approach to the management of any organizational process. School children are continuously tested; those in need of social services are tested; credit profiles are continuously adjusted – populations are sorted and ranked according to their expected outcomes of risk and failure and public policy operates through and is crafted accordingly. It is not simply that resources once separated as public and private are now allocated through market mechanisms, but that each instance of exchange is already assigned a risk market before the activity in question – childhood, hunger, ill health, even death – comes due (Blackburn 2002). In this respect, financialization is not a total departure from earlier processes of accumulation. Rather, it deepens, extends, and intensifies an array of spaces whose autonomy and integrity it violates, whose boundaries it crosses, through an imposed and imposing association.

Now as in other processes of association, interdependence does not mean homogenization, flattening, or smoothing out, as was claimed in the conventional account of globalization (Friedman 2006). This is both because the energies and efficacies of slavery and colonialism, industrial manufacture and wage labor, are far from spent, but also because derivatives themselves constantly parse and separate, and make much from what other would be minor differences in price or fluctuations in market circumstances. Financialization then, is ultimately not simply more finance everywhere, but also more socialization, more interdependence, more mutual debt.

Marx keenly observed that occasions and opportunities for accumulation were pursued around the world and those spatial arrangements were themselves transformed in the process – the aphorism “all that’s solid, melts into air” captures this poignantly (Marx & Engels 2002). The solidity that appears to have melted for many (clearly for many more it was never there to begin with) is the sense of security that government would protect them from the excesses of the marketplace, and that a horizon of ever expanding affluence would animate a secular dream space called the middle class would deliver them to a steadily more promising future. Recall that the Communist Manifesto offers a paean to the dissolution of small property holders, and this theme of class decomposition is explored as well in the 18th Brumaire where Marx ties the weak socialization of the French peasantry to the authoritarian and violent, even self-destructive rampages of the Bonapartist state (Marx & Engels 1848/2002; Marx 1852/1969). To the contemporary dysfunctions of government and the dimming horizons of white male middle class privilege, we might inquire as to what socialization of the sort imagined here means for relations of state and class. Doing so would compel a confrontation with what is decomposing and what being formed in the present conjuncture that would deepen an understanding of what it means for finance to dominate.

Perhaps the most potent critical analytic trope for naming the dominance of markets over every aspect of life is neoliberalism (Harvey 2007). As much as the
term has served as a rallying cry for all that ails us, its use has tended to collapse an ideology that markets rule, with an acceptance of their victory in doing so and popular accommodation to this formation of power. The danger of proclaiming neoliberalism’s success in these terms is in effect a critical version of Thatcher’s “there is no alternative” (TINA). Maintaining the critical optic while crafting analytic openings to opposition and alternatives would entail challenging the key terms of privatization and deregulation. Financialization in general and derivatives in particular may be of some service here, especially in the aftermath of the massive bailouts. Far from government getting out of markets, the imagined border that polices the distinction between polity and economy appeared to be violated when public coffers were offered as collateral to market failure. The U.S. government, through the Troubled Asset Relief Program, purchased stock – expecting to profit without imposing mandates of ownership. And yet this act was far from a single magnanimous gesture, indeed the positioning of government on the part of presidents of both parties as the enemy of free enterprise has been used largely to replace entitlement programs with support of investors by means of regressive tax cuts (although certainly progressive for capital and its largest beneficiaries).

**Toward Disintermediation**

This shift from defined benefit to defined contribution public policy approaches – terms that come from the world of pensions which indicate the shift from a guaranteed annual income at retirement (which most pensions were at the end of the 1960s) to the advent of self-management through investment portfolios whose paltry returns for most are hardly a means of retirement. Now these once public goods of health, education and affordable housing, are themselves treated as investments, and citizenship is converted to a gambit of pay-to-play. Derivatives are of course all around these various investment-based goods, with student loan default swaps and securitizations of supplemental health care, to say nothing of collateralized debt obligations that borrow default rankings and trade them for different risk profiles. If privatization was really about crafting certain kinds of publics and social participation through government intervention, plowing the fields of finance proceeded not by deregulation, but through massive pilings of rules. During the reign of neoliberalism, through Republican and Democratic administrations alike, the Federal Register, official rulebook of the United States has swelled in girth (Roubini & Mihm 2010: 200-215).

But the fact that there are more rules than ever before, something consistent with the effervescent spirit of capitalism, becomes for finance, a factor of production, part of its materiality that can be factored as regulatory risk that banks could exchange on the basis of different appraisals of their legally versus actually required money reserves. The institutional effect of deregulation in financial services, whether for savings and loans in the 1980s or erasing the boundary between
commercial and investment banking (codified in the depression era Glass-Steagall legislation), was to affect something called disintermediation. Disintermediation entails removing the exclusionary mandate of institutions that can legitimately broker financial dealings. Hence, many kinds of institutions can lend money, generate financial contracts (like OTC derivatives), or construct and sell bonds.

Disintermediation is a financial term for socialization of capital, for it means that the field of economic activity becomes more porous, open to more and more actors working from ever more complex webs of rules and risks. In light of this, privatization and deregulation could be renamed as processes of political and economic disintermediation, respectively. Investor-based, defined contribution, means-tested protocols for participation in decision-making aided and abetting through government acting as a medium for redistribution of wealth to the wealthy through tax cuts, renders those whose decisions affect the common good, de facto state actors. Government, however is not simply getting out of the economy, but creating conditions of political disintermediation, where those best positioned to do so make political decisions as to how public funds (deferred or reallocated tax monies) are to be allocated but also what kinds of decisions will serve as the models upon which the expected life course will proceed. Private or charter schooling, home ownership, private health care and retirement accounts would be part and parcel of this.

**Derivative Class**

While financialization socializes capital in particular ways, it also promotes a specific class. Indeed, the professional managerial class (PMC) displays many of the contradictory features of the petit bourgeoisie of Marx’s day (Wright 1997). In the fable of post-industrialism after WWII, the PMC would serve as the class to end all classes, the clean, non-contentious, fully corporate and integrated individual in the white collar and gray flannel suit. The government policies that would allocate suburban homes to returning G.I.’s would also build the public educational infrastructure that would train a new generation of knowledge-based professionals. While clearly racially and gender based, this was to be a new social compact that claimed those who gained credentialed expertise through access to higher education would come to govern the terms of their employment as professionals whose careers guaranteed steady progress in status and income. While more can be counted in the ranks of the PMC than ever before, the compact around professional autonomy is eroding – not only for the professoriate who see tenure receding in their rear-view mirrors, but for physicians working in managed care and attorneys casualized through the dismantling of partner-based firms. Even financial services left many of its children behind when the going got rough. This is on the one hand, a story of security turning to risk par excellence, but it is also an account of the proletarianization or socialization of the professions. The performance-based
test-driven, continuously assessed measures of life now define the professions more than their purportedly less noble kindred occupations. Doctors, lawyers, financiers all face the specter of do-it-yourself challenges to the monopoly of legitimate knowledge that once was managed autonomously and is now increasingly managed for them (Martin 2011; Brook 2012).

In this, the fate of professionals is tied less to their particular expertise than to the increasingly common protocols by which their work is attributed with worth. The irony of course is that theirs was the technical knowledge that made their own colonization possible, and theirs was the popular enthusiasm that made escalations of risk and reward the coin of the realm. At this point the derivative needs to be brought back in as a key figure in moving across these realms of autonomy lost and risk measurement found. Certainly professionals are not suddenly unified as one, doing the same thing at the same time, but something has happened to their means of ascertaining their worth, of governing the sobriety of their senses that relates certain attributes of their experience in ways that are leveraged across their respective situations.

The stars, celebrities, market-makers, and outliers have stripped away the grey flannel and oriented their gaze away from the norm, median and central tendency of their heretofore rational existence and oriented them toward the few that got away. While the wealthiest may still hold their islands, the figure of this success is projected as the hypermobile, unattached, and impermanently anointed Davos Man, a specter of volatility where privilege has its memberships but these come pre-stamped with expiration dates and must be used immediately (Rothkopf 2008). In opposition to this sensibility of placeless elite, living spaces, streets and squares are inhabited by the multitudes act to reinvest what has been spirited away.

**Financial Difference**

Seen from the perspective of the derivative, dominance is both far and near, hugely scaled and intimate, so much explanatory power is being asked of these massive aggregations of small differences, minor fluctuations, and persistent volatilities. Certainly this narrative can quickly become a bit breathless. How could something derivative matter so much, could it really make all this difference? Just as there is a danger in over-consolidating an account of dominance so that resistance is futile, there is a temptation to proclaim an entirely new world from what could seem the top of a stack of turtles. There is certainly something new in these times, but much that is old and continuous as well. New forces are launched but few ever really disappear. Despite centuries of proletarianization, several billion souls remain tied to the land for their subsistence, and irrespective of the soaring knowledge economy, many, including those tethered to a keyboard still work with their hands. How then to make good on this caution regarding the ever
forward march of time that casts its own amnesia on all the other temporal traces in its midst?

A key strategy here has been to remember what Marx saw and said when he regarded his world, and to extend his approach to imagine ways of understanding a capitalism that is itself in motion. While the imperative to accumulate is undimmed and the socializing effects making the world over to wealth are ever more expansive, capitalism itself is not an internally closed machine, a system that continues to run until it breaks down. For many around the world, capitalism never worked to begin with, or continues to fail them through exploitation and misery, or simply a denial of access to its vast resources and the politics of how they might be devised and deployed. The system metaphor, which is not part of Marx’s own analytic vocabulary but has been spirited into many a Marxist account by means of conventional social science, betrays the functionalism of well-purposed parts serving to maintain the overall operation of the whole. Rupture, burst bubbles, crisis, even revolution would be conceived as catastrophic moments of total departure that set history on a new course (Parsons 1955; Edwards, Reich & Weiskopf 1972; Brenner 2006).

Marx’s own dialectics grasps social relations in “fluid motion” but with a particular trajectory of transformation in mind so as to not collapse social and political revolution (Marx 1867/1967a). History is made from the received weight of encountered circumstances. In the straightforward circuit of accumulation, these historical encumbrances disappear, the commodity labor power is concealed and the surplus it generates expressed in the increased magnitude of capital. In one way, derivatives follow this logic. They are detached from their underlying commodities or assets and traded independently as attributes of those original commodities. But in another respect, the underlying continues to weigh like a “nightmare on the brain of the living” in Marx’s vivid phrase (Marx 1852/1969). Production is amplified not curtailed through derivative trading, and conversely, when the derivative risk is realized, the underlying is also effected. This was certainly what the subprime dynamics demonstrated; namely, that collecting risk attributes stimulated housing construction, but also shut it down when prices fell short.

**Risking Space and Time**

If derivatives are a central instrument of risk management, then the generalized turn to acting upon risk differentials speaks to this more engaged relation between what has been and what could be, between continuity and change. In this the derivative augurs a different temporal sensibility than the smoothly progressive time of commodity accumulation, of one magnitude added to another that underpins the conception of growth. Clearly much economic activity is still oriented by and calibrated through linear progressive time. Households, firms, nations remain ro-
bust social and statistical categories. Calendars and second hands have yet to be abolished. Rather, if linear time is the underlying pulse of the capitalist calculus, variations of speed, duration, and scale act upon what were once treated as the stable markers of past, present, and future (Zerubavel 1981). The promise that the future would be different and better than the present, that it would be allochonic or an other time, had been capital’s claim for progress, but also for its own version of utopia – that market growth would deliver populations from want and universalize prosperity (Fabian 1983). The insistence on deficit reduction over stimulus would seem to reflect a flight from a utopian future and a universalistic claim that all could get to this better place together. Instead, utopian claims are inverted, and future promises must be sacrificed to present debts.

The derivative makes certain aspects of the future actionable in the present. Rather than abiding an anticipatory mode scanning the temporal horizon for opportunity, trying to get out ahead in the race, the future does not exist as something absolutely different from the present, but actions taken now are meant to form what that future could be. Pre-emption hence becomes a key policy logic, whether this applies to the Federal Reserve Board’s altering of interest rates on signs of changes to inflation and unemployment, or the invasion and occupation of countries before a threat to security can manifest (the doctrine for the Global War on Terror) (Martin 2007). This radical constructivism, intervening with a targeted intervention on some risk factor in order to prevent or mitigate the negative effects of an unwanted occurrence before it takes place has been described as a kind of performativity (MacKenzie 2006). The pre-emptive signal in the present is meant to bring about the desired future state. Needless to say, derivatives not only manage risk, they also amplify risk opportunities. The Federal Reserve and the Federal Government has become more interventionist in pursuit of economic and political security. Yet doing so has had perverse effects.

**Algorithms of Volatility**

Modeling behavior, even on the basis of complex algebraic equations, imagines the future to consist of an array of discrete outcomes and independent variables that have no will or at least parallel capacity to read the signs around them. Yet volatility creates not only more risk that can be priced and acted upon, but also more uncertainty, and unknowable circumstances that elude the methods of forecasting and recognition. The collective effect of so many acting upon and anticipating signs and signals amplifies uncertainty and generates opacity – in contrast to the model of decision that posits a lone rational actor who stands outside and is independent of observable phenomenon, and can therefore predict the future. To the spatial unevenness of development in different parts of the world in which the capacities of the margins are sacrificed to the enrichment of the center, the derivative logic adds variegated times where present, near and long-term collide.
The future is not one unbroken horizon, it is not approached steadily, and it does not open before us. The actionable future stitches together many durational terms, as it continues to trade in these multiple times, deferring closure, keeping the deal in motion. Finance, however does not simply consolidate these various time frames, it also disburses and disarticulates the beginning and ending of when a good is made, and when it can generate a revenue stream. As such, the derivative breaks-up the integrity of all manner of productive units, keeps them flowing, but also maintains and depends upon the underlying values’ capacity to generate something productive.

**Derivative Materiality**

Derivatives are not less material or physical, but they violate what had been the integrity of material and physical forms in space and time. One symptom of this violation is the collapse of the distinction in the financial world between investment and speculation (Bogle 2012). Supposedly, investment was a decision to allocate capital on the prospect of a long-term perspective for growth, and speculation was an orientation toward short-term gain. The villains would be shareholder value, mergers and acquisitions, short-selling, and the bevy of greed-mongering financiers whose only interest was in arbitrage, not in creating real worth in companies.

There is no doubt a moralistic tenor to these assessments of current woes that conceals an analytic challenge. The distinction between investment and speculation is typically made in hindsight with the former associated with the growth it predicts, and the latter tarred with loss. But if the derivative slices and dices not only whole units into bits and pieces but the flow and order of time as well, then the very distinction between short and long term upon which investment is separated from speculation would tend to implode as well. Development, after all is a combination of smoothly expanding volume (growth) and linear time (progress), in which primitives are to imitate the mature moderns in order to achieve the promised land of the future. Origins can be many, but the developmental path will not diverge.

If it was not apparent in the emergence of financial dominance over the past forty years, after the global bailout of finance, these promises and the populations enclosed through them have met a sturdy indifference. It is important, however, not to maintain all focus on the vagaries of capital. The long march of colonialism that drove capitalist expansion worldwide proceeded through these various enclosures: of communal lands to propertied estates, open territories into bounded nations states, and persons into the self-possessed beings called individuals. And yet colonialism bears its own counter-history, its often transgressive and creative process whereby the colonies are re- or mis-appropriated, where associations are directed toward ends other than the dull mandates of accumulation. The United
States and Haiti both emerge through national de-colonization which would inspire liberationist impulses for centuries to come. Socialist, communist, anarchist movements arise through various sunderings of the integrity of wage labor. Movements around identity, difference, need, desire, sense and nature, would all erupt as the private sphere of social reproduction was itself ruptured by socializing productive activity in a refusal of the voiceless subject without political agency, but also an expansion of the sphere of the political as such.

**From Decolonization**

The three vectors of decolonization named here: of the times and spaces of territory, production, and social reproduction, constitute the conjuncture in Fredric Jameson’s (1984) formulation of what would become the various social movements of the 1960s. In Giovanni Arrighi’s (1994) seminal study of the successive historical conjunctures of financialization as the geo-political axis of capital accumulation shifted from The Netherlands, to England to the United States, two dramatic internal shifts take place. One is an explosion of financial activity that proves ruinous to the extant social order, and the other is a dramatic strain on the social compact that attached to the particular middle class. The current inflection of this strain would attach to what was discussed earlier in terms of the professional managerial class and its attendant expansion in number and decomposition of its forms of solidarity and autonomy. The international financial architecture devised by John Maynard Keynes and his cohort at the end of the Second World War known by the New Hampshire resort of Bretton Woods where the plans were drafted was certainly an effort to introduce financial colonization of the globe through the sovereignty of a single currency, the dollar. The seventies recession and the fall of Bretton Woods that brought the sixties impulses to a close provided a basis for financialization. While OPEC and Eurodollars are assigned culpability for making dollar sovereignty unsustainable, the larger inability to contain the flows of currency can also be taken as decolonization in its own right.

By decentering the account of financialization the expression in financial flows of the wider currents in social relations starts to emerge and the appraisal of the politic landscape of the past forty years also shifts appreciably. Rather than unmitigated failure and defeat at the hands of a triumphant neoliberalism, the optic of a derivative logic provides a far more uneven assessment. The decolonization of territory, labor and social reproduction seemed to have passed with the heady days of the early seventies (with the victory in Vietnam, a renaissance of socialist theory and practice, radical and substantive reforms driven by the equality and difference agendas of gender, sexuality, race, environmental and other movements). Yet the longer view is that these contestations and movements never went away, and that they continue in their expressions, albeit without the same clarity of assess-
ment and valuation that accompanied their earlier appearance under the sign of unalloyed freedom (i.e. movements for liberation) (Young 2001).

This last problem, of how to value existing mobilizations, if there is evidence that the horizons of the political have not in fact receded, returns us to the question of the derivative, but now as an analytic term. One purpose in seeing financial derivatives as a response to movements of decolonization is that it allows us to re-value what otherwise might be dismissed as fragmentary, disunifying, or generally insufficient in the political responses to the circumstances at hand. Just what would such a derivative approach to a valuation of the political consist of? Attending to that question, necessitates a return to and re-invention of the question of debt.

Financial Debt

As with finance itself, the sums and magnitude of debt now receive increasing public attention. Student debt in the U.S. at over $1 trillion has surpassed credit card debt, ignited a debt refusal movement with a more militant tone than the debt forgiveness appeals to Congress that have made the rounds over the past decade (Occupy Student Debt Campaign 2012). The idea of a debt moratorium, championed by Fidel Castro and other so-called debtor nations during the 1980s has both been complicated by the United States itself assuming the mantle of the largest debtor, but also of a geographical fluidity across countries of publics who are asked to make sacrifices of development, retirement, infrastructure or other markings of the social economy to the perquisites of capital accumulation. In many ways, debt bondage has replaced development as the promised route out of poverty. Payday lending, microfinance, credit profiling, all become part of the expansion of large financial services and carry with them a critique of what they see as the moralism of public assistance. They trumpet their own moralistic claims that indenture to profit-taking investors is a more noble form of self-sufficiency (Roy 2010). The sorting of legitimate and illegitimate debt justifies the limits to small business underwritten by large multinationals in lieu of general social benefits. Already those who had championed microfinance are suggesting that at 150 million small enterprises, the approach may have reached its limits as to how many more can be drawn into its debt circuits (Rosenberg 2011). Similar moral assignments of blame were heard through the subprime debt process that those who signed mortgage agreements did so as responsible adults, or that they had no business assuming more debt than they could pay, or that their profligacy made the world unsafe for everyone else.
Moral Economies

Two temporalities of moralism tend to separate debts of capital from those of labor. The large bank and corporate bailouts triggered the concern of moral hazard; namely that publicly funded bailouts would reward bad behavior and prompt the bad actors to repeat their mistakes rather than taking their licks from the purifying stream of market discipline. Yet these consternations are invariably voiced after the fact of massive public assistance. Corporate aid is treated the general will, as if were action not taken, the whole economy would be effected. With deals struck behind closed doors and little evidence presented as to how the public good would be served by the rescued firms, the transparency said to be part of democratic deliberation is absent and the rectitude of the decision is a fait accompli. For what is typically referred to as consumer debt, all norms of culpability remain in force, as these are the actions of willful knowing individuals, not those blindsided by the invisible hand of the market. Yet there is a persistent anxiety among those who refuse to assist the poor and laboring debtors; namely that in doing so they would cease to act as individuals and morph into an unruly and contentious mass.

The fear of contagion, of bad debt suffocating and sullying the sterile efficiency of markets is known as moral panic (Hall 1978). Whereas moral hazard is backward looking, moral panic is pre-emptive; a fear of what is to come that must be punitively thwarted before it gets out of hand. The specter of debts being spoken of not from their disparate sources of origination – as so much credit card, or student loan, or mortgage, or microfinance, or sovereign debt, or government debt – but as social debt as such indicates where a derivative logic may lead us. The derivative both removes values from their originating sources and aggregates the total value to which they are attached. The notion of a global face value of debt begins to get at what it would mean for the derivative dialectic to enter fully into the public discourse.

Claiming Surplus

The derivative as a social logic directs attention at the debt that can be seen, of the legers that make explicit what people owe one another. The financial bailout presented the spectacle of enormous wealth – first the $787 billion in Troubled Asset Relief Program, and eventually what would become the equivalent of the entire U.S. tax base of $14 trillion dollars offered on behalf of what was considered a social necessity (Sourcewatch 2012). The terms of exchange for this massive wealth transfer would be permanent austerity for all manner of social expenditure. The Occupy movements, but also the ongoing debate over continued Bush era tax cuts, certainly rendered the question of whose debt a political issue (Graeber 2011; Dienst 2011). But perhaps the more suggestive avenue of debt politics is not in the direction of blame and refusal – as much as these have brought the issue to
the fore – but in a consideration of what it means to be able to suddenly muster trillions of dollars and to undertake a public deliberation over what might be done with a social surplus that was never acknowledged as such to be one. Permeating all aspects of social life with metrics of risk not only shifted burdens for social production from government security programs onto individuals as managers of their own fates (Hacker 2006); it also created a vast second shift of risk productive activity as well as a nascent literacy in the face of a manufactured illiteracy around what finance is and does.

In one respect, the derivative is the pure idiom of the numerate vision of social life: that all outcomes and appreciations can be calculated, foretold, made legible, and acted upon. Once wealth is presented in the aggregate and a language exists for making claims upon this mountain of debt made in common, questions of inequality and therefore of redistribution can be brought to the fore. That which is invisible can be rendered transparent; that which is frozen in the vaults of private equity, hedge funds, proprietary trading, can be released to liquidity. This is certainly a way of understanding the politics of debt refusal on the one hand and the refusal to lend, invest or employ that marks the current capital strike. The difference is that now the illiquidity of capital confronts the fact of a social surplus that was explicitly assigned to get the economy moving again.

A Politics of Excess

But the derivative is not simply a process of making money appear as self-expansive and therefore to direct collective attention to the universe of number. The derivative also unbundles what was bound and treated as an integral, indivisible unit, an isolated monad, and interweaves, associates and renders these circulating attributes as implicated in one another’s fates. This is not a matter of the debt that can be seen, but of a debt that is sensed. Identity, or derivative attributes of selfhood, it can be observed is borne through bodies, not simply marked on the surface, but detectable in ways of moving, of shared sensibilities, but also of creative and emergent stylistic innovations. Certainly these attributes that comprise styles are also crucial to the expansion of cultural commodities, the imperative to look to identity through personal collection and social consumption.

If for capital, this cultural turn has been a factor in the expansion of consumer debt, also apparent is the expanded realm of political demands, of equal rights surely, but also of recognition of difference that augur an expansion of social forms as such. Taken together as part of the broader movements of decolonization, a significant outcome is the expansion of social indebtedness as what eludes, escapes, and exceeds measure. Hence, the anxieties over the mobilizing masses, the concerns of contagion that attach to moral panics, register an unseen debt and expanding sociality to sets capital to flight. If accessing the social surplus prompts a resolution of the liquidity crisis through which more just distributions of wealth
might be made; there is also the risk of an insolvency crisis, an inability to trace through all of the circuits of debt in order to find the value there. The greatest contradiction of the derivative has been to efface the distinction between illiquidity and insolvency, to make it impossible to know whether valuable assets exist but cannot be sold, or whether say, home mortgages are so under water, the prices have declined so steeply, that all value has escaped the vault that had held it – but to where did it escape?

Conclusion

The derivative brings attention to the excess of the social as the very basis for new needs, demands, and desires that shape the political horizon. Such excess generates not a clear object that can be seen, but opacity, an unrecorded debt precisely of the sort that Marx named for the commodity labor power. Again, one direction of that labor’s surplus was reclaimed as surplus value, but another becomes the basis for the continuous effort to reduce, elude, contain the debt to labor that yields the tendency for the rate of profit to fall. The derivative points to the ways in which finance, which seemed to be sheer self-expanding quantity, of money making money, also bears the internal relations of socializing labor through commodity production. If the derivative performs such a double session of the social; of surplus value and an excess of the social itself, then the politics of debt would consist in rearticulating these two moments. One is where debt is refused in order to make a claim upon it. Another where debt is embraced in order to be claimed by the abundant sociality that ultimately decides what the wealth of a given society might be if it is to be a “society of the producers.” Re-aligning and re-valuing the relation between abundance and excess would perhaps open the horizon of communism that the derivative poses.

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Abstract
Cultural policies in Europe were designed, albeit in significantly different ways national and ideological lines, as an additional component of the Welfare State. They were supposed to bring about democracy in cultural consumption by removing the obstacles on the road to giving access to symbolic goods. Since the ’80s and the neo-liberal turn, this democratic imperative has declined, and was even labeled a complete failure, and new goals for cultural policy emerged: developing the conditions for a creative society, supporting city branding, and encouraging private sponsorship. This change in political justification created new contradictions and some disenchantment among the professionals who were, in growing numbers, employed in the cultural sector. The current crisis of capitalism has two main consequences. Shrinking budgets add new limits on cultural policy as culture tends to be identified as a “supplement of soul” when basic needs are no longer addressed and new claims for full democratic access to cultural resources.

Keywords: Cultural policy, creative society, neo-liberalism, democracy crisis, capitalism.
Introduction

Cultural policy might not be the most important dimension of government action, but it encapsulates all the contradictions of public action. The development of cultural industries in a globalized world and the generalization of a form of “soft power” (Nye 2004), that no longer needs to go through the channels of cultural diplomacy, have deepened those contradictions. The relative weakening of the nation-state has increased the limitations of a national cultural policy, particularly in the European Union, where “national exceptions” are increasingly targeted by supra-national regulations. Cultural policy is split between democratization and creation, between the autonomy of the artist and the need to meet the cultural needs of a diverse population, between the necessary rationality of public choice and the arbitrariness of taste, between the universality of aesthetic values and the heterogeneity of various identity claims. Cultural policies may differ greatly from one country to another according to the different definitions of the public interest. However, these contradictions are present everywhere, albeit in different combinations. The current crisis of capitalism reveals the limits of our optimist views on the “creative turn” in contemporary societies and leads us to rethink the democratic potentialities of cultural life. Richard Florida’s creative society does not look as flamboyant as it used to. What is called creative society amounts quite often to precarious labor, growing unemployment in the cultural sector, and a huge amount of social frustration among the younger generations. What does the “right to culture” means now, more than sixty years after it was introduced by the UNESCO Declaration of Human Rights in 1948? Is it still a collective and valuable ambition? In the first part of my presentation, I analyze the inherent contradictions that undermine the very notion of cultural policy. The second part is an overview of the consequences of the current crisis.

Contradictory Models

If we remain at a very general level, defining cultural policy is very easy. It is about government action “with respect to the arts (including the for-profit cultural industries), the humanities, and the heritage” (Schuster 2003: 1). Things get more complex as soon as we reach more specific forms of action, not only because, as Mulcahy reminds us in his theoretical approach, it encompasses a vast array of activities, from fine arts to quilting and marching bands (Mulcahy 2006:321). Cultural policy addresses simultaneously the artist and the public, two social entities that can be at odds with each other since the growing autonomy of the artistic gesture and the end of the “art de plaire” conceived as the norm of aesthetic production. It combines profit and non-profit in a hardly decidable mix. It praises eternal masterpieces and popular culture in the meantime. It contributes to establishing hierarchies of taste and promotes the equivalence of all forms of cultural expres-
Identity claims co-exist with the implicit acceptance of the effects of globalization. Of course, the definition of a cultural policy largely depends on the role of the state, the degree of centralization, the forms of governance, and the share of the private sector. In this respect, France and the United States can be opposed term to term. Historical and bureaucratic traditions matter: “many countries support what is known as cultural industries, or what would be known in the United States as ‘entertainment business,’ whether to preserve an old cultural heritage or to develop a nascent culture.” It is worth noting, since one of the main historical justifications of cultural policy is based on the distinction between “real culture,” viewed as a civic and emancipatory endeavor, and mere entertainment, defined as a form of passive consumption.

Mulcahy points out what I would like to define as the paradoxical nature of cultural policy, wherever it is applied. A very limited share of the nation budget is associated with a multiplicity of tasks and a rare complexity of governance, particularly concerning the decision criteria and the action evaluation. Of course, policy goals have changed over time: One of the most striking turns remains Margaret Thatcher’s redefinition of British cultural policy, which has set new standards for the neo-liberal turn in this domain, but less visible reorientations have occurred in countries less sensitive to that type of ideology (Alexander 2007). This is the case in France, where the “commodification” of great museums, particularly the Louvre, has been heavily debated and the public-private partnership enthusiastically supported by the state (even with leftist governments) in the last twenty years. The “privatization” of culture has become a common goal that transcends diverse types of governance and is to some extent a consequence of the success of cultural policies that have generated new forms of action, for example, equipping small towns with a set of cultural institutions or creating very big units with huge personnel and maintenance costs. The system has also created enormous social expectations in the population about “cultural careers,” either artistic or managerial. In very different countries, the increase in cultural employment goes with the increase in cultural unemployment, but the attractiveness of artistic and cultural occupations, no matter vague they are, has not diminished. Pierre-Michel Menger’s pioneering work on artistic occupations can be recalled at this stage.

Artistic labor markets are puzzling and challenging ones for social scientists...Evidence of sustained growth in artistic employment over the last 20 years is amply documented by several surveys and Census sources, and trends are quite similar in most advanced countries. In the United States, over the period 1970–1990, the number of artists grew at a rate of 127%—much more rapidly than the civilian labor force, and the rate of increase has continued to be high...Obviously, fluctuations in supply and demand of artistic labor do not provide a satisfying explanation of what appears to be highly unbalanced growth (Menger 1999).

The present development of labor markets for the arts shows an apparently irresistible trend toward flexibility. According to Menger’s assumption, this explains...
the underlying process characterized by the pervasive uncertainty of artistic undertakings and careers. It gives an account of how individuals, as well as organizations, handle uncertain prospects and manage the correlated individual and business risks. This model is well-known now and seems to work in very different countries.

Of course, part of the situation is the consequence of a collective illusion: Believing in the increasing cultural appetites of the population and in the necessity of carrying people to the institutions is not entirely based on witnessing a precise or rapid change, if one leaves aside entertainment industries. Public support tends to blur the real situation, and young people continue to develop sincere hopes in the “culturization” of the world. In France, the spectacular success of the higher education offer in cultural management or intermediation (around 100 master-degree-level programs now) shows that, particularly for girls, the cultural world has replaced teaching as a model for occupational future (Dubois 2013). The more the younger generations are rebuked by the low salaries and what is seen as the stressful lives of teachers, the more they dream of being involved in cultural occupations. This is again a paradox, since it is difficult to conceive a form of sustainable cultural action that would not be based on education. There is a kind of social magic here, which has to do with the ideology of creative society.

This ideology has developed along with the neo-liberal turn. The extraordinary success of Richard Florida's theses can be analyzed in retrospect as a symptom rather than a consequence of their sheer explanatory power. Florida succeeded in creating an ambiance blurring the division of labor existing and increasing in the world of “thought leadership” and of the development of “meaningful new forms,” (Florida 2002) as if “problem-solving” attitudes were contemporary to the “rise of the creative class.” The so-called super-creative core was stratified and was as much an oversimplification as the “cognitariat,” this new proletariat of knowledge, invented by Hardt and Negri in Empire (Hardt & Negri 2000). Rather than those big frescoes, one should prefer more detailed analyses of the changes in the workforce.

In the more recent book Le travail créateur, Pierre-Michel Menger (2009) discusses the legend of artistic creation as subversive, solitary, and linked to anti-utilitarianism (artistic work being posited against labor) and shows that today artists develop their projects in the environment of new capitalism, although there is no such thing as a critical view in Menger’s work. They fit completely into the model of hyperflexibility, acceptation of growing inequalities, teamwork, and short-term projects. Such a paradox stems from the fact that the post-industrial worker and the artist look alike, and that they melt into the type of the new “creative worker.” The artist is no longer an exception in the world of capitalism but becomes a kind of prototype who has integrated the changes in capitalism earlier than his or her fellow citizens. The Art worlds are a laboratory where the transformations may be observed. Thus, the division of labor is seen by Menger as a
functional division that generates interdependency relationships, from cooperation to conflict, but not frozen in a direct and organized hierarchy. The traditional forms of long-lasting and disciplinary authority and command diminish. The individualization of links gives more autonomy and responsibility to the subject. In the meantime, such an organization of work increases the chances of unemployment and failure as a result of the reputational inequalities. The division of artistic work has two great principles: individualism and risk. Here, the old philosophical question of the determination of artistic value re-appears. The individual creativity, expressing a unique talent, is evaluated by the market and the public. In the Art worlds, as well as in the Sport worlds, unbelievable differences in gains are celebrated and valued. Their markets are characterized by the most astonishing apology of inter-individual competition, most of the time as “winner takes all” markets. Achievement in sports is frequently based on a killer instinct, and a form of deadly competition tends to become the norm of individual action. Even in the realm of sciences, cooperation is less praised than the solitary achievement of the genius. Thus, what is labeled creative work allows a rather radical social Darwinian vision of the world.

The artistic work offers also the best example of hyper-flexibility at every level of occupational activity: The traditional model of salaried work is disorganized. The workermultiplies short-term contracts; she becomes an autonomous professional, but at her own expense. The final question is: Are the artists the forerunners of a new social structure oriented toward the needs of new capitalism? The portrait of the artist as a worker might also be the sketch of the portrait of the worker as an artist, and of course, most of the time, as an unsuccessful artist.

This has to be compared with Boltanski and Chiapello’s thesis in The New Spirit of Capitalism (Boltanski & Chiapello 1999/2005). Although this book was written before Boltanski’s rather flamboyant return to a critical stance, the book contains more potential for reintroducing political issues (Boltanski 2011; Fabiani 2011b). I would simply like to point out the importance of the “artistic” critique in the ideological justification of new capitalism. Capitalism has the genuine capacity to integrate the artistic view of the world. Freedom, liberation, and authenticity are recognized as the core values of new capitalism. Here we are not far from the idea of the artist as a forerunner of capitalist justification or legitimation. However, Boltanski and Chiapello have added a new set of inescapable questions concerning the convergence of an artistic worldview and the reorganization of capitalism. Are not the ideas of freedom and authenticity void of their artistic meaning in the realm of new capitalism? Is the search for profit compatible with authenticity and with individual responsibility? Artistic critique is not yet the strength of social critique. But one can recognize quite a few signs of anxiety as a connected and entirely flexible world develops. The spread of new capitalism does not bring about the expected re-enchantment of the world that it seemed to promise. On the contrary, it seems to lead to huge difficulties in projecting oneself into the future.
The connected world is mainly connected to the present and to short-term involvements and relationships. The efficiency of the system may seem to provide the individual with more opportunities (more encounters, more exotic sex, more travel, more professional experience), but it increases the level of frustration. Of course, the implicit acceptance of risk and the taken-for-granted ideology of the successful genius now constitute a very powerful tool of symbolic domination. Individuals believe less and less in the powers of collective struggles, although the most successful artistic endeavors, as in the movie or television industries, are still characterized by the power of guilds or by the existence of strong unions. But it does not suffice to guarantee the smooth functioning of the system. More and more people, although increasingly connected and willing to be self-employed entrepreneurs, think that they cannot come to grips with their environments. Quite often, autonomy means anxiety, loneliness, and devaluation of the self. The world has become completely precarious. Short-term work assignments correspond to short-term life involvements when it comes to marriage and children. Richard Florida has defined gay educated people as a sort of cultural avant-garde, and his “gay index” has become the indicator of creativity in urban settings. However, the mobilizations for gay marriage in the most developed countries clearly show that contrary to the creative imagery, many gay people aspire to stable forms of social life. In addition, younger generations, who should more willingly accept the constraints of new capitalism, are more affected by dissatisfaction with life.

In its ideological history, capitalism has been constantly associated with freedom and autonomy. They are the main objects of its self-justification or legitimization process. And with new capitalism we seem to have reached a peak in this process. However, new capitalist liberation has very high costs. It has destroyed securities developed in the Welfare State (especially the security of employment), and it has developed diverse new forms of control, the most important undoubtedly the controls exerted by the self, giving a new meaning to the process of disciplinarization developed by Michel Foucault (1978). With new capitalism, we are like artists. We may play the role we want to play. Achievement reigns versus ascription. We are completely mobile and flexible; we can forget all our former links and develop new projects as much as we want. This process has generalized the commodification of all activities including culture and leisure, and, perhaps even worse, the commodification of human authentic qualities. It becomes difficult in our world to distinguish clearly between authentic and non-authentic values, since we have to constantly produce our own authenticity, to play it or to perform it, so to speak. Being commodified, the authenticity of goods becomes a sign of their inauthenticity, but in turn, capitalism is able to integrate the critique of inauthenticity and to provide the market with new “authentic” goods that will be quickly replaced by others. How can one be “authentic” and in the meantime completely flexible and available for all the mobility and changes of the self required in that world? The worker is an artist, in as much as he or she can play all
the roles needed by new capitalism. However, he or she has the duties of an artist (being versatile enough to satisfy the audience) but not necessarily the recognition of artistic prowess (being multiple by the deepening of the self or by the quest for intensity). The democracy of talents allowed by the new capitalism might be a world of simulacra or a huge ideological illusion.

Freely using Boltanski and Chiapello’s ideas, we have thus reached a critical point about creative society. At least, we have seen that there was a contradiction between the dreams of a connected, creative, and free society and the reality of short-term commitments. Of course, those criticisms do not take into account what Menger stressed, the growing acceptance of a higher level of risk, the recognition of the unequal distribution of talents. I tend to ignore the development of safety nets in what could be a redefined Welfare State associating flexibility and security. These safety nets are not evenly provided in each country. Post-socialist countries lack the most in this respect. This is why they are sometimes considered more vulnerable to the ideologies of creative entrepreneurship. In France, a form of cultural Welfare State emerged after the Second World War. Two of its most original features are now under attack. The first is the “intermittents du spectacle,” these very numerous workers, artists and technicians, employed in show business on a casual basis who can collect unemployment benefits on a disdainful scheme, with fewer hours worked. The other one is the advance on earnings (avance sur recettes) in cinema that allows more French movies to be produced with funds collected from a tax on theatre tickets, ironically mainly bought to watch US blockbusters. Both schemes were created to alleviate the risks of cultural endeavors, and they have been quite efficient for more than sixty years. But they cost taxpayers, and do not fit the ideology of neo-liberalism. Artists are portrayed as assisted people or even parasites. Diverse governments, right and left, have not yet made radical choices, since it would undoubtedly weaken the cultural activities in France. But it shows that the cultural sector is now the heart of violent ideological fights in the name of “liberalizing” and “privatizing” artistic activities. French neo-liberalism is deeply ambivalent regarding culture: While praising the autonomy of the artists, it aims to dismantle the institutional tools that led to its development. This attitude is a very good example of a broader trend. Cultural activities should be aligned on the economy as a whole. The current crisis has increased this trend and offered new justifications for radical change. We must turn now to the analysis of the first consequences of the crisis.

The Effects of the Current Crisis

In the last sixty years, culture has been to some extent a constitutive element of the welfare state in the West. Culture has provided many new facilities to citizens. Museums, libraries, theatres, and festivals have blossomed. In spite of the strong inequalities of access to cultural goods, these institutions have become common
features of the cityscapes. They are considered an index of what a good life can be, notwithstanding the educational benefits attached to their regular use. In socialist countries, culture was ideologically central on somewhat different grounds and played a very important role in public life. After the fall of the Berlin wall, the communist cultural world brutally fell apart and had to be reshaped along new policy lines. Thus, culture is undoubtedly a central feature of the contemporary public sphere and has even, as nicely shown by Jim McGuigan, become a cultural public sphere of its own (McGuigan 2004, 2011). In all countries, cultural institutions are oriented by public funding and public policy. Cultural public policies have two major dimensions. The first is public support for the arts and the democratization of access to cultural goods. The second is the regulatory aspect of the government activities and deals mainly with the control of cultural industries. Thus, the shrinking of state and municipal budgets as a whole has had a direct and immediate impact on cultural life, since it depends so heavily on public expenditures. Luis Bonet and Fabio Donato think that the former socialist countries have an edge in this respect.

Nowadays, this is paradoxically an advantage for them, since they know how to face processes of radical change better than Western European countries. They are more aware of how to deal with instability and how to move to a very different political, social and economic system. (Bonet & Donato 2011).

This, of course, remains to be seen, but is a very interesting idea as the austerity packages are not likely to fade away in the near future. Thus far, there have been no major changes in most countries since the beginning of the financial crisis. We witnessed more adjustments to the situation than promises of structural change. In some countries, where the issue is extremely touchy, as in France, there has been no major change in public funding yet. If the crisis deepens, it is very likely that decreasing public budgets will have major consequences on cultural choices. In the past few decades, two trends have coexisted: the funding of very big institutions viewed as nation or city flagships and the dissemination of small cultural units created to serve the everyday needs of local populations. In the near future, contradictions between the two sides of the cultural policies might grow. Less money will imply drastic political choices, and is very likely to lead to the shrinking or even the closing of some institutions. A sort of cultural rust belt might even appear. This is not pure speculation. Last fall in Germany, some people expressed the wish to significantly reduce the number of cultural institutions in the country. There seem to be no possible relief from the private sector, for three reasons. The private sector can handle a few prestigious endeavors and cultural flagships but cannot handle the democratizing aspect of public policy. The crisis had an impact on firms’ funding capacity, and the public-private partnership has not always been very efficient. Households must now pick up the bills for cultural bounties if they want to benefit from them. However, it is very doubtful that average households can replace traditional philanthropists.
As the first available data show, the budget cuts have direct consequences. There has been a decrease in new cultural productions and an indirect decrease in cultural consumption (EUROSTAT 2011; see also Inkei 2010). It is very likely that this situation will diminish the level of risk taking among cultural operators and increase the amount of “popular” programming. It will also make the race for private sponsorship even more intense. As we know, those trends are not new, and they have tended to shape the policy of big institutions since the neo-liberal turn. Margaret Thatcher's policy, even as reshuffled by New Labour, has been a case in point, but it is undoubtedly a larger trend, as the numerous controversies about the “commodification” of the Louvre in France clearly show. The battle against the Abu Dhabi extension of the Louvre opposed two types of cultural actors: the new managers, who think that anything goes as long as it brings prestige and money, and the traditional curators and art historians, who think that their first aim is to preserve the heritage from the aggressions of time but also from the demands of the market.

Pierre-Michel Menger, as we already know, has shown that the number of people engaging in cultural occupations has increased more quickly than the slots available in the sector (Menger 2002). Will the deepening crisis reverse this strong and long-term trend? The budget cuts affect the weakest actors in the field first: young people who make their debuts and have no established reputation, small theatres with scarce audience, and the most “experimental” parts of artistic life. But it can be the other way, too. Poor prospects in the overall job market can attract young people to an impoverished form of bohemia by allowing them to postpone confronting harsh realities. This depends of course on the possibilities of what will remain of the welfare state. Thus, two situations can coexist: the survival of the fittest, the talented, the connected, and so on and so forth and the “artistization” of the multitude. However, impoverishment of the sector can lead to aesthetic changes. Smaller budgets can lead to new forms of “poor art” and to seeking new forms of relationships with the public. New forms of justification are about to appear. Some forms of philistinism or cultural conservatism are already flourishing. They are not new in the landscape, of course. The National Endowment for Arts is characterized by a long history of protest against the public funding of “obscene” or pornographic art that has not prevented its success (Shockley 2011). The former president of France, Nicolas Sarkozy, is famous for a statement he made at the end of a play at the Comédie Française: “One does not come to the Comédie Française to get bored.” This is common, but in a time of crisis, the conservative may become more vocal as the shortage of money seems to give more weight to cutting budgets for superfluous or elite endeavors. More generally, the new constraints on public choice will generate an awareness of the limited possibilities of public action in the cultural sector. This is particularly true when it comes to heritage policy. In the last few decades, we have witnessed what I call the “heritagization” (patrimonialization) of everything as identity claims and de-
hierarchizing of cultural values have made every single object, building, or now intangible items a potential candidate for local or worldly recognition.

Against a form of cultural pessimism that is likely to occur when one thinks of the dangers ahead, I would like to end with a more positive tone. Since the neoliberal turn, the deepest meanings of the idea of a cultural policy have been lost. Absurdly believing that a Bilbao Guggenheim could be easily planted in every declining seaport of the world and bring fame to the city was the most salient effect of the so-called cultural turn. The MUCEN (Museum of the Civilizations of Europe and the Mediterranean) in Marseilles is a case in point (Bias & Fabiani 2011). The controversies that have arisen in this city about the public funding of the Cultural Capital of Europe in 2013 are extremely interesting, because they show the structural contradictions of cultural policy: either allocating funds to local initiatives or contributing to city-branding. Again, these disputes are not new, and they accompanied the development of the Guggenheim in Bilbao, but the funding shortage will redefine the terms of the debate. Who can define the public interest in culture? Is culture equipped with emancipatory properties? How can they be reassessed in light of the current situation? How can a cultural public sphere be consolidated? I propose to put these questions on the new agenda of cultural policy makers.


Notes
1 An earlier version of this text was presented at the International Conference on Cultural Policy Research asa keynote address (Barcelona, July 2012)
2 Richard Florida’s creative society (2002) is undoubtedly the most striking example of an ideological construct, with the dimension of a self-fulfilling prophecy. According to Florida, metropolitan regions with high concentrations of high-tech workers, artists, musicians, gay men, and "high bohemians", correlate with a higher level of economic development. The creative class is by such attractive: it has the power of fostering cultural and economic growth. Business is attracted by culture: the creative class is oriented towards openness and personal development. Attracting the members of the creative class is the surest way of securing continuous development.
References


The Neoliberal Self

Jim McGuigan

Abstract

This article proposes an ideal type of the neoliberal self as the preferred form of life in the economic, political and cultural circumstances of present-day developed and developing capitalism. The neoliberal self combines the idealised subject(s) of classical and neoclassical economics – featuring entrepreneurship and consumer sovereignty – with the contemporary discourse of ‘the taxpayer’, who is sceptical of redistributive justice, and a ‘cool’ posture that derives symbolically – and ironically – from cultures of disaffection and, indeed, opposition. In effect, the transition from organised capitalism to neoliberal hegemony over the recent period has brought about a corresponding transformation in subjectivity. As an idea type, the neoliberal self cannot be found concretely in a ‘pure’ form, not even represented by leading celebrity figures. The emergent characteristics of the ideal type, though not set out formally here, accentuate various aspects of personal conduct and mundane existence for illustrative and analytical purposes. Leading celebrities, most notably high-tech entrepreneurs, for instance, operate in the popular imagination as models of achievement for the aspiring young. They are seldom emulated in real life, however, even unrealistically so. Still, their famed lifestyles and heavily publicised opinions provide guidelines to appropriate conduct in a ruthlessly competitive and unequal world.

Keywords: Cool culture, entrepreneurship, ideal (social) type, neoliberalism, organised capitalism, preferred self, sovereign consumption.
Introduction

This article explores the hypothesis that the leading cultural, political and economic features of a given civilisation tend to be implicated in the construction of a preferred self, that is, a discernible social type. The hypothesis does not claim that everyone or even a majority of people within such a civilisation will necessarily display the typical characteristics of a preferred self, merely that there is a social pressure to do so. Although the argument here has psychological implications, the proposition concerning a preferred self is principally a sociological proposition. The following observations are inspired by Margaret Thatcher’s notorious description of her own politics in 1981 when she remarked that the method is economic but the object is to change the soul.

Substantively, the article is concerned with the transition between two phases of capitalist hegemony throughout the world during the late twentieth century, in effect, from the mid-century phase of organised capitalism to the presently hegemonic phase of neoliberal capitalism. The key ideological sources, assumptions and conjunctures of this transformative process are identified and related to their implications for selfhood, drawing upon the insights and methodological precepts of such theorists as Ulrich Beck, Michel Foucault, Georg Simmel and Max Weber within a broadly cultural-materialist framework.

The article constructs an ideal typification of the neoliberal self, emphasising how demotic neoliberalism, with the aid of celebrity role models, instructs the conduct of the young in general today. It is probably most evident in financial occupations, particularly so in what has come to be seen as an arcane and virtually sacred – or, at least, priestly – practice of stock-broking but also in the profanely popular work of the Devil, leisure-time gambling, which has become such a normalised feature of everyday life. Neoliberal selfhood is especially discernible as well in the lifestyles, aspirations and frustrations of entrants to the ‘creative industries’, a phenomenon that is likely to be of special interest to those of us involved in cultural analysis and media research.

Neoliberal Hegemony

Although neoliberalism is first and foremost a doctrine of political economy, it is also, rather more diffusely, a principle of civilisation that shapes the socio-cultural makeup of people through socialisation in the broadest sense.

Neoliberal political economy imagines that the free-play of market forces – the ineluctable laws of supply and demand that operate unencumbered according to the never actually existing model of ‘perfect competition’ – is the magical elixir for prosperity. Enlightened avarice is the motivating incentive for the self. In an inversion of Marx’s labour theory of value, the Schumpeterian entrepreneur is said to be the ‘wealth creator’. Some of the wealth thus created by full-blooded
capitalism is said to trickle down to the masses eventually though equalisation as such is neither a priority nor a goal. And, in any case, inequality is no bad thing since there have to be winners and losers of any genuine competition. Competitive business gives the consumer what he or she wants, matching supply with demand. Choice is vital in the sphere of consumption; the consumer is sovereign. People, moreover, should be able to provide for themselves and their families rather than being looked after by a paternalistic state. It follows, therefore, that taxpayers must not be robbed by excessive taxation. Private provision in a competitive and, therefore, efficient marketplace is always better than wasteful public provision, which tends to involve the frittering away of other people’s hard-won earnings by irresponsible bureaucrats.

The successful entrepreneur, sovereign consumer and hard-working taxpayer, these are key players in the capitalist game today. At one time it was thought by well-intentioned but misguided people, as we are told constantly these days, that socialism might be a good idea. Whether or not there was any truth in that dated hope, according to conventional wisdom, we now know for sure that socialism never works in practice; it stunts innovation, deprives us of our individual freedom and wastes our precious money.

As David Harvey (2005: 3) argues, then, neoliberalism is not only economic policy and hard-nosed politics but it actually frames the meaning of everyday reality for people: ‘Neoliberalism has, in short, become hegemonic as a mode of discourse... [with] pervasive effects’. So, as well as promoting ‘the market’ not only in the economic but also in the political field (i.e. ‘liberal democracy’) of contemporary capitalism, neoliberalism is implicated in an ideological battle for hearts and minds over everything, most insidiously by influencing the very language that is used mundanely. As Bourdieu & Wacquant (1991: 2) maintain, there is a ‘new planetary vulgate’ articulated in the now tediously familiar lexicon of ‘NewLiber-alSpeak’.

Moreover, the unquestionable legitimacy of neoliberalism is represented daily in the news. Mainstream media seldom, if ever, actually name neoliberalism or call it into question. Instead, politics is represented naturalistically in places like Britain and the USA these days as a debate over how to be ‘competitive’ under ‘global’ conditions in pursuit of ‘growth’ according to the taken-for-granted market and budgetary principles of neoliberalism. These principles put into action are currently meant to clear up the mess that was, in fact, caused by neoliberal economics and politics in the first place.

Since the meltdown of 2007-8 even quasi-Keynesian measures have been tried, such as spending huge amounts of public (‘taxpayers’) money to save banks in neoliberal regimes, especially in countries like Britain, with the forlorn hope that this infusion of cash would actually be used to boost ailing ‘private-sector’ enterprise. That Friedrich Von Hayek and Milton Friedman, according to expert opinion, are supposed to have refuted the efficacy of such policy and sent it packing
long ago is not usually acknowledged when that assumption no longer holds apparently in practice. Neoliberalism is nothing if not contradictory.

Commenting on the failure of the British Conservative Coalition government’s austerity programme to actually reduce the budget deficit, including draconian benefit cuts, Ha-Joon Chang (2013: 50) has said shrewdly, ‘spending cuts are not about deficits but about rolling back the welfare state’, thereby identifying the deep project of hegemonic transformation, which is about structural change. At the same time, the European Union’s Central Bank claims to be alleviating suffering in debt-ridden Greece whilst, in effect, worsening it. Yet, in spite of notable instances of lavish state intervention as well as austerity measures, the authority of ‘free-market’ economics retains its credibility – albeit perhaps somewhat less securely now – in business schools, government finance departments and op-ed columns.

Capitalism had emerged historically in various financial and mercantile manifestations before the enclosures of common land during the eighteenth century. It only became truly systemic on a societal basis, however, in the nineteenth century when the principles of free trade and mass production were put into practice with gusto in Britain by the industrial bourgeoisie. With the exception of a few protectionist measures like the Corn Laws, the state was not meant to interfere in the natural workings of enterprise and trade. Government was not entirely minimalist, however: the state established legal arrangements to facilitate business – the joint-stock company, contractual regulations, restrictions on trade unions, etc. It also backed up capitalist exploitation and class domination by force when necessary by sending in the troops. Gun-boat diplomacy was another specialism of the British state and the militarily-policed empire was an immense source of raw materials and markets. Admittedly, some progressive legislation was enacted too, for instance, on abolishing slavery and curtailing child labour in order to affect a semblance of civilisation and assuage humanitarian sentiment. It is convenient to label this phase of capitalist development, liberal capitalism.

Liberal capitalism emerged in national pockets and, through international trade, its tentacles spread across the world. It became vulnerable, however, due to periodic downturns in the trade cycle and to the challenge of emerging labour movements, exacerbated by the rise of socialism and, then in the early twentieth century, confronted by the counter-system of communism, which for a while looked as though it might bypass the crisis tendencies of capitalism. Communism also claimed to serve its people with greater fairness and equality. In the Soviet Union, the very notion of ‘socialist man’ was promoted by the authorities to be a better model of conduct than the greedy individualism of capitalism’s ‘economic man’ during the 1920s and ‘30s. From the Thirties right up to the Sixties and, for some post-colonial countries, a few years beyond, Soviet Communism offered a credible alternative to capitalism. Furthermore, public ownership of ‘the commanding heights’, state planning and management of economic resources were
also considered promising measures to combine with free enterprise in the ‘mixed economies’ of the West.

Already such developments were hinted at earlier within capitalism itself by what Rudolf Hilferding (1919/1981) called ‘organised capitalism’, originally referring specifically to cooperation in German cartels of firms so as to control the market instead of relying on bitter competition between rivals. Later, during the Depression of the 1930s, unregulated markets and irresponsible speculation were denounced universally. A period of state intervention in Western capitalism was ushered in, including Roosevelt’s ‘New Deal’ and the construction of social-democratic welfare states in Europe. At that time, belief in the efficacy of large-scale state intervention was shared by Keynesian liberals, social democrats, socialists, communists and fascists alike. The remarkable consensus around this expanded form of organised capitalism contributed greatly to the post Second World War ‘golden age’ of rapidly advancing affluence and moves towards equalisation of opportunities and rewards on both sides of the Atlantic.

The crisis of the 1970s following the OPEC (Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries) hikes in the oil price, however, triggered the turn away from organised capitalism. The USA led the way, accompanied by Britain, in dismantling the post-war settlement of egalitarian reform, including variously, institutionalised collective bargaining for higher wages and better working conditions, and ‘the social wage’ of relatively generous welfare entitlements and so on. Fordist vertical integration was broken down in industrial organisation, to be replaced by complex networking and outsourcing. Thus the devastation of deindustrialisation was under way in the former Northern and Western heartlands of capitalism. Manufacturing and heavy-industry were transferred increasingly to cheap labour markets in the developing South and East. And, there was a switch back to the pre-Keynesian and less adulterated capitalist nostrums of neo-classical economics.

This shift from organised capitalism to the currently hegemonic neoliberal capitalism worldwide is a big story of the past thirty to forty years, possibly bigger even than the collapse of ‘actually-existing socialism’ in former communist states, albeit facilitated by it. Stuart Hall (1988) always insisted in the 1980s that a local and pioneering instance of this transformation, the ‘authoritarian populism’ of successive Thatcher-led governments in Britain, represented a hegemonic project, not an achieved hegemony. His attitude now to the much broader and globalising category of neoliberalism – which subsumes Thatcherism, Reagonomics and much else besides – is somewhat less provisional. However, he still insists quite rightly, following his theoretical inspiration, Antonio Gramsci, that hegemony is never a static condition: ‘No project achieves “hegemony” as a completed project. It is a process, not a state of being. No victories are permanent or final’ (Hall 2011: 26).

‘Neoliberalism’ is a catch-all term for a complex amalgam of ideas and policies with significant variation amongst its constituent streams of thought and prac-
tice; from, say, the ‘anarcho-liberalism’ of the USA through the ‘social-market’ of the Federal Republic of Germany to the state-directed forms of East Asia. From a Centrist position, Daniel Stedman Jones has surveyed this complexity in considerable historical detail in his *Masters of the Universe – Hayek, Friedman, and the Birth of Neoliberal Politics*. He concentrates most specifically, however, on transatlantic currents and cross-currents. In that regard, he provides a basic definition of transatlantic neoliberalism: ‘the free market ideology based on individual liberty and limited government that connected human freedom to the actions of the rational, self-interested actor in the market place’ (Stedman Jones 2012: 2). This definition has the virtue of including a conception of the individual subject within the matrix of neoliberal ideas, ‘the rational, self-interested actor in the market place’; or, to put it another way, Stedman Jones’s glimpse of the neoliberal self.

Stedman Jones disagrees, on the one hand, with the ‘inevitabilist’ school of apologists for neoliberalism, the argument that it was a doctrine whose time of necessity had come, which has been expounded, for instance, by Daniel Yergen and Joseph Stanislaw (1998/2002). On the other hand, he also disagrees with ‘Marxists’ like David Harvey (2005), the late Andrew Glyn (2006) and Naomi Klein (2007), who see it as the latest phase of capitalist class struggle around the globe, responding to a longish term decline in profitability and seizing upon disasters to exploit economically (see McGuigan 2009 for a fairer treatment than Stedman Jones’s of these authors). Stedman Jones’s own account of the rise of neoliberalism is meticulously detailed but hardly a convincing explanation: for him, neoliberalism is merely a contingent and surprisingly effective reaction to the failures of state control, full stop.

It is worth noting, incidentally, that the French historian of systems of thought, Michel Foucault was on to the significance of the neoliberal episteme very early. His lectures at the College de France in 1978 and 1979 were supposed to be about what he called ‘the birth of biopolitics’. Yet, in practice, he devoted most of his lecture time to the topic of neoliberalism as a doctrine of political economy and a form of governmentality. Foucault did, however, eventually get around to remarking briefly yet very insightfully on its implications for the self. There are two main reasons for being interested in these lectures now. First, Foucault spotted the historical profundity of a revival of (neo)liberal thought in the 1970s and his observations concerning it were extremely prescient. Second, Foucault realised that neoliberalism was not confined to economics and governmental politics in the conventional sense but that it represented a scheme for reordering the social and a design for refashioning the conduct of the self.

Foucault spoke about the Germanic school of thought that arose during the 1930s on the Right of politics but not in the Nazi camp, the ‘Ordo liberals’, named after their journal, *Ordo*. They rejected National *Socialism* and were fundamentally opposed to welfarism. Contradictory perhaps as it may seem, Ordoliberalism
was fated to frame the policies of the post-war ‘economic miracle’ in the Federal Republic.

In honour of Walter Lippman, Ludwig Von Mises, Von Hayek and others, including Raymond Aron, had held a colloquium in Paris towards the end of the 1930s, at which the term ‘neoliberalism’ was used apparently for the first time (Stedman Jones: 31). They set up the *comite international d’etude pour le renouveau du liberalisme* (CIERL) to promote it. Already faced with creeping socialism, in their opinion, there was a need to renew the liberal principles of nineteenth-century capitalism for changed times. This call for renewal was made before the Second World War and nearly ten years ahead of the 1947 setting up of the Mont Pelerin Society in Switzerland by Von Hayek and Friedman, which made the key transatlantic connection and is normally credited with launching neoliberalism as a political movement, not just a crackpot doctrine of political economy.

For Foucault (2004/2008: 226), the announcement of neoliberalism in the late-1930s and elaborated upon since then was calling for a return to the pre-twentieth century’s *homo oeconomicus* but with a freshly subjective inflection: ‘*Homo oeconomicus* is an entrepreneur, an entrepreneur of himself’. For such a figure, according to Foucault, education is not conceived of being so much about learning as about ‘investment’ (2004/2008: 229). Notions like ‘human capital’ come into play which, Foucault notes, require a ‘mobile’ and flexible self (2004/2008: 230) plus the constant orientation to ‘innovation’ (2004/2008: 231) and ‘growth’. In sum, neoliberalism is about ‘*the application of the economic grid to social phenomena*’ (2004/2008: 239). He goes on to say:

> What is the function of this generalization of the ‘enterprise’ form?... *It* involves extending the economic model of supply and demand and of investment-costs-profit so as to make it a model of social relations and of existence itself, a form of relationship of the individual to himself, time, those around him, the group, and the family.

(Foucault 2004/2008: 242)

Harbouring no great fondness for the state himself, Foucault concludes that the game of neoliberalism is to set the market against the state and, ultimately, to treat the state and all its doings as a marketplace. How prescient indeed he was.

Wendy Brown (2005) has also noted the percipience of Foucault regarding the emergence of neoliberalism, the application of economic reasoning to everything and the construction of a distinctive subjectivity. Following Foucault to the letter, Brown sees neoliberalism as a governmental regime that sets the rules of conduct in all spheres of life and, moreover, she believes it needs little in the way of ideological support to sustain the operations of power. In this respect and on the question of ideological ballast, she understates the contemporary role of mass-popular culture in securing consent to neoliberal hegemony. In my own work on the culture of ‘cool capitalism’ (McGuigan 2009), the incorporation of disaffection is stressed. Signs and symbols of ostensible dissent are joyfully inscribed into capi-
talism itself through mass-popular forms and practices. This ideological-cultural complex is an important supplement to the prosaic construction of *homo oeconomicus* and serves as a means of disarming critical opposition, you might even say, poetically.

**Social Typification**

Louis Althusser’s (1970/1984: 44) gnomic statement, ‘Ideology Interpellates Individuals as Subjects’ was always too generalised and undifferentiated a theoretical proposition. Yet, it does capture something of how we relate to the world. Althusser claimed that we imagine our relation to the world through ideology as a universal feature of human existence. At the same time, however, he wished to explain the ideological reproduction of the conditions and exploitative relations of production specifically under capitalism. He wanted ‘ideology’ to do too much, to serve as a replacement term, in effect, for ‘culture’ as well as a critical concept. But, Althusser’s version of ideology deprived it of the inherently critical promise of correcting distortion.

Alternatively, in order to question neoliberalism as ideology, then, critique is obliged to point out the error of its ways. A preferable concept of ideology, then, is as distorted communication motivated by unequal power relations, a conception inspired by Jurgen Habermas’s (1970) optimistic yet quite possibly unrealisable ideal of undistorted communication. This particular concept of ideology is not strictly attributable to him. Habermas preferred to dispense with the very notion of ideology in his theoretical scheme, opting instead for a consensus rather than correspondence theory of truth. Whether fully attainable or not, some idea of undistorted communication, similar to the concept of the public sphere, is an essential aid to and necessary feature of the critique of ideologically distorted communications in the present author’s opinion. Still, there is an important feature of Althusser’s (1970/1984: 36) Lacanian formulation that is worthy of retention, that ‘Ideology is a “Representation” of the Imaginary Relationship of Individuals to their Real Conditions of Existence’.

There seems to be little doubt that actual, everyday understanding of ourselves in the world is, at the very least, partly a matter of imagination, ranging from mere egotism to the extreme delusions of mental illness. A person’s self-image is always unlikely to correspond exactly with how others see us. Some young women, however, risk their lives trying to attain what they regard as a socially approved ideal, as in anorexia. Conformism might normally be deemed sane whereas non-conformity is often considered insane. Yet, under certain conditions, madness may lie with conformity.

In order to fit in socially some people are neurotically ‘other-directed’, as David Riesman (1950/2001) and his colleagues argued famously on the brink of the 1950s when discussing what they saw as the growing conformism of American
life. Such work gave rise to a spate of ‘characterological’ studies in US social science, which was to result in both wild speculation and earnest empirical research on such notions as ‘the culture of narcissism’ (Lasch 1979), ‘the minimal self’ (Lasch 1984) and, recently revived, discussion of the ‘me generation’ or ‘generation me’ (Twenge 2006) of American youth, this later notion approaching closest to the idea of a neoliberal self. Much of the fascination with self-identity today, however, is too psychologistic in that it fails to address the relation of micro-changes in subjectivity to macro-change in culture and society, something which did, of course, preoccupy Riesman and Lasch.

A recent Guardian/ICM poll came up with findings about what is now being called ‘Generation Self’ on young people’s social attitudes that are especially alarming for Left-liberals in Britain. Guardian journalists, James Ball and Tom Clark (2013: 6) posed the questions: ‘Has Britain raised a new “heartless” generation of children of Thatcher – and, arguably, of Tony Blair? Does this mark the slow death of solidarity?’ It would be prejudging very complicated issues at stake concerning how selfhood today relates to and possibly corresponds to prevailing conditions that are established by polity and economy in the social world to simply adopt what can too easily become a merely moralising complaint about youthful selfishness. This is hardly a fresh complaint anyway and it lacks a sufficiently historical explanation for patterns of behaviour in everyday life.

The construction of the self from early childhood is mediated by the acquisition and use of language. Our sense of self is developed and further sustained through various media of communication, including modern electronic and digital media. It is significant that Manuel Castells (1996), the guru of the sociology of information and communication technologies (ICTs), should open his celebrated ‘information age’ trilogy by discussing the relation between ‘the Net’ and ‘the Self’. For him, this relation is not simply an enhancement of communicability between people but also a contradictory and, in some respects, troubled relation.

‘The Net’ obviously refers to the Internet, the web of information flows facilitated by telematics. However, it is not just this technological capacity. It is also to do with the various ways in which people relate to one another in their personal and working lives, how businesses are structured, how everything is organised through complex network structures, Castells’s ‘network paradigm of society’.

‘The Self’ refers to subjectivity and identity, our individuality. Castells’s network paradigm poses all sorts of questions concerning selfhood today. What sense(s) do we make of ourselves in a social world of hyper communication? Are we all in happy mutuality, forever exchanging emails and mobile phone calls, incessantly chatting with one another? Why is it, then, that widespread experiences of alienation and anomie persist and, in some cases, may be chronic?

As Raymond Williams (for instance, 1974) argued long ago, the experience of ‘mobile privatisation’, the simultaneity of much greater actual and virtual mobility, on the one hand, with an increasingly cocooned, individualised and perhaps
isolated social existence, on the other hand, is a characteristic feature of modern life. Mimi Sheller and John Urry (2006) have formulated yet another new paradigm in the light of the kind of developments in communications that Williams originally spoke of, both in terms of the exchange of messages and travel: ‘the mobilities paradigm’.

In his co-authored book with Anthony Elliott, Mobile Lives, Urry claims to ‘show how the mobilities paradigm can be extended to analysis and critique of self-identity and ordinary daily life’ (Elliott & Urry, 2010: x). Furthermore, it is argued, ‘an intensively mobile society reshapes the self’ (2010: 3). For exploring the lived experience of the mobile subject, Elliott and Urry’s methodological strategy is to tell stories either briefly or at some length about actual or imagined individuals, whom we must consider, presumably, to be socially representative types, not in any sense atypical. There is, for instance, the case of ‘Simone... a British-based academic, originally from Brazil, who travels a great deal for her work’ (2010: 1). And, then there is ‘Sandra Fletcher... [who is] sophisticated and smart – a high-profile advertising executive’ (2010: 25). A favourite source of fictionalised lives for Urry (2007) to recount is David Lodge’s comic novel, Small World, which is about a network of academics who keep meeting up with one another at various conference locations around the world. Such exemplifications of the mobile existence, of course, do little more than illustrate the exceptionally privileged and socially cocooned experience of successful academic careers. This particularistic strategy results in a misplaced concreteness methodologically that undermines the credibility of qualitative social science. It is novelistic and too specific. For analytical purposes, satisfactory identification of a prevalent social type, such as the type under present consideration in this article, the neoliberal self, should be framed at a much higher level of abstraction than merely describing the peculiar characteristics of individuals, either real or imagined.

The Neoliberal Self

If liberal capitalism cultivated puritanical habits in early entrepreneurs and workers, as Max Weber (1905/2002) argued, then, neoliberal capitalism has reversed matters by cultivating a hedonistic spirit that is no longer dysfunctional to business (Boltanski & Chiapello (1999/2005). Such hedonism is connected to a ‘cool-capitalist’ cultural formation that performs an astonishing ideological trick, comparable to Robert Tressell’s ‘Great Money Trick’ (1914/2004), by incorporating signs and symbols of disaffection, affecting a rebellious posture, as in the case of Apple, to popular and extremely profitable effect (McGuigan, 2009). The neoliberal self to be formulated here is consistent with ‘the recasting of identity in terms of flexibility, adaptability and instant transformation’ in the words of Elliott and Urry (2010: 7). According to them, the free movement of networked individual-
ism is the Utopian ideal today, best exemplified by ‘the “fast lane” mobilities of the ultra-rich or global elite’ (2010: 22).

The ideal type of the neoliberal self presented here follows Weber’s methodological argument, with all its qualifications, concerning the ideal type as an artificial heuristic device. To quote Weber:

The concept of the ideal type can direct judgement in matters of imputation; it is not a ‘hypothesis’, but seeks to guide the formation of hypotheses. It is not a representation of the real, but seeks to provide representation with unambiguous means of expression... It is formed by a one-sided accentuation of one or several perspectives, and through the synthesis of a variety of diffuse, discrete, individual phenomena, present sometimes more, sometimes less, sometimes not at all; subsumed by such one-sided, emphatic viewpoints so that they form a uniform construction in thought. In its conceptual purity this construction can never be found in reality, it is a utopia. Historical research has the task of determining in each individual case how close to, or far from, reality such an ideal type is... If employed with care, this concept has specific uses in research and exposition. (Weber in Whimster, 2004: 387-388)

Sociologists from Simmel, through Riesman to Bauman who have deemed it necessary to engage in the depiction of social types usually in order to classify different kinds of situated response to various societal pressures currently experienced have tended to observe Weber’s methodological strictures concerning the ideal type. Take, for instance, Georg Simmel’s use of the ideal typification procedure to characterise the lives of the stranger, the poor, the miser, the spendthrift, the adventurer and the nobility (in Levine 1971: 141-213). These are abstract formulations that do not exactly conform to any particular empirical instance. They are defined, in the Weberian sense, by essential features that are accentuated in order to bring out the most salient aspects of a given form of life. For example, the stranger type is not ‘the wanderer who comes today and is gone tomorrow’ but, instead, is someone ‘who comes today and stays tomorrow’ (1971: 143). Such a typification has obvious relevance for thinking about outsiders in the migrant experience. There is a problem, however, with Simmel’s social types; they are virtually ahistorical archetypes.

Historicisation is methodologically necessary in the construction of an ideal typification of the neoliberal self. This is not just a timeless subject positioning that is hailed by bourgeois ideology, in the Althusserian sense, an ideology which has tended to be defined in the broadest terms by its origins in the philosophy of ‘possessive individualism’ (MacPherson 1964).

To be sure, individualism does still matter but today this is better understood not so much as the bourgeois ideal of personal freedom but as compulsory individualisation instead. As Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim (2001/2002) have argued, individuals are compelled now to make agonistic choices on which way to go at nodal points along their life-course trajectory – there may be no guidance – and also they are required to take sole responsibility for the consequences of choices made or, indeed, not made. Individualisation is a matter of
institutionalised obligation, not free choice. It is as though the post-Second World War philosophy of existentialism that flourished in Parisian cafe society has lately achieved mass-popular diffusion. Now that the old collective supports and scripts no longer apply, everyone is abandoned to their fate like an angst-ridden French philosopher. Individualisation is a contradictory phenomenon, however, both exhilarating and terrifying. It really does feel like freedom, especially for women liberated from patriarchal control. But, when things go wrong there is no excuse for anyone. That would be mauvais foi. The individual is penalised harshly not only for personal failure but also for sheer bad luck in a highly competitive and relentlessly harsh social environment. Although the Becks deny it, such a self – condemned to freedom and lonely responsibility – is exactly the kind of self cultivated by neoliberalism, combining freewheeling consumer sovereignty with enterprising business acumen.

Such a self is not unappealing. It is actually quite attractive, especially for the young, initiated as they are into a cool-capitalist way of life that does not appear to insist upon conformity and even permits a limited measure of bohemian posturing, personal experimentation and geographical exploration (‘the year out’, for instance). And, of course, such neoliberal latitude, including male and female ‘metrosexual’ selfhood, say, is to be compared favourably to the regimentation and ‘conservatism’ of socialism, according to neoliberalism’s ideological demolition of socialist conviction in the conventional wisdom of the day.

In fact, generational tension is a distinct feature of the neoliberal imaginary, including the rejection of ‘dinosaur’ attitudes concerning all sorts of matters cherished by an older generation. The universalising and collectivist principles that were established by the welfare state after the Second World War are called into question incessantly today by neoliberal politics in a manner that makes sense to peculiarly individualised young people. Public provisions from the distribution of a tax allowance for childcare irrespective of income and winter-fuel benefits for all the elderly to universal healthcare in general are under siege. Young people are unlikely to understand, on what appear to be egalitarian grounds, why wealthy people’s entitlements should be the same as the poor. Means-testing is surely the answer if you are oblivious to well-off taxpayer complaints about paying for the poor’s health as well as their own when they do not get anything for it. That was why the architects of the welfare state insisted on the universal principle for institutions like national-health services because otherwise the legitimacy and actuality of good quality public healthcare for everyone – that is, egalitarianism – would be imperilled by the well-off opting out, leaving an inferior service for the poor. In this sense, the neoliberal self is connected to a generational structure of feeling, a selfhood counter-posed to the old social-democratic self, though not exclusively so since adherence to youthful up-to-dateness, for instance, is more common now amongst older generations too, albeit not to the same extent when it comes to, say, instant enthusiasm for the latest communications gadget.
The consumption aspect of the neoliberal self is the most obvious, involving the subjectivity cultivated by the cool seduction of promotional culture and acutely brand-aware commodity fetishism. Naomi Klein (2000) said most of what needs to be said about it at the turn of the Millennium. Other authors have added to the critical picture since then, such as Alissa Quart’s (2003) *Branded – The Buying and Selling of Teenagers* on viral marketing among young girls and Juliet Schor’s (2004) *Born to Buy – The Commercialised Child and the New Consumer Culture* on the cool seduction of children. Anya Kamenetz’s (2006) *Generation Debt – Why Now is a Terrible Time to be Young* is especially important for understanding the plight of young adults, including graduates with their high and very often frustrated expectations, caught between an Olympic training in consumerism and the bitter prospect of life-long debt dependency, poor job and retirement prospects, high rents and unaffordable house purchase.

These factors contribute massively to the circumstances and pressures under which the neoliberal self is situated in relation to production; that is, in addition to the inculcation of an intensely competitive ideology of working life these days. The consumption aspect of the neoliberal self does not simply equate to the feminine in the terms of some older binary opposition and the production aspect is no longer necessarily masculine due to a progressive loosening of gender constraints. Masculine consumerism has been cultivated and there is a certain feminisation of work. Women have also progressed upwards in labour hierarchies, though not proportionately so at the very highest levels.

The twenty-first century world of neoliberal capitalism is not at all the same as the nineteenth-century world of liberal capitalism. There is much widespread affluence and, in many respects, capitalism really has delivered the goods to a great many people. The complacency that is cultivated by affluence and which still persists quite strongly in richer countries has, of course, broken down for many young people over the past few years, especially in the poorer countries of Southern and Eastern Europe. But, on a much grander scale, inequality across the Earth has actually worsened over the past thirty to forty years, the rich have become richer, most of the poor have remained poor and some of them have become much poorer. The astounding rate of exploitation in the early twenty-first century at a global level – with sweated labour conditions, long hours of drudgery, fierce workplace discipline in unhealthy environments and still comparatively meagre rewards in so-called ‘developing countries’, including booming China and India – would have shocked Marx and Engels.

The massification of a reduced quality of higher education has placed a young middle-class generation firmly into the neoliberal trap as well, significant numbers of whom work in the precarious occupations of the apparently burgeoning ‘creative industries’ in wealthier countries. The paradoxical life conditions of such professional-managerial groups have been written about insightfully by Andrew Ross (2009). Personal initiative and frantic networking in the precarious labour mar-
ket of short-term contracts, where enterprising ‘creativity’ is at a premium, according to Ross, represent an ironic fruition of the counter-cultural campaigns for job enrichment dating from the 1960s and ‘70s. This phenomenon is also commented upon by Boltanski and Chiapello in their discussion of the questionable success of the artistic critique of capitalism. They go so far as to argue that the politically liberationist themes of May ’68 have been channelled into a business ‘theory’ that extols the idealised figure of the portfolio worker in the professional-managerial class who finds self-fulfilment by multitasking and forever switching from one challenging project to yet another challenging project instead of sticking within the dwindling securities of old routines. As Boltanski and Chiapello (1999/2005: 199) put it, for cadres instilled with ‘the new spirit of capitalism’, in effect, ‘Autonomy was exchanged for security’. Such figures are highly mobile in their relentless pursuit of success: ‘Great men [sic] do not stand still. Little men remain rooted to the spot’ (1999/2005: 361). For Boltanski and Chiapello, inequality is not about ‘inclusion’ and ‘exclusion’, in what is really a neoliberal affection of social conscience. Inequality is relational: there are winners and losers. There are winners because there are losers. There are exploiters and exploited.

There are also many caught in the middle, occupying ambiguous and shifting ground, on the edge of success and failure. Axel Haunschild and Doris Ruth Eikhof (2009) have applied a concept from German industrial sociology to research on theatre work, Arbeitskraftunternehmer, self-employed employment. It is not, however, the application of this concept to theatre work that is most revealing. After all, working in the theatre has always been precarious and discontinuous, with regular periods of ‘resting’ for young actors until most give up the ghost and go off to do something less stressful. It is the application to creative labour in general that is really significant. Precarious forms of labour are increasingly the norm across the professional-managerial occupations, rather like the casual work experienced by many proletarians traditionally that was struggled against and reformed by labour movements in the past, such as on the docks where workers were hired at the gate on a day-to-day basis.

People subjected to such uncertainty and unpredictability especially in so-called ‘creative’ and allied careers, though not only there, must fashion the kind of self that can cope where trade-union representation has been eliminated or severely restricted. This kind of self is a neoliberal self, figuring a competitive individual who is exceptionally self-reliant and rather indifferent to the fact that his or her predicament is shared with others – and, therefore, incapable of organising as a group to do anything about it. Such a person must be ‘cool’ in the circumstances, selfishly resourceful and fit in order to survive under social-Darwinian conditions. Many simply fall by the wayside, exterminated by the croak-voiced Daleks of neoliberalism.

However, the mass-media of communication hardly ever report upon the down-side of the neoliberal experience that is sketched in here, not even for the
young adults in the eye of the storm. There is some concern about costs of study and youth unemployment but much more commonly, thanks to advertising, music media and Hollywood movies, young adults are seen to be cool, laid-back and endlessly partying. We are also shown constantly how their lives are blessed by the fun-filled and fabulous use of newer, continually up-dated and improved communications technology, especially Apple products – iPods, iPhones and iPads – with all their great and proliferating apps.

Mobile technology is not only for leisure; it’s for work too, at one time mainly represented by the be-suited business commuter/traveller, normally a man and only occasionally a woman as well, who, in the recent past, had a Blackberry and insisted on speaking into it very loudly on trains. Nowadays, the typical figure is just as likely to be casually dressed, typically on the younger side, quite probably male but possibly female too in an airport lounge on wifi with earplugs and an Apple gadget, well-connected and at the same time cocooned privately in alien public space.

Today, it is impossible to talk of an ideal self without mentioning the role of the celebrity, larger-than-life figures to be admired and maybe even emulated, in an old-fashioned term functional as role models of aspiration. Boltanski and Chiapello’s (1999/2005: 390) ‘network-extender’ was illustrated helpfully in a review on the original publication of Le nouvel esprit du capitalisme, ‘dressed-down cool capitalists like Bill Gates or “Ben and Jerry”’ (Budgen, 2000: 151). That was a few years ago. Presently, we might wonder, how many would-be Mark Zuckerberg are there wanting to bring us all together as in an old Coca Cola ad?

It should be remembered that Zuckerberg’s invention of Facebook started out as a sexist service for young guys at Harvard to assess and rank the attractiveness of their female co-eds. He still affects the slacker demeanour of a teenaged student with his perpetual hoody, T shirts, jeans and seeming lack of interest in material consumption. Yet, Zuckerberg earned $21.6 billion from the ludicrously bloated and legally dubious stock-market flotation of May 2012 on the assumption that Facebook could be turned into the principal platform not for convivial public use of the Internet in general, as some idealists imagined but, instead, as the best medium potentially for advertising in particular. Zuckerberg apparently remains, however, a dedicated adherent to Boltanski and Chiapello’s artistic critique of a disenchanting capitalist civilisation. One of his favourite quotations is said to be Picasso’s ‘All children are artists. The problem is how to remain an artist once you grow up’ (Haliday, 2012: 31).

Such youthful billionaires of digital commerce proclaim officially, in a neo-hippy manner, their wish to do good. After all, the Google motto is ‘Don’t be evil’, though critics find plenty of reason to dispute that shop-worn official claim. The fact of the matter is that these services for keeping in touch with both significant and insignificant others, conducting research while staying at home or moving about, genuinely ‘empowering’ the customer in many ways, no doubt, are
also, and most importantly from a business point of view, advertising and market research tools designed for subtle manipulation and surveillance of consumers instead of sites for the secular communion that a great many uncritical users, ignoring the ads if they can, mistakenly assume these ‘cool’ outfits to be. At the same time, the open-source movement battles for an on-line public sphere in the face of heavily funded and efficiently organised corporate and governmental closure of new and social media’s potential.

And, finally we come to the most profitable corporation in the world today, Apple, and its lost leader, the late Steve Jobs who died in October 2011 to spectacular expressions of grief amongst aficionados. Unlike the clever but too nerdy Bill Gates, Steve Jobs was the epitome of the cool capitalist and became through his staged launches of mobile gadgetry the folk hero for the neoliberal self.

Jobs’s entrepreneurial achievements add up to an extraordinarily profitable journey through ‘six industries: personal computers, animated movies, music, phones, tablet computing, and digital publishing’, in the words of his biographer, Walter Isaacson (2011: xix). In terms of ‘creative’ achievement, however, he was at best a *bricoleur* – bringing together and combining the talents of others, from his original collaborator, Steve Wozniak to his later designer, Jonathan Ives – rather than meriting the authorial status that is persistently attributed to him in routine panegyrics.

Steve Jobs maintained an apparently counter-cultural persona right up to the bitter end. He was a college drop-out, Vegan, disciple of Zen and former lover of Joan Baez who, like Zuckerberg, was apparently unconcerned about personal wealth and ostentation, though he amassed billions for himself and his company, Apple. He dressed down and his rhetoric transcended tedious management speak. He and the products he promoted, the Apple Mac and exciting mobile gadgets from light-white laptops through iPods and iPhones to iPads were represented in advertising and commercialised sub-cult attitudes as ‘cool’, even rebellious compared to a tradition of business machines inscribed in the once powerful and static IBM – International Business Machines. Yet, Apple sequesters customers within its own monopolistic range of services from music downloads to the array of later applications. And, Jobs himself was a ruthlessly exploitative businessman. For example, just before the launch of the iPhone, Jobs forced Chinese workers, through the supplier Foxconn, to labour flat out at immediate notice to replace the plastic screens that he had himself spotted scratched easily at the last possible moment with scratch-proof glass screens. The grim conditions in which Apple gadgets are produced in China especially instead of the still comparatively higher-pay labour market and less docile labour force of the USA were becoming increasingly well documented in Jobs’s last few years (see McGuigan, 2012).

As Isaacson (2011: 451) remarks of Jobs, ‘Jangling inside of him were the contradictions of a counterculture rebel turned business entrepreneur, someone who wanted to believe he had turned on and tuned in without having sold out and
cashed in’. What Isaacson does not realise, however, is that there is no structural contradiction at all today between the technology-mediated cool culture of communicative mobility that is promoted and to a large extent commanded by companies like Apple and the extreme logic of neoliberal capitalism.

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‘Being in the Zone’ of Cultural Work

By Mark Banks

Abstract

In the cultural industries, workers surrender themselves to ultra-intensive work patterns in order to be recognised as properly creative subjects. In its more affirmative versions, there is a recurrent idea that captures that special moment of creative synthesis between the ever-striving worker and the work – the moment of ‘being in the zone’. Being in the zone (hereafter BITZ) describes the ideal fusion of the intensively productive mind and the labouring body. But what precisely is this ‘zone’, and what is its potential? As part of a wider project examining exemplary and intensified subjectivity, in this article I examine BITZ from different perspectives. The main aim is to contrast affirmative readings of BITZ (mostly derived from ‘positive’ social psychology) with other, more critical perspectives that would seek to politicise the conditions of its emergence and examine its range of social effects. The overall aim of the article is therefore to suggest the kinds of social and cultural frameworks that might facilitate exploration of the political potential of BITZ in different kinds of empirical context.

Keywords: Being-in-the zone, flow, work, subjectivity, cultural industries, politics.
Introduction

What is a body capable of?
(Lotringer 2004: 17)

In the cultural, media and creative industries – organised worlds of symbolic production – the total integration of the creative person and the creative work has long been standard. By practitioners, this is not necessarily regarded as problematic. The worker and the object of cultural work have often been regarded as two sides of the same coin; synonymous, even – the perfect fusion of human intent and material expression. Investing one’s person into the act of creative production is merely the asking price and guarantee of an authentic art. Indeed, in cultural work – at the leading edge of media, fashion, art, music and design – to not surrender one’s person to the work and all its demands is to endanger the prospect of producing anything of value at all.

In its more affirmative versions, there is a recurrent idea that captures that special moment of perfect synthesis between worker and the work – the idea of ‘being in the zone’. Being in the zone (hereafter BITZ) describes the epitomic, optimal fusion of the productive mind and the labouring body; an exceptional temporality where ordinary human capacities are transcended to produce excellence beyond convention. In the cultural industries BITZ is viewed as the special attribute of, and reward for, the most creative of workers, as well as the locus of much-needed original creativity. ‘The zone’ is simply where the best work gets done. As we’ll see, in this cherished space of productivity, and time without time, the consummation of the union of person and work is at its most intense – the body in labour made both transcendent and ecstatic.

This article seeks to outline a range of socio-cultural perspectives on BITZ as part of a collaborative and exploratory project examining the contemporary prevalence of exceptional or intensified modes of social subjectivity. In this inquiry ‘the zone’ is posited as a somewhat open-ended, discursive and embodied mode of intensity, characteristic of the psychological and social demands made by ‘immersive’ activities such as music, sport and – in this particular case – cultural industries work. At the heart of this project is a particular concern with the politics of intensity, or how BITZ, when activated, might illuminate something of the productive interface between culture and the body, or the relationships between the ‘inner’, individual world and the broader social relations that individuals embody and inhabit. Thus, by exploring some of the theoretical perspectives that have a handle on BITZ, that allow us to grasp BITZ in social and cultural (and not just psychological) terms, the aim of the article is to help develop a theoretical-analytical framework which might usefully examine BITZ as a particular expression of the kinds of contested, politicized – and increasingly intensive – subjectivities that pertain to cultural work (and other) immersive social settings.
The article begins by defining BITZ, before outlining its origins and popularisation in some of the more affirmative or ‘positive’ social science perspectives. These are then contrasted with critical social science accounts, which are imputed to understand BITZ rather less as a gateway to ecstasy and rather more as a biopolitical instrument for managing dutiful workers. In attempting to find ground between these perspectives, the final part of the article outlines the recent conversion of some exponents of ‘positive’ psychological approaches to a more nuanced social and cultural perspective on intensive work. The parallels of this reformulated theory with some emergent and increasingly influential critical sociologies of media and cultural industry work are then outlined. Finally, a more radical, autonomist rendering of the ‘affirmative’ potential of BITZ is speculated upon. The article is therefore deliberately suggestive and exploratory, concerned with potentials, rather than advocating the putting into play of any singular approach. In assessing these possible perspectives, and drawing attention to the overlaps and tensions between them, one aim is to invite others to evaluate the appropriate frameworks in which BITZ might be theorised, as well as consider the broader – or more fundamental – question of what might be the social or political potential of the zone, unleashed?

**BITZ Defined**

Being in the groove. It just takes you away. You’re not even in the world
Bootsy Collins

I was in the zone ...executing my shots...staying in the moment
Victoria Azarenka

Sometimes I think I have multiple personality disorder, my personalities are ‘me in the zone’ and ‘me not in the zone’
Jacques, programmer

Once I pick up those bamboo knitting needles and start with a simple knit or purl, I’m hooked. As an athlete would say, I’m in the zone
Carla, knitter

BITZ is a term commonly used to describe the feeling of existing ‘in the moment’, or in a state of exceptional concentration, clarity or productivity. BITZ is also associated with ‘peak’ performance, or the attainment of an extraordinary excellence. The most commonly identified inhabitants of the zone are creative artists (such as Bootsy Collins) or athletes (such as Victoria Azarenka), though it is widely used as a term to describe and account for a closed and focussed excellence within activities – such as Jacques’ computer programming or Carla’s knitting. The apparent consistency across fields suggests, in theory, everyone is capable of having zone-like experiences, alone or with others, however unexceptional their talents. By dint of having the human capacity for immersing ourselves in compelling and engaging tasks and activities we open up the possibility that we
too will enter the zone, and achieve excellence beyond the ordinary. Likely we can recall a time when we experienced something like BITZ, immersed in an absorbing activity to the extent that time and all external matters faded into insignificance and where, maybe, like Bootsy, we felt out of this world. Clearly, BITZ is usually regarded as positive and desirable. Accordingly, to begin to explore the range of socio-cultural perspectives on BITZ in cultural work, we first need to evaluate its origins in similarly affirmative and ‘positive’ forms of social science.

**BITZ and Flow**

The precise origins of the idea of BITZ remain unclear, but is most strongly linked in academic terms to the concept of ‘flow’ developed by the social psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi in the early 1970s (Csikszentmihalyi 1975). Since then Csikszentmihalyi has periodically refined and expanded his descriptions of the kinds of productive outcomes generated by flow – understood as the harmonious and productive synchronicity of mind and body:

> These exceptional moments are what I have called *flow experiences* [his emphasis]. The metaphor of ‘flow’ is one that many people have used to describe the sense of effortless action they feel in moments that stand out as the best in their lives. Athletes refer to it as ‘being in the zone’, religious mystics as being in ‘ecstasy’, artists and musicians as aesthetic rapture (...) their descriptions of the experience are remarkably similar (Csikszentmihalyi 1997: 29).

Csikszentmihalyi contends that flow is an intense psychological state where both ‘arousal’ and ‘control’ are at peak levels and where levels of ‘anxiety’ and ‘apathy’ are low. Time goes unnoticed as distractions are eliminated and self-consciousness fades – all that remains is the actor in unthinking action, yet still wholly oriented to the task. Flow is a kind of forgetting, or abandonment of temporal consciousness – an unconscious negation of one’s own bodily sense. Yet, while one can try to engineer entry to the zone, this is not always possible, and, conversely, it may simply happen when one is not expecting it. Neither are the outcomes of flow determinable in advance. There is a therefore a certain kind of elusiveness or contingency in its availability or undertaking.

Nonetheless, according to Csikszentmihalyi, in all flow or zone-like moments, the balance between ‘challenges’ and ‘skills’ equalises, and there is perfect alignment between ‘physical and psychic energy’. Here, then, ‘life finally comes into its own’ (ibid: 32), providing the ‘flashes of intense living’ (ibid: 31) necessary for animating otherwise routine and conventional situations. BITZ is thus a positive affirmation of the individual self and its creative capacity to transcend the confines of the ordinary; a rhapsodic timelessness, beyond self-consciousness, predictability or measure.

While activities of various kinds might be regarded as potentially absorbing and engrossing, in the literature, the concept of flow *is* especially earmarked as...
being work or task-oriented – and so has proved ideal for application into different workplace contexts (Csikszentmihalyi 2003). For example, encouraging workers to enter the zone, to find their flow is, of course, one of the ways in which work can be intensified and productivity and efficiency gains can be made. Employers can also offset or counter worker disharmony by encouraging their charges to engage in (apparently) stimulating, rewarding and self-realizing activities. Here, flow, or BITZ, is imagined as an unqualified good – beneficial to employer and employee alike. Such insights have helped inform both an academic sub-discipline (‘positive psychology’) as well as inspire a diverse literature in management commentary, psychology and training (see for example Geirland 1996; Marsh 2005; Carr 2011; Brusman 2013).6 BITZ, then, is most commonly regarded as a useful form of bliss – a nirvana with purpose.

BITZ and Cultural Work

Developing on this ‘positive’ approach, I want to argue that in affirmative readings of the cultural and creative industries, the ideas of BITZ and flow might carry a particular resonance. It is in such work – long regarded as the benchmark form of creative, un-alienated and progressive labour (see Stahl 2013) – that the possibility of productive, flow-like work appears particularly fertile. Here, immersive, intensive modes of work are commonly regarded as standard and intrinsic (Virno 2004). The cultural worker has also been perceived to anticipate the ‘model figure of the new worker’ (Menger 2002: 10, cited in Stahl 2013: 74), one exposed to, and able to uphold, the kinds of creative subjectivity now becoming more commonly distributed across the social body. Therefore, in cultural work, not only is BITZ more likely to be found, it might also provide the blueprint for a more thoroughgoing dispersal of its intensive mode to other kinds of professional and knowledge work.

In cultural work, cultural objects and commodities not only appear to emerge from free, productive union of the various ‘physical and psychic energies’ possessed by their autonomous, individual creator(s), but the imagined close bond between object, creation and creator rests on the social premise that only in ‘creative’ or artistic work is the product fully invested with an author’s own intentions. Given this relative autonomy, and productive control, the zone therefore becomes both an attainable and necessary state. To be in the zone, to feel flow, is widely regarded as a prerequisite for actually making an authentic (rather than inauthentic or ersatz) cultural object or commodity. Thus, with the more recent emergence and institutionalization of the cultural and creative industries, the emphasis on harmonious union between the creative process and commodity outcome has prompted much renewed theorising about how to get workers into the zone sufficiently for them to execute their work – or channel their ‘energies’– most effectively.
In creative industry policy, business and management literatures, promoting the zone will often involve some initial lionisation of the well-known individual ‘creative’ – be it a Damien Hirst or Sheryl Sandberg, a Joseph Beuys or Gertrude Stein; some archetype who has the capacity to make visionary ideas come to life while immersed in the state of flow, as popular commentator Eric Calonius positively suggests:

Steve Jobs ‘stood back’: ‘You can't really predict what will happen,’ he said. ‘But you can feel the direction you’re going. And that’s about as close as you can get. Then you just stand back and get out of the way, and these things take on a life of their own’. (Calonius 2011, no pagination)

BITZ is just one element of the composite personality of the ideal-type celebrity-creative, who not only commands respect by making commercial profits, but by self-consciously (or some might say egregiously) disavowing much of the conventional means for their attainment. Conventional work narratives of cultural professionals routinely promote the necessity of emulating such free-spirited and zone-inhabiting role-models as a means for realising their own personal, latent (and comparably unrecognised) ‘talent’ – part of what Angela McRobbie (2002) has previously termed the wider ‘auteur relation’ underpinning the formation of cultural and creative work identities.

Managers, who try to emulate these inspiring individuals, or create flow or zone conditions that inspire their charges or employees, can rely on a range of interventions that might enable them to coax employees into the required states of productive ecstasy. It is now commonly argued that the workplaces can be engineered to enable flow states to more readily develop; usually by facilitating relations of informality, open communication, creativity and play, and by reducing bureaucratic management and discredited variations on Taylorism. Andrew Ross’s (2003) groundbreaking study of the ‘no collar’ technology workplace revealed firms providing their staff with the kinds of stimulating environments designed to induce the types of work intensity that generated the seductive thrill of BITZ-like experiences:

It was intoxicating at first. Look at me! I’m in New York and I’m working really late! Then, of course, you realize that it sucks. But, even then – and this was the strange part – it was still a rapturous feeling. (Kathy, tech-worker, quoted in Ross 2003: 76)

More explicitly, Yuri Martens (2011: 76) suggests the provision of ‘games rooms, relax lounges and green space’ and avoiding having ‘too high temperatures or too much noise, or not enough space to host the number of people’ as a potential means of manufacturing BITZ. That creatives can be given discretionary dispensations to ensure they more readily enter the zone (better workstations, more resources, research days, flexible hours, free time) has become a commonplace at leading technology firms like Microsoft and Google, and their emulators. Here, the zone is often an expression of normatively engineered workspace, one that

[246]
values the freedom of maverick individuals (usually men) to express outwardly their inner creativity in ways conducive to production imperatives (Nixon 2003). Yet, inspired by others or not, ordinary workers also routinely strive for the zone in their own everyday practices, viewing it as special pleasure or privilege of their personal creative endeavour – as revealed in David Hesmondhalgh and Sarah Baker’s (2011) recent study of workers in television, magazine publishing and music recording (more on this later). Finally, note that BITZ can arguably occur anywhere, not just in the formal workplace – moments of focussed creativity inspiration, especially for the mobile and autonomous cultural worker, can occur at home, on the road, in leisure, or in any circumstance where they might happen to be suitably stimulated or inspired.

BITZ, then, in its idealized form, is not simply an industry imposition, but a process of elective self-valorisation; both inside and ‘outside’ of work. It has become common for cultural and creative industry professionals to identify with, and publicly voice, the necessity of routinely experiencing flow or zone-like experiences. In fact, to identify oneself as someone capable of BITZ is a sure sign that one is as serious participant and true contender; for if one is not able to rouse one’s passion and enter the zone, and so attain the levels of in-flow excellence characterised as essential to the best kinds of cultural and artistic creativity, then what reasonable claim does one have to be a true creative, at all?

**BITZ and the Social Subject – Critical Perspectives**

Clearly, ‘positive’ theorists of flow and BITZ seek to emphasise the pleasurable, productive aspects of work – those qualities that might make it such a compelling and attractive activity, beyond economic necessity. But that work is actually the source of much of our personal happiness and self-respect should not be lightly discounted – given the choice of giving up work for a life entirely comprised of leisure and ease, many people would choose to decline the opportunity. Work, to some significant degree, makes people happy. It fulfils and enriches lives. This truth has long been recognised – not just by Csikszentmihalyi and generations of managers, trainers and employees – but even by work’s most radical critics (see Granter 2009 for a most effective summary). It would be remiss therefore to discount the fact that BITZ at work can be pleasurable and productive – at least for some. Yet, to simply assume that it is a universal, or even commonplace, experience – beyond the realm of the social – is to insulate it from any kind of critical challenge, evaluation and analysis. This section suggests some perspectives that may help us to meet that challenge.

First of all, let us make the obvious point that for many people, work fails to generate anything like a feeling of BITZ or flow. For the majority, work is – at best – a routine and just-about-tolerable necessity, rarely punctuated by moments of transcendent bliss. Even in the kinds of creative and cultural industries that I’m
concerned with, which presume a degree of free intellectual and creative engagement not always found in routine manual and service labour, BITZ might occur only infrequently, maybe not at all. Across all industries, the continued existence of entrenched forms of structural inequality, ill-treatment and exploitation are likely to militate against having joyful ‘in the moment’ experiences. This much is given.

Additionally, the preponderance of alienation in work – in a plural sense of being alienated from the specific product of one’s labour, and being distanced from the regimes of organisational control and normative structures that prefigure it, might often lead workers to feelings of isolation, meaninglessness and self-estrangement sufficient to undermine the possibility of accessing and enjoying BITZ opportunities (Mitchell, 1988). Given that BITZ and flow presuppose unfettered opportunity to enter (and exit) heightened states of creative productivity, then it is unlikely (given the division of labour and its associated conflicts) that the kinds of useful ecstasy imagined by flow theorists are commonplace or widely accessible – even in the cultural sector which claims to have privileged access to them.

But if we accept from this (broadly Marxian) perspective that BITZ can sometimes occur in the cultural industry workplace, this might still be explained through conventional forms of ideology critique, denunciations of a false and fictive consciousness and so on, and recourse, perhaps, to Adorno’s and other critical-theorists’ insistence that the idea of transcendental, free-thinking subjectivity at work is either a relic or more likely a manufactured ‘social effect’ (Adorno and Horkheimer 1992: 126) of the administrative machinery of capitalist production. However, more recent theorists of cultural industry – such as Bill Ryan (1992), Robert Witkin (2000) Sarah Brouillette (2009) – have tended to argue that the provision of subjective autonomy for creative workers (of the kinds likely sufficient for BITZ to occur) is actually a significant structural precondition for effective capitalist production, since it is only through providing people with the ‘free’ time and space to fashion new and ‘authentic’ commodities, that any future returns can be anticipated. The zone, therefore, is able to be imagined as part of the mixed repertoire of actions and temporalities that enable reproduction of the field conditions of cultural (industry) capitalism – where the freedoms of the cultural worker are part-protected to ensure that public demands for original products marked by the impress of authentic creation can actually be met. It is axiomatic that those designated as ‘creatives’ can never be entirely incorporated as abstract labour and subjected to standardised work routines, simply because they need to be given the latitude to create exciting and novel works that can be commodified – BITZ, therefore, might be regarded as part of the means to this end; an absolutely necessary temporal concession within a more familiar, fundamentally-ordered industrial structure.
By way of contrast, in other inquiries, the problem of creative subjectivity has been more keenly addressed using the concepts of governmentality and biopower – suggested by Michel Foucault as, respectively, the power to manage, and the power to produce and administer life itself (Foucault 1991; Lemke 1991). Here, under (neo)liberal rule, workers are willingly seduced and entrained to self-produce, uphold and refine the productive interplays of power and knowledge that ensure their subjection to the prevailing logic. Constituted through discourse and practices that affirm the personal freedoms to be obtained through inhabiting self-directed, entrepreneurial modes of being – ones that happen to be calibrated to effect discipline and responsibility in affairs of commerce – the worker-subject’s desire becomes seamlessly enjoined to the accumulation imperative. Through such a lens, BITZ might regarded as a kind of Grail-quest that promises deliverance to the higher plane of creative ecstasy, while simultaneously normalising the self-exploiting surrender of body and soul to the economic principle. In less purple prose, BITZ is now simply a routine part of the professional identity of the self-disciplined creative worker; which is nonetheless a ‘tactic’ – in Foucault’s terms – effected by those concerned interests whose aim is to ‘arrange things in such a way that, through a certain number of means, such and such ends may be achieved’ (Foucault 1991: 95).

Viewed in such a way, the provision of BITZ opportunities is another spatio-temporal mechanism for breaking down any residual reluctance amongst workers to recognise and accept the necessity of surrendering oneself to the logic of production. Similar to recent innovations like ‘away-days’, ‘boot-camps’, ‘Open Space’, ‘ideas-pools’ and ‘sand-pits’, the zone provides a named concession to a human need for play, free space, autonomous time, and creative self-expression – one that just happens to be congenial to the kinds of governmental ordering it appears to disavow (Donzelot 1991). It is hard to read the accounts of, say, the fashion workers studied by Amanda Bill (2012) or the television workers studied by Gillian Ursell (2000) and not give some credence to claims that creative subjectivities are (at least partly) a manufactured means of ensuring obeisance to a prevailing model of productive selfhood, one that also invites workers to co-write the scripts of their own subordination. And while in the wake of the legitimation crises of industrial capitalism all kinds of work have been to some extent re-arranged in this ‘empowering’ fashion, it is cultural and creative industries work, with its veneration of sovereign talent and preference for individualized and performative modes of subjectivity, that appears most receptive to the kinds of organising technology that promise to propel workers more rapidly towards the promised land of meaningful work – or the kind of place where BITZ opportunities might more ‘naturally’ take root and flourish.

But is BITZ more fundamentally attributable to wider temporal adjustments in work? Autonomist writers such as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2009) and Paolo Virno (2004) have brought to our attention the contradictory ways in which
time at work is now being transformed, sufficient to question the kinds of separation of functions and practices that marked the industrial epoch. On the one hand, workers are subject to the kinds of managerial biopower and surveillant organizing previously discussed — and engaged in diligently (re)producing the social as freely-acting, self-constituting bodies, endowed with autonomous time. Yet on the other hand, time is never autonomous or disinterested, since one can only act within the limits prescribed by the situation of totalized precarity that now appear to unite working populations. Precarity names the process through which work has now escaped the confines of the plant, firm or factory, and become embedded in the social fabric, in the form of a necessary and generalized labouring subjectivity, which not only ruptures the historical partitioning between work and non-work, but ensures the worker’s whole life experience is given over to capital. Indeed, Hardt and Negri (2009: 147) understand the term precarity partly as a kind of ‘temporal poverty’, a lack in which workers are no longer able to establish or exert control over their own ostensibly ‘free’ time. In such terms BITZ might be rendered as both a temporal endowment of biopolitical labour – part of a provision and demand for more intense temporalities of self-subjection – and an expression of the capacity of precarity to diminish the quality of free time, representing the further invasion of instrumentality into temporal relations hitherto protected from the generalized capitalization of life. In cultural work, analogous to the kinds of ‘immaterial labour’ studied largely by autonomist thinkers, this temporal dynamic is most markedly felt, since not only is the ‘production of ideas, images and affects’ (Hardt & Negri 2009: 147) demanding of freedom for producers to organize their own time, the capacity for producing such goods is now extended into the general social body in the form of uncontainable productive time and ‘free’ labour (Terranova 2000).

Further, not unrelated to these previous critiques, BITZ might be considered as one element of the administrative apparatus of an ascendant culture of intense or ‘extreme work’. In extreme work (as in extreme leisure, see Elias & Dunning 1996), people work much longer than the norm, assume greater responsibilities and risk-burdens, and are pushed continually to the limits of their mental and physical capacities (Hewlett & Luce 2006; Granter 2009; 2013). One the one hand, we might account for this as a structural feature of an advanced capitalism that demands ever more effort from ever more power-less workers (while tending increasingly to disregard their non-productive needs), and, on the other hand, a testament to the extent to which work has displaced non-work as a significant source of human pleasure and meaning (Hochschild 1997). Indeed, it must be acknowledged that, in extremis, a gratuitous and exalted pleasure – not to mention elevated status – can be extracted by those workers who revel in the narcotic pull of working harder, faster and longer, or glory in their exaggerated and excessive labour. BITZ, then, might be regarded as both a way of thinking in the context of an affirmative language of total possibility, and a practical means of being a pro-
ductive person sufficiently geared to working extremely. Critics in this vein have, of course, identified the many deleterious effects on personal and social well-being of extreme work; one of which is – ironically – that it may not even be that economically productive (Hewlett & Luce 2006). While students of ‘edgework’ and others seeking adventure beyond the soporificizing effects of modernity would doubtless challenge the inherent pessimism of this reading of the ‘extreme’ (Lyng 1990), they would likely not deny the potential risks of those kinds of work where excess is construed as standard, and where the means of achieving the desired production intensity might tend more towards the authoritarian than the consensual.

Finally, for other critics, the simple question of the wider ethical purpose or ends of BITZ or flow has been neglected in the positive psychology literature. For Chris Rojek (2010) BITZ could be said to be suffering from a normative deficiency, in so far as we lack any substantive account of the ethical reasons one might be trying to be in the zone and what the ends of being in the zone might be – outside of some idea of its usefulness in enabling individuals to self-affirm, or to reach a point of extra-ordinary transcendence. Rojek develops this line in criticism of Csikszentmihalyi’s work on flow, where he forcefully makes the point regarding the necessity of developing a fully socialized and ethically-laden understanding of the concept:

> From the standpoint of critical theory the objection to [flow] centres upon the ethical content of behaviour. Without a discussion of the *lebenswelt*, the context in which the experience of flow is located, it is really a somewhat facile concept. It is a reprehensible truth that the Nazis experienced ‘flow’ in the programme of Jewish extermination […] From Arendt’s (1963) account […] we know that [Adolf] Eichmann derived a powerful sense of work satisfaction and life justification by making the Nazi death trains […] run on time. (Rojek 2010: 112)

An extreme example perhaps – but used to underpin the more general argument that we should not automatically associate BITZ or flow with positivity, affirmation, and life-enrichment, since both harmful deviancy and the most criminal horrors are equally likely to produce some intense, BITZ-like feelings. Rojek’s point is that any inquiry into the political potential of BITZ must involve situating it morally or ethically, by evaluating it in the context of the communities and practices within which it occurs. To do otherwise is to artificially separate BITZ from the very conditions and conflicts that both produce it and render it meaningful – or, put otherwise, to ignore why BITZ matters, socially and culturally. The following section therefore explores how others have tried to ground BITZ in some discernible socio-ethical context.
BITZ and the Social, a Retrieval?

While the idea that BITZ is used to discipline and motivate (rather than to politically autonomise) compliant workers seems persuasive, in this section I speculate as to whether BITZ could still provide a means to other meanings, or other social outcomes. This requires thinking of an intensified labouring subjectivity as something potentially productive and generative – not just of happy work and compliant workers, but of an otherwise capable and capacitarian worker-subject, able to utilise the zone as a means to some kind of determined, social or non-capitalistic end. In fact, such a possibility is not wholly discounted by either the affirmations or critiques I have previously discussed – but let us return to them and outline some possible other scenarios.

First of all, we should acknowledge that consideration of such potential is, already, not entirely absent from the ‘positive’ literature. The more recent writings of Csikszentmihalyi and others have tried to explore the prospects for using flow to achieve progressive reforms in the workplace (Gardner, Csikszentmihalyi & Damon 2001; Csikszentmihalyi 2003). It is suggested here that flow helps workers more intensively realise their self-potential, which, when appropriately directed, can contribute to maximising the sum of human well-being – with ‘good work’ loosely defined in relation to certain social and ethical precepts and standards now regarded as threatened by the commercial imperative. For example, in their study of journalists (identified as a hitherto flow-rich profession), Howard Gardner, Csikszentmihalyi and William Damon suggest that the ‘insatiable quest for profits’ (2001: 138) has undermined the ethical basis of journalism, damaging its core ‘mission’ (ibid.) of upholding the democratic polity and providing honest, and honourable labour for liberal minds. Clearly, here, flow has become inappropriately blocked or stymied. But little is actually revealed about the essence of ‘good work’ or how flow might help us move beyond the unfortunate situation of its lack – BITZ in itself appears to possess no particular qualities that would enable it to allow ‘bad work’ to be overcome.

While this work represents a welcome effort to lift flow/BITZ into a projective social horizon, beyond any previous expositions of the ‘positive’ genre, it remains limited by its tendency to retain strong faith in the ability of enlightened firms and benevolent managers to recognise and value the symbiotic relationships between flow and ‘good work’. Its focus is only on transforming only the behaviour and performances of free-choosing individuals in situ, which is presumably deemed sufficient to overcome any of the obstacles configured by those social structures that might actually preclude the possibility of ‘good work’ flourishing. Nonetheless, such writings do at least offer some initial counter to Rojek’s critique of the lack of ethical discussion in flow theory, and suggest that exponents are seeking to pull together the psychological and the sociological in the interests of a unified, outward facing set of formulations about the effective purpose and goals of BITZ.
at work. However limited as a form of critical inquiry, such work holds the virtue of suggesting a potential for further cross-over and rapprochement with other kinds of work sociology, from contrasting critical traditions.

Indeed, such a view of ideal-type journalism – with its focus on shared, ethical standards and excellence, geared to social rather than individual ends – has at least something in common with more critical, politically-focussed understandings of cultural work more recently developed in sociology and media and cultural studies. Here a number of researchers have tried to identify the ways in which workers are entrained to a labour process that can provide for (but just as easily diminish or degrade) capacities for ‘good work’ (variously defined as excellent, secure, meaningful, autonomous, interesting) cultural work – examples include Hesmondhalgh and Baker’s work already mentioned, as well as research on new media and web-designers (Kennedy 2012), visual artists (Taylor & Littleton 2012), craft workers (Luckman 2012) and film-makers (Vail & Hollands 2012) to name but a few. Work here is presented as a complex moral economy of mixed desires for wealth and esteem, autonomy and self-actualization, personal and social well-being, and political commitments of a worldly nature, all of which combine to influence significantly how the practice of cultural production takes place and how cultural goods actually emerge and become valued. Yet a striking commonality of this research lies in its persisting with the understanding that while capitalistic work remains plagued with various injustices, and plainly directed towards ‘external’, instrumentalizing ends, it also provides a focus for animating different kinds of ‘internal’ collective, co-operative activities (unions, associations, communities, practices) that might in different ways furnish critical understandings and actions that have the capacity to challenge some of the less-welcome impositions and iniquities of the labour process. But where might BITZ come into this work, explicitly? Let me suggest one example.

Recall that Hesmondhalgh and Baker’s study outlines how flow experiences play an important role in providing creative media professionals with moments of what they term ‘pleasurable absorption’ (2011: 132), that further enhance the satisfactions of what is taken to be inherently stimulating and rewarding work. They also recognise, however, that such flow or BITZ experiences may constitute only individualized and relatively self-contained compensations for what is otherwise somewhat difficult or exploitative work – the sweetener that ensures a more general (if never unquestioning) compliance. Yet the stronger point we could make here about BITZ, is that it is also part of an enabling repertoire of shared activities that help make up the ethical constitution of the total practice of cultural work. By practice I am explicitly adopting Alasdair MacIntyre’s (2007/1981) rendering of the term which is used to describe any kind of skilled, complex and collective activity that possesses its own ‘internal goods’ – a set of standards of excellence, techniques and ethical precepts which are unique to the specific practice in question. What unites people in a practice (in the cultural industry context, let us say
journalism, painting, screenwriting or opera) is not simply that they might singularly and competitively pursue or accrue ‘external’ goods (such as money, fame or power), but that they share some commitment to the internal goods of the practice, which are recognised as distinctive and special, and collectively valued for their own sake. In this respect, practices are not simply (or only) understood as ‘ways of doing things’ (as in their most commonplace definition) nor, as in Bourdieu’s formulations, ultimately concerned with optimising strategic interests, but as shared, ethical endeavours – strongly linked to ideas of how one should live, and, crucially, how one should treat others, in the practice, and beyond. Practices are therefore not simply analogous to professional ‘ethics’ or ‘integrity’ or ‘product quality’ but much more deeply linked to the collective extension of ‘human powers’ and the creation of ‘the good of a certain kind of life’ (MacIntyre 2007: 190-1). While practices are not guaranteed to be benevolent and harmonious, desires for internal goods tend to incline practitioners towards co-operative and collaborative modes of living that allow these goods to be most effectively obtained, since, as MacIntyre has it, it is only through concentrated absorption in the virtues of a practice (his equivalent of BITZ is of a painter living a ‘Gauguin-like’ existence) that one becomes able to elicit its full array of internal goods and rewards. We might use this to speculate that the demand for virtuous engagement and excellence inherent to practices may be more likely met when practitioners adopt a position of intensive engagement in its characteristic activities.

In these terms, BITZ might be imagined hypothetically as a means of intensifying the production of a different kind of ‘good work’ – work that meets or surpasses the standards of excellence identified as consistent with the practice and that has benefits not just to practitioners and their community but – potentially – to wider publics (Banks 2012). When an author enters the zone to create a powerful new text, genre or style of writing that transforms the perspective of the practice, when jazz musicians get ‘into the groove’ and create a new composition or improvisation, one that significantly advances the practice and public appreciation of jazz as a whole, or when programmers intensely co-operate to create new software or applications that have wide community benefits, or cohere a political action – then one might say that zone has done its work. Ideally, here, standards have been raised, the ‘human powers’ of practitioners extended and the strengths of the community enhanced. Intensive modes of singular or co-operative work, in the context of a cultural practice, can have social or politically-beneficial effects – benefits that, theoretically, may not have accrued if those intensive, creative, zone-like conditions had not been made available. In short, BITZ in itself can be a route to the advanced cultivation of politically significant ‘internal goods’ – goods that might potentially cohere, unite, mitigate or challenge social worlds.

And yet (as ever) we must be cautious, sceptical even – not least because practices are not necessarily oriented to virtuous or ‘good’ work, only potentially so. And the particular progressive, practice-enhancing uses to which BITZ might be
put – and the special intensive qualities that BITZ possesses to entail them – still remain contained within, and perhaps only a weak compensation for, the broader patterns of control, iniquity and injustice that pervade capitalist work. An awareness of the value of BITZ in a practice may raise consciousness but offer little challenge to established property relations, for example. And while a practice may have its own internal rewards and potentials, as might be obvious, it must develop them in relation to external pressures (such as money, institutions, markets) that are necessary to support the practice, but may also (as MacIntyre noted) threaten its foundation or integrity. Nonetheless, in linking intensive subjectivity to demonstrable ethical concerns (and the kinds of virtue needed to fulfil them), a redemptive prospect for BITZ at work is at least theoretically raised, beyond that conventionally offered in the more affirmative literature.

Finally, I want to briefly consider how this concern with the intrinsically productive qualities of intensified work might take on a somewhat different political cast in the autonomist perspective. We have already seen in a previous section how the social spread of precarity might serve to intensify regimes of biopower, sufficient to institutionalise BITZ as a mechanism of rule. Yet, here, the latent potential of the ‘multitude’ – the plural society (or dispersed unity) of active individuals and activating networks – also provides a way of thinking the possibilities of BITZ through a more radical lens; one that focuses not on the amelioration or reform of capitalism, but on its refusal.

For example, one of the more provocative claims of Virno (2004) is to suggest that all work (but especially work in the cultural industries) has increasingly taken on the form and character of politics, since (in its post-industrial guise) it now relies more strongly on political skills of communication, association, negotiation, managing contingency and problem-solving. Work (like politics) is also more performative, concerned with ‘being in the presence of others’ (ibid, 51), impressing an audience, and, crucially, directed towards producing not (or not simply) a physical commodity-object, but an open-ended, immaterial outcome, (such as) more communications, a brand, or an immaterial service – an execution of labour potential ‘without end product’ (ibid. 55). This assumes that workers are now more likely to be judged as productive in so far as they can embody these performative, communicative competencies – where they show they can self-manage and project their own labour-power, almost independent of any conventionally ‘objective’ or measurable outcome. With this in mind, Virno sketches striking parallels between the ‘virtuoso’ and the contemporary post-industrial worker. The virtuoso is an artist who offers a memorable performance, a display of artistry that carries within it its own internal weight and value – not someone who necessarily produces a commodity or object to take away, but an expert stylist or auteur whose work is ongoing and never complete, a potential always becoming – and, for Virno, this provides a quite congenial model for understanding the cultural (and non-cultural) worker.
Here, then, we might imagine BITZ construed as a particular expression of virtuosity – a performance of becoming that guarantees a worker’s ability to inhabit the creative role ascribed to her; a presentation of a body committed to the necessary but uncertain process of self-expression and exploration. Indeed, in the performative mode, BITZ is not simply passive or benign, but also about visibly and vocally putting oneself ‘out there’ in a creative sense, publicly displaying extraordinary creativity and risk-taking capacities of the kind that Virno artfully links back to Max Weber’s definition of the ‘vocation’ of the politician – namely, ‘knowing how to place the health of one’s own soul in danger’ (Virno 2004: 55). This suggests that, in cultural work, BITZ is about a wilful imperilment of the self – since one of the things we ‘know’ about BITZ is that its outcome can never be pre-ordained. What does BITZ itself actually produce? How can we predict or measure its effectivity or efficiency? We cannot, or cannot easily, answer these questions. Managers must rely on the virtuoso to present their own (though arguably stylised and pre-formatted) evidence of the zone’s intrinsic worth and value. Hence, the familiar ways in which cultural workers must talk-up the affects and dis-affects of BITZ, its glamour and its triumphs, its draining intensities – and seek to do so publicly, to ensure that it is appropriately witnessed, just as a virtuoso must be witnessed. The allusion is somewhat overdrawn as the products of BITZ are often tangible in a way – the text, code, document, symbol or image that might be produced – but equally they are perhaps as intangible as Virno imagines, often producing only an affirmation of faith in the process as the worker reproduces the desirable ‘score’, ‘script’ or communicative performance of acceptable competence and quality.

This, then, is the enthrallment, and the control, but what of the politics? For Virno, the performance of the virtuoso intrinsically contains an excess potential, able to be put to other than work-serving uses. This potential arises because the singular expression of virtuosity is also an expression of the general intellect, the stock of common creativity possessed by the multitude, and one that is never entirely shackled by the productive ends imagined for it. Constantly updating, and transmuting, the multitude is the radically heterogeneous source of creative surpluses that can never be fully expropriated. In such a register, BITZ seems remarkably analogous to the kinds of energetic and visceral modes of revolutionary being imagined by autonomist thought. Cast in Hardt and Negri’s most effusive terms, the intensities inspired by BITZ are easily imagined as part of the ‘spontaneous movement’ (Hardt & Negri 2000: 399) of the multitude, where productive flows of bodies transform spatio-temporal horizons and forge ‘new paths of destiny’ (ibid. 397). Clearly, the role of the zone here would not be to do ‘good work’, or enhance excellence in a communitarian practice, but to create an anti-reformist politics of civil disobedience, defection and exit from capitalist work relations. The refusal of work characteristic of the autonomist perspective would likely demand that BITZ (as, hypothetically, a time of intense virtuosity) be employed only
as a means to activate the ‘flee-option’ rather than the ‘resistance-option’ (Virno 2004: 71) – BITZ harnessed to a flight to future possible worlds, beyond the grasp of work itself.

Towards a Theory of the Zone?

This article has offered a speculative and exploratory investigation into the phenomenon of flow or ‘being in the zone’ (BITZ), across different kinds of cultural or creative industry work. As an expression of a now more widespread intensification of labouring subjectivity, within an exemplary and influential field of work, such a study might prove suggestive of the broader and changing character of contemporary employment. What patterns or relationships have been detected, sufficient to underscore any future inquiry?

Evidently, a persuasive case can be made for a critical (either broadly Foucauldian, or neo-Marxist) interpretation. There seems no doubt that cultural workers today are being induced to offer employers the full, productive capacities of their unconscious bodies. This involves the immersive, kinaesthetic engagement of the worker into the productive tasks demanded of her; habitual acts of (re)production that enable the worker to become fully absorbed in her work and to undertake it ‘without thought’ – while remaining alert to its particular intellectual challenges and demands. Of course, labour – particularly in its idealised, craft forms – has always required some surrender to the beat and rhythm of the task in hand, a kind of necessary detachment from exteriority, sufficient for the very best or most rewarding work to be done (Sennett 2007). But now – especially across the kinds of professional cultural work I’ve considered here – the habituation to immersive and intensive work appear to act as a kind of organised and instrumental reflex; a standardised orientation to being usefully active that nonetheless remains largely internalised, un-spoken and un-examined. One is simply required to inhabit or even become one’s job, regardless of any intrinsic virtues or qualities it might lack or possess. BITZ is a manifestation of that compulsion. It remains important, politically, to resist that compulsion when it can be shown to have personal and socially-deleterious effects.

Nonetheless, it seems vital to continue to explore the possibility that BITZ – as an expression of a contingently creative and intensive subjectivity – might have other potentials, that might demand a different explanation. As we have seen, for positive psychologists, the potential of BITZ lies in its capacity to orient people towards ‘good’ and useful work – to create a ‘harmony of the spheres’ where managers and workers of enlightened good character, co-operate to enhance the shared quality of existence (Csikszentmihalyi 2009). The Panglossian and quasi-spiritual leanings of this approach, coupled with its determination to disregard either the problems (or potentials) of established social structures and divisions make it easy to dismiss it as an approach laden with unrealistic expectations. Less
easy to dismiss are the more critically-informed kinds of analyses that acknowledge the enduring value and appeal of cultural work, for both individuals and societies, while also recognising and seeking to challenge its deeply-entrenched and institutionalized injustices. It is here (in the kind of approach represented in this article by Hesmondhalgh and Baker) that studying BITZ as a form of intensive commitment to accessing internal goods and improving standards of excellence in the cultural work ‘practice’ appears potentially most fruitful – alongside or in conjunction with the equally necessary evaluations of the uses of the zone to control and exploit workers. This more ‘balanced’ approach is not without its own difficulties and limitations, however. For example, even a politically-directed and practice-led valorization of BITZ might provide only temporary consolations from – or help mask, or inhibit reform of – fundamental inequalities and enduring injustices. The rich plethora of active and ongoing demands for social justice within cultural work (amongst unions, collectives, worker associations and so on) already provides real contexts for the elaboration of debates about what might constitute the appropriate intensity of work and to what useful ends moments of extraordinary excellence might be directed. In this context, some extended inquiry into the capability of the body, and the politics of the zone, might prove illuminating.

This is not to discount the value of autonomist approaches that envisage a world pregnant with the possibilities of workplace defection and exit; worlds where BITZ might be – at least hypothetically – cast as an expression of intensive virtuosity, or a revolutionary disruption of the ordinary. BITZ certainly has affinities with the kinds of revelatory, spontaneous action imagined to (one day) fuel the exodus from work, though we must keep in mind the possibility that it may remain effective only as a temporary and fleeting form of escapism, as work rolls on regardless. Indeed, questions remain about the extent to which workers (and, actually, which workers in particular) are able to be ‘spontaneously’ direct themselves towards defective acts and networks of refusal. For the majority, work is a question of everyday struggle and subsistence, but one that is recognised as an absolute necessity – for diverse reasons that range from basic survival to perceived fulfilment of instinct or human essence. Much less is it regarded as a source for fomenting one’s ungovernable surplus. And we must accept that those for whom work does actually provide the kinds of life-enhancing pleasures that other social realms fail to provide, are likely to be among the most reluctant to abandon its rewards and satisfactions. Nonetheless, it is remains vital that BITZ in an autonomist register continues to suggest a potential to significantly disrupt (rather than simply try to redeem) the organisation of cultural work\textsuperscript{11}, and here – as is the case with the other approaches I have outlined – there remains much reason to theorise the political uses of intensity in cultural work, and realms beyond. Perhaps, then, for now, at this largely pre-empirical stage, it is simply enough to offer a universal, rather than any particular, defence of BITZ; one that does not so much
celebrate intensity, as sympathise with its prevalence and acknowledge the condition that lies at its heart – a desire for transcendence, or a manifest longing for something else, both ecstatic and extraordinary, either within or without the confines of work.

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Notes
1 AHRC Research Network ‘Being in the Zone: The Importance of Culture to Peak Performance in Sport, Art and Work’, led by Kath Woodward (The Open University, UK) and Tim Jordan (King’s College, London) For more details see: http://www.open.ac.uk/ccig/research/projects/being-in-the-zone
3 Some have attributed the first use of ‘the zone’ in popular culture to tennis coach Timothy Gallwey and his book The Inner Game of Tennis (1974), others to tennis player Arthur Ashe, or even baseball player Ted Williams (see Young & Pain 1999). Given its synonymy with older musical terms such as ‘in the groove’ and ‘in the pocket’, or even older ideas of being ‘open’ or ‘connected’ in everyday religious or spiritual contexts, we might presume to identify BITZ contains some general and long-established qualities of experience, even if particular descriptions and understandings of that experience have tended to vary across disciplinary fields and historical contexts.
4 Note that Maslow’s (1964) idea of ‘peak’ performance has close affinities with ‘flow’, though the latter has become more widely employed in work and employment contexts.
5 Positive psychology is concerned with the exploration of ‘positive’ human emotions, such as happiness, well-being and contentment, developed by its exponents in direct contrast to the
(perceived) hegemonic social scientific focus on the negative, disabling and pathological aspects of the human psyche; see http://www.positivepsychology.org for more details

6 ‘One of the most powerful questions you can ask yourself is “Am I helping to create a work culture and climate that nourishes a state of flow?” Emotionally intelligent and socially intelligent organizations provide executive coaching and leadership development for leaders to be more innovative at motivating others’ (Brusman 2013: no pagination)

7 In May 2013 The Economist ran an article entitled ‘Cycling is the New Golf’ in which the benefits of road biking for business networking were espoused, as well the effectiveness of cycling for generating useful zone-like experiences. As architect and cyclist Jean-Jacques Lorraine offered, on a group ride, “The adrenaline rushes, the serotonin pulses and the surges of endorphin create a kind of high, a sense of euphoria. I feel open, honest and generous to others. I often find I’m saying things on a bike which I wouldn’t normally say, and equally I’ve been confided in when I wasn’t expecting it.” See http://www.economist.com/blogs/prospero/2013/04/business-networking (accessed May 2013).

8 While alienation might discourage the flourishing of BITZ, one might also think of some kinds of repetitive, boring, menial or meaningless work as generating their own particular kinds of BITZ experiences, ones much less positively-valued than the kinds open to the creative worker. Any production line or routine labour that requires low skill and maximum repetition might be said to induce workers into another kind of zone – a ‘dead zone’ where thinking is unnecessary, or into a deliberate zone of ‘switching off’ by the worker as a means of coping with monotony, alienation and self-estrangement. Here the zone is about suppressed potential and capacity, not about extension and elaboration.

9 A virtue is a quality of moral excellence (e.g. justice, courage, benevolence) that aids the flourishing and progressive development of human-beings, which are seen (by virtue ethicist philosophers such as MacIntyre) as vital to the creation of equal and just societies. Derived from Aristotelian ethics, virtues are character traits which enable those who possess them to ‘live well’.

10 At the time of writing, in the UK, the most recent example of where the ‘vices’ rather than the ‘virtues’ appear to have taken hold in a cultural work practice came in tabloid journalism, as revealed by the 2012 Leveson Inquiry.

11 See Stevphen Shukaitis’s Imaginal Machines (2009) for a lively and energising account of ‘intense relations’ and the possibility of some zone-like political interventions at work.

References


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Beyond the Model Worker: 
Surveying a Creative Precariat

By Greig de Peuter

Abstract
The figure of the self-reliant, risk-bearing, non-unionised, self-exploiting, always-on flexibly employed worker in the creative industries has been positioned as a role model of contemporary capitalism. Although the notion of the model-worker is a compelling critical diagnostic of the self-management of precarity in post-Fordist times, I argue that it provides an insufficient perspective on labour and the so-called creative economy to the extent that it occludes the capacity to contest among the workforces it represents. Informed by a larger research project, this article thematises salient features of select collective responses to precarity that are emerging from workers in nonstandard employment in the arts, the media, and cultural industries. The discussion is structured in three main parts: the first, aggregation, identifies initiatives in which employment status – rather than a specific profession or sector – is the basis of assembly and advocacy; the second, compensation, highlights unpaid work as a growing point of contention across sectors; and the third, occupation, describes cases in which precarious cultural workers are voicing their grievances and engaging in direct action in the context of wider social movements. These dimensions of the contemporary response to precarisation in the creative industries are at risk of being overlooked if the research optic on workers’ strategies is focused upon a single sector or a particular profession. In conclusion, I emphasise that the organisations, campaigns, and proposals that are surveyed in this article are marked by tensions between and among accommodative adaption, incremental improvements, and radical reformism vis-à-vis precarity.

Keywords: Labour, precarity, creative industries, cultural workers, resistance.
Role Model Worker

Cultural, media, and ‘creative’ workers – especially those outside the fraying ‘standard employment relationship’ – are role model subjects of contemporary capitalism. Variations on this claim frequently arise in the literature on labour that has surged in recent years within and beyond cultural studies. Freelance, contract, self-employed, and intermittent workers in the arts, the media, and cultural industries are invoked as paradigmatic figures of 21st century capitalism, specifically, of a political-economic order putting a premium on risk-taking, flexible employment, valorisation of immaterial labour, entrepreneurial forms of subjectivity, and a mode of governmentality expecting individuals to shoulder responsibilities otherwise borne by an employer or the state (Ross 2000; McRobbie 2001; Boltanski & Chiapello 2005; Neff et al. 2005; Fraser 2006; von Osten 2007a, 2007b; Sholette 2011; Bryan-Wilson 2012; Steyerl 2012; Raunig 2013).

The thrust of the role model proposition is that priorities of post-Fordist, neoliberal capitalism are exemplified by the conditions and propensities of those in nonstandard employment navigating the liquid labour markets of the vaunted ‘creative economy’: habituated to self-reliance; accepting a high level of risk; allergic to bureaucracy; juggling multiple short-term ‘projects’; blurring the boundaries of work and non-work time; preternaturally adaptable; striving to be innovative and unique; producing monetary value from knowledge, symbols, or otherwise intangible resources; carefully branding the self; personally funding perpetual education upgrades; vigorously managing social networks within highly informal labour markets; performing work without a guarantee of compensation; assuming responsibility for maintaining a steady flow of paid work and, hence, on a job search without end; and willingness to put the passion for the work ahead of the size of the pay.

Such portraiture is intended to critically diagnose self-exploitation and the pragmatic adjustment of behaviour to the rigours of flexibility. There is a dominant analog to the role model idea, however, in early 21st century celebratory discourses surrounding labour flexibility and the creative economy: for example, the business writer Daniel Pink (2002) declared ‘the MFA the new MBA’ and mused enthusiastically on ‘free agency’; the academic-consultant Richard Florida (2012) nominated the ‘creative class’ a key to post-industrial prosperity and a paragon of rewarding job opportunity; and the New Labour Party, under the leadership of Tony Blair, refined the now globalising creative industries policy framework, which sought to join together the value-adding promise of symbolic production, the intellectual property imperative, and the enterprise culture of Thatcherism. It is tempting to conclude that these official perspectives and their critical counterparts make basically the same point – that workers animating the creative economy have contemporary capitalism’s preferred labour profile.
The critical role model idea is, however, distinguished by normative concerns, namely, that the risk-bearing, benefit-bereft, non-unionised, self-sacrificing, meritocratic-minded, always-on independent creative worker is hardly a template for spreading economic and social justice, let alone emotional well-being (Ross 2000; McRobbie 2002; Neff et al. 2005). Indeed, the turn to labour in cultural studies was itself accelerated in response to turn-of-the-century government discourses about the creative industries, which scholars roundly criticised for neglecting the flipside of often glamourised occupations in the arts, the media, and cultural industries (McRobbie 2002; Rossiter 2007; Banks & Hesmondhalgh 2009; Ross 2009), a flipside that many activists and academics would come to know by the shorthand, ‘precarity’.

It is at this point worth recalling that the liberating tone of official tales of ‘free agents’ and the ‘creative class’ is an echo of dissident genealogies. As several theorists have argued with reference to 20th century capitalist transformations, one-time oppositional impulses – to escape the routines of standard employment, to avert the Taylorized rhythms of the factory, to access expanded opportunities to be creative – came to be accommodated by and increasingly generic to capitalism (Hardt & Negri 2000; Berardi 2003; Boltanski & Chiapello 2005; Fraser 2006; Lorey 2006; von Osten 2007a, 2007b). The spread of nonstandard, creative work under post-Fordism demonstrates capital’s remarkable capacity to absorb, adapt to, and thrive off desires opposing it. Rather than reinforce capitalist triumphalism, however, a reading along these lines derives its perspective from below, affirming labour’s ability to collectively withdraw from and seek alternatives to the prevailing organisation of work.

In contrast, the role-model portrait conjures up a figure so thoroughly formatted to the exigencies of flexible exploitation that it runs the risk of adding to the sense that there is no way out (c.f. Gillick 2010; Rosler 2011). So although the notion of the model-worker is a compelling critical diagnostic of the self-management of precarity in post-Fordist times, it provides an insufficient perspective on labour and the so-called creative economy to the extent that it occludes the capacity to contest among the workforces it represents. Glossing over countervailing possibilities is potentially debilitating politically. Raising this concern does not imply a rejection of the role model proposition, however. On the contrary, if the cultural worker in nonstandard employment exemplifies tendencies in contemporary capitalism that promote precarity, by the same token, such workers may be a strategic locus of resistance against these tendencies.

**Creative Precariat**

Barely a decade ago, labour issues were rightly characterised as a ‘blind spot’ in such fields as communication studies (McKercher & Mosco 2006: 493). Since then, labour research has proliferated in media and cultural studies. Much of this
research carefully documents conditions and experiences of work in individual sectors of the creative industries, including, among others, television, fashion, journalism, new media, video games, and the arts (e.g., Ursell 2000; Neff et al. 2005; Dyer-Witheford & de Peuter 2006; Deuze 2007; Gill 2007; Arvidsson et al. 2010; Lloyd 2010). While this literature is heterogeneous, a couple of general observations can be made about this welcome wave of labour scholarship. Firstly, it illuminates the prevalence, across sectors of the creative industries, of precarity, that is, of financial, social, and existential insecurity exacerbated by the flexibilisation of labour under post-Fordism, a process exemplified by freelancing, short-term contracts, internships, solo self-employment, and other unstable work arrangements that are familiar in creative industries. A second general observation about the research on labour in creative industries is that greater attention has tended to be given to manifestations of precarity as compared to collective efforts to confront precarious conditions of labour and life.

Gathering momentum, however, is a current of inquiry where the primary focus is on efforts to counteract precarity in the arts, the media, and knowledge and cultural industries (Bodnar 2006; Corsani & Lazzarato 2008; Mosco & McKercher 2008; Ross 2008; Brophy 2010; Cohen 2011; Murgia & Selmi 2012; Murray & Golmitzer 2012; Raunig 2013). Working in this stream, this article is informed by a larger, collaborative research project, Cultural Workers Organize (see www.culturalworkersorganize.org). This ongoing project is rooted in a memory of ‘precarity’ as a conceptual tool forged in the context of activism (Papadopulous et al. 2008; Mattoni 2012). Cultural Workers Organize sets out to survey emerging collective responses to precarity by contract workers, interns, self-employed, freelancers, part-timers and other flexworkers in creative economy milieus. At the core of the research are organisations, campaigns, and policy proposals that variously seek to expose, resist, and mitigate precarity. Between 2010 and 2013, fieldwork was carried out mostly in London, Milan, New York City, and Toronto, where interviews were conducted with sixty people, spanning professional associations, trade unions, activist groups, coworking spaces, and cooperatives. Spotlighting collective initiatives and listening to activist voices, this research underscores that flexibilisation, individualisation, and precarisation may be leading mechanisms of post-Fordist exploitation, but these processes have not exhausted labour’s capacity to act collectively.

In their wide-ranging review of recent literature on nonstandard work, Dennis Arnold and Joseph Bongiovi (2013: 304) conclude: ‘… there is a need to better understand the ambitions, desires and strategies of precarious workers’ efforts in organizing and the broader implications of social struggle for alternatives to the dominant development paradigms’. A modest contribution to this task, in what follows I identify three broad ways in which precarious workers are responding – or might respond – to the challenges they face, responses that are, to varying degrees, accommodative of or antagonistic toward the creative economy paradigm.
of contemporary capitalism. The first section of the paper addresses emerging flexworker organisations in which a (quasi-)employment status, rather than a particular occupation or sector, is the basis of aggregation and advocacy. The second section zeroes in on unpaid work as a point of contention in a variety of creative economy quarters, a grievance dovetailing with diverse compensation proposals. And the third section considers precarious cultural workers’ involvement in wider social movement politics, in particular, the politics of occupation. In conclusion, I highlight the tension between incremental improvements and more radical reforms in the ‘ambitions, desires, and strategies’ catalogued herein.

The responses to precarity focused upon in this paper require a final framing comment. How precarity manifests, and the means by which workers might confront it, will be shaped by sector-specific dimensions, ranging from industrial structure to professional culture, work organisation, and access to and forms of collective representation – dimensions with, moreover, distinct national and regional contours. This is why, in the research project informing this article, an effort has been made to share sector-specific accounts of precarity and strategies for mitigating it (e.g., Ziff 2012; Condé & Beveridge forthcoming) and to provide case studies addressing particular national and metropolitan contexts (Cohen & de Peuter 2013; de Peuter 2014). In this article, however, I take an intentionally generalist perspective, arguing that if the research optic on workers’ strategies in creative industries is limited to a single sector or a particular profession then important features of the contemporary response to precarity may be overlooked. Of interest here are organisations that reach across sectors or occupations; policy proposals with potential effects beyond one professional group – and beyond cultural workers per se; and moments where cultural, media, and creative workers air their grievances via participation in wider counter-capitalist social movements. In these and other ways, the initiatives surveyed below have significance for thinking through the possibilities and the limitations of a ‘creative precariat’ (Arvidsson et al. 2010: 296).

**Aggregation**

Densely concentrating labour power at a single production site not only enabled mass-scale extraction of surplus value, but also deepened the consciousness of common cause that fueled industrial trade unionism. Such conditions of counter-power are short-circuited by the spatial and temporal disaggregation of workforces. Short-term stints and off-site working, characteristic features of many creative industries, complicate workplace-based labour organising and the objective of employment continuity. ‘The organizing template of long-term stability and security in a single workplace’, writes Andrew Ross (2009: 211), ‘is not well-suited to industries where a majority of workers shift their employers on a regular basis, whether voluntarily or involuntarily’. Workers in low-wage service sectors and
their allies were the first to collectively address flexible and precarious employment through campaigns such as Justice for Janitors and new organisations such as worker centres. Novel responses are emerging from flexworkers in creative-economy sectors, too, as precarity trickles up the value chain. Discussed below is a subset of these collective responses for which the aggregating factor is not necessarily craft, occupation, or industry – conventional sources of labour solidarity – but (quasi-)employment status.

Organised labour has had difficulty adapting to the sort of transformations in occupational structures and employment relationships that converge in the creative industries. Emerging at the margins of the union movement, however, are atypical workers’ associations exploring strategies for bringing together workers in nonstandard employment, including the self-employed, across a variety of occupations, at the higher end of the value chain in the creative economy. Along these lines, the most established collective organisation in the cities covered by our research is New York’s Freelancers Union (see Abrahamian 2012). Boasting some 229,000 members, the Freelancers Union has been developing – outside the scope of collective bargaining – infrastructure for protecting and supporting ‘independent workers’ excluded from entitlements available to their counterparts in standard employment. Its strategic gambit for bringing its dispersed constituency together is to service independent workers’ unmet need for medical insurance. Recognising that mobile workers require benefits that are not fixed to one employer, the Freelancers Union pools members’ financial resources so as to provide access to healthcare coverage at a discount rate as compared to purchasing insurance individually. Based on this foundation, the Freelancers Union has evolved a model that combines fee-based services, free resources (e.g. its Online Contract Creator), legislative advocacy to improve freelancers’ socio-economic conditions, and, more recently, it has opened a medical clinic for members in New York City. The Freelancers Union – and likeminded groups such as Milan-based Associazione Consulenti Terziario Avanzato – is an actor in what Joel Dullroy and Anna Cashman (2013) describe as the fledgling ‘freelancers’ rights movement’ – integral to which are strategies, beyond the bargaining table, for expanding social protections for flexworkers.

Those in nonstandard work arrangements are also coming together via coworking, the practice of freelancers and other self-employed operating out of a shared workspace (de Peuter, Cohen, & Saraco 2013). Mostly populated by communication, design, and business services professionals, coworking spaces respond to two manifestations of precarity for solo operators: the isolation of working alone at home, and a lack of access to affordable commercial property. Virtually unheard of a decade ago, coworking spaces are mushrooming, with an estimated 2,500 globally (Foertsch 2013). Charging membership fees based on usage, coworking spaces are typically for-profit entities. There are, however, contending models, including free, ad hoc coworking events, a.k.a. ‘jellies’; municipally sup-
ported spaces, such as the Hive at 55 in Manhattan; social enterprises, such as the Impact Hub, an international network of coworking spaces; and co-operatives, such as Montréal’s Ecto. There are glimpses of the potential for these spaces to help their constituencies confront aspects of precarity beyond social isolation: for instance, the Hub Islington in London has hosted workshops raising the subject of freelancers’ rights; members of the Toronto Writers’ Centre informally support one another in conversations about negotiating decent publishing contracts; and coworking spaces in the Canadian province of Ontario have collaborated on an extended benefits program for their members. Coworking is one of the sites where common cause might be recomposed among otherwise dispersed workers.

Anti-precarity aggregations are also forming around the quasi-employment arrangement known as the internship (de Peuter, Cohen & Brophy 2012). High youth unemployment, socially glamorous sectors, and careers promising self-expression are among the factors bulking up the youthful reserve army under competitive pressure to accept low- or no-wage internships, in the hope of securing stable, paid work in creative industries. Misclassification of entry-level staff as interns, diminished social protections, and the cordonning off of professions from those insufficiently privileged to be able to work for free are just some of the grievances expressed by intern activist groups that have proliferated internationally in recent years – including, in the cities of our research, Intern Labor Rights in New York; Intern Aware, Precarious Workers Brigade, and Ragpickers in London; and the Toronto-based Canadian Intern Association. While some unions have begun to advocate for interns, most intern initiatives are cropping up at the margins of organised labour. Rather than in bargaining units, interns are converging in nimble collectives, participating in direct actions targeting dubious internship schemes; in class-action suits, challenging employers on the legality of their internships; on social media networks, naming-and-shaming companies recruiting unpaid interns; and on campuses, where past, present, and prospective interns congregate for longer than the average placement. Interns’ oppositional initiative has made wageless young workers a high-profile subject, prompting some politicians to press for more stringent regulations (see Cohen & de Peuter 2013). Most significantly, intern activists have broached the taboo topics of labour exploitation and workers’ rights among the children of neoliberalism.

Atypical workers’ associations, coworking spaces, and intern initiatives are aggregators of workers differentially detached from a single, stable employer. Vincent Mosco and Catherine McKercher (2008: 13) remark, ‘it is uncertain whether the stories of … new forms of organizing in unlikely places … represent a new dawn for the labor movement or its last defensive gasps’. ‘Last gasps’ are within earshot, when, for example, atypical workers’ associations sell benefits to independents, the latter shouldering the financial burden of outsourcing; when coworking members buy access to the workplace community that has been eroded by flexibilisation, and, in the process, activate a site for ‘network sociality’ (Wittel...
2001); or when campaigns against exploitative internships stop short of troubling the inherently exploitative character of waged labour. Still, the above-discussed efforts are exposing real challenges faced by precarious workers in creative industries – and are mitigating some of those challenges in significant, if not always systemic, ways. These nonstandard aggregations demonstrate that the spatio-temporal fragmentation of the workforce is incomplete. It is important, however, to avoid making a virtue of a necessity; in particular, collective bargaining unit certification surely is not the only legitimate mechanism of labour politics, but, absent that, it is difficult to confront one of the most basic indices of precarity – pay.

**Compensation**

One way to widen the lens on labour politics in the creative industries is to search out common concerns among precarious workers in different sectors. The previous section, for example, identified social isolation and weak social protections as manifestations of precarity around which media and cultural workers in nonstandard employment are aggregating. This section turns to another point of contention among flexworkers in the arts, the media, and cultural industries – compensation, specifically, unpaid work. As the activism surrounding internships indicates, discontent is rumbling at the zero-wage margins of the creative economy. This section flags some of the forms of unpaid work that individual workers and their organisations are problematising, the strategies characterising their efforts, and the proposals being forwarded for redressing this grievance. Identifying shared sources of agitation is a preliminary step toward exploring possibilities for pan-sectoral labour campaigns and solidarities across, and perhaps beyond, creative industries.

Lacking union representation, the primary strategies used by nonstandard workers and their organisations to respond to the problem of unpaid work have involved litigation and legislation. Take, for example, the Freelancer Payment Protection Act, currently awaiting a Senate vote in New York State, which was initiated by the Freelancers Union (2013) in an effort to better protect freelancers when clients do not pay; the class-action suits forwarded by unpaid media interns, perhaps most notoriously, the *Black Swan* case (Perlin 2013), in which it was persuasively argued that interns performed work that merited statutory minimum wage; and the successful wage-theft cases pushed by the labour group Retail Action Project (2012) through the New York State Office of the Attorney General to win unpaid wages for part-time workers in the fashion retail sector from employers that failed to comply with minimum wage regulations. While costly and timely, litigation and legislation are often the only options for nonunionised precarious workers to confront unpaid work.
For the creative-economy paradigm, the figure of the artist is especially worthy of emulation, due partly to the dubious yet enduring notion that self-expressive work offers ‘nonmonetary rewards’ (Ross 2000: 22) which counteract the sting of low earnings, a characteristic feature of artistic labour markets (see, for example, Miranda 2009). In lieu of payment, visual and performing artists are frequently invited to provide work in exchange for a very particular nonmonetary reward, that of exposure, says New York City artists’ group, W.A.G.E. (Working Artists and the Greater Economy). Contesting the legitimacy, and doubting the convertibility, of the ‘promise of exposure’ (W.A.G.E. n.d. a), W.A.G.E. formed in 2008 in response to what the group describes as the ‘common practice’ (W.A.G.E. n.d. b), among New York’s non-profit galleries, of not paying artists for their contributions to shows. Operating in a non-unionised sector, W.A.G.E. began by leveraging art-world communication platforms for ‘consciousness-raising’ (W.A.G.E. n.d. b); went on to research the scope of non-payment via an online survey (58.4% of respondents reported cases of non-payment) (W.A.G.E. n.d. c); and, currently, is designing a regulatory framework, ‘W.A.G.E. Certification’, for recognising those cultural institutions that transparently budget for, and consistently pay, artist fees.

Advocating for minimum standard rates, W.A.G.E. is inspired by organisations such as Canadian Artists’ Representation / Le Front des artistes canadiens (CARFAC). Since 1968, CARFAC has published updated base-fee schedules that are more or less adhered to by galleries in Canada. Presently, CARFAC is lobbying for a policy response to another variety of unpaid labour; the association is pushing for national legislation – the Artist’s Resale Right – that would redistribute a five percent royalty to an artist when their work is flipped on the art market (CARFAC 2013). Unpaid cultural work is an issue gaining attention well beyond the visual arts. For example, the UK’s 30,000-strong Musicians’ Union initiated the campaign ‘Work Not Play’ after members reported being asked to perform for free at the 2012 Summer Olympics in London. W.A.G.E., CARFAC, and the Musicians’ Union are on a growing roster of organisations engaged in struggle over the meaning of cultural work as such, from refusing the cliché of the labour-of-love to debunking the half-truth that working unpaid is a commercial opportunity. For its part, W.A.G.E. (n.d. b) is straightforward about the stakes: the promise of exposure ‘denies the value of our labor’. Fighting this devaluation, these organisations’ efforts underscore the need for blended labour/cultural policies to counteract a model whereby cultural production is subsidised by those economically equipped – by debt, inheritance, or precarious secondary jobs – to perform cultural work on spec.

‘[G]etting the multitude to work for free’, writes Yann Moulier Boutang (2011: 133), ‘is the general line of cognitive capitalism, wherever it has the possibility’. Nowhere in the creative economy does unpaid work find more favourable conditions than online. Prospects are particularly bountiful in the byline business: ‘The
easier it is to get published, the harder it is to get paid for it’, says the President of the US National Writers’ Union (Goldbetter 2011). Writers, their allies, and organisations are, however, pursuing multiple strategies against the normalisation of the provision of content for nothing, or nearly so, to profit-seeking media outlets, including, among others: class-action suits, such as that filed against The Huffington Post in which unpaid bloggers sought (unsuccessfully) a cut of the $315 million that AOL paid in 2011 for the news website whose valuable online traffic, plaintiffs argued, was partly their collective product; contributor boycotts, including one called by the National Writers’ Union – against Huffington Post again – as part of its ‘Pay the Writer!’ campaign, and, another, informally called in 2013, targeting the Daily Review, an Australian arts and culture site; online pay ‘walls’ – such as ‘Who Pays Writers?’ and ‘Pay Me Please’ – which use the same Internet infrastructures that enlist unpaid or low-paid media work to instead expose it; and research efforts, with the Writers’ Guild of Great Britain, for example, surveying the extent of unpaid work as part its campaign, launched in 2013, ‘Free Is Not An Option’.

The plight of freelance writers is, however, a specific case of a more general trend: network communication technologies are multiplying the options available to capital for accessing creative labour power without entering standard employment relationships, a process of ongoing destandardisation ultimately arriving at the online continuum of productivity, and hence of exploitability, now widely theorised as ‘free labour’ (Terranova 2004).

Imposing minimum rates via collective agreements is a necessary element of a response to the problem of unpaid work in the creative economy. A more sweeping additional possibility is basic income, that is, the proposal for the introduction of a universal and unconditional annual guaranteed income, set at a rate sufficient for meeting basic human needs (see Raventós 2007; Weeks 2011). Rather than seek a specified wage for a given contribution, basic income would delink compensation from employment. Across our research sites, the basic income proposal is most prominent among activists in Italy, and, in the early 2000s, the EuroMayDay parade, which incubated in Milan, was a vehicle for the transnational circulation of the proposal (Negri 2008: 215). Understood as a radically expanded version of what has been termed ‘precarity pay’ (Vosko 2000: 226), basic income potentially provides a threefold response to the problems of unpaid work and income insecurity generally, across and beyond creative economy sectors.

First, access to an incrementally dispensed annual basic income could bridge the payless gap between contracts that affects intermittently engaged workers (Gill 2007: 7; Horowitz et al. 2005: 5). Pointing in this direction is the unique indemnity available in France to media and cultural workers on short-term contracts, l’intermittent du spectacle, which brings some stability to erratic incomes (see Corsani & Lazzarato 2008). By compensating the interval between gigs, this income security measure, writes Antonella Corsani (2007), begins to recognise...
there is ‘a wealth created outside of time spent in employment’; between paid jobs, a cultural worker could be rehearsing, conducting research, acquiring skills, developing ideas, or otherwise replenishing the creativity coextensive with future productions. This dovetails with a second case for basic income: it would offer some compensation for contributions to the creative economy – from maintaining the social networks that undergird flexible labour pools, to feeding content to social-media firms, to lending cachet to gentrifying neighbourhoods – that generate financial value but are currently unremunerated. ‘We are’, to borrow the words of anti-precarity activist Alex Foti (2004), ‘100% of the time part of the (re)production of capital’. From this point of view, basic income is not conceived as welfare support for those excluded from production but rather as a ‘social salary’ (Vercellone 2007) for those always already a participant in it. Basic income is, then, a policy correlate to the claim that cognitive and affective labour are not restricted to specific occupations but instead are diffuse social capacities and exceed activity performed in the context of paid employment.

A third case for basic income vis-à-vis unpaid activity is also the most urgent case: basic income could be a policy strategy for swiftly ‘eradicating poverty’ (Raventós 2007: 107). Distribution of earnings in creative industries are characteristically lopsided, between, as Gillian Ursell (2000: 817) remarks in a study of television labour, ‘a well-placed minority … and the rest’. ‘The rest’, even if unemployed, are productive for capital: the standing reserve army can be expected to exert downward pressure on the wage that a creative-economy employer is likely to bear, and, thus, raise their return. Additionally, basic income could lower the class barrier to labour market entry to the arts, the media, and cultural production. Although it could be a mechanism for mitigating cultural worker precarity, basic income’s promise of greater economic justice has, of course, vast relevance for impoverished populations beyond those selling their labour in creative industries.

In addition to bridging the pay gap between gigs, recognising the value contribution of activity performed outside employment, and insulating against immiseration, basic income has further potential to transform the conditions of media and cultural production. Jim Shorthose and Gerard Strange (2004: 58) suggest basic income could be a policy component of ‘governance for autonomy’ in the sphere of cultural work. Not only would access to basic income enable cultural producers to experiment with content and forms that do not abide by dominant criteria of commercial viability, but also, by providing a base level of material security, basic income would enable cultural workers – among a range of other groups – to pursue their work in the context of alternative economic experiments, including, for instance, worker cooperatives, with the basic income providing some protection for counter-capitalist experiments from the competitive pressures of the market. In these and other ways, basic income begins to show its promise as a ‘tool of counterpower’ (Fumagalli & Lucarelli 2008). Ultimately, however, the basic income proposal broaches issues of class inequality, the privatisation of socially
produced wealth, and a desire for autonomy – systemic issues that are more fully confronted by precarious cultural workers when they spread out and contribute to social movements.

**Occupation**

Representing the figure of the artist as a model for contemporary capitalism flattens out the ‘heterogeneity of art practice’, including the persistence of what Alberto López Cuenca (2012) refers to as ‘autonomous projects seeking to produce non-hegemonic social practices’ (see also Gillick 2010; Rosler 2011). Artists and other cultural workers are, moreover, among the protagonists of struggles against exploitation and inequality in the neoliberal era. Spatial disaggregation of the workforce, exclusion from union representation, and the apparent difficulty of stemming income inequality through collective bargaining are some of the reasons why the problem of precarity has been posed beyond the confines of workplaces, in public spaces, via social movements. Indeed, the circulation of the concept of ‘precarity’ was itself propelled by autonomous organising and street-level protest in Europe in the early 2000s (see Cosse 2008). And, more recently, the dissident wave of occupations, cycling from North Africa to New York, has been read by labour researchers as, in part, a response to conditions of precarity (Lee & Kofman 2012; Schram 2013). Highlighted below are two cultural worker organisations that are voicing grievances and staking claims within the context of contemporary counter-capitalist movements for which occupation has been a decisive strategy.

As public squares were squatted in the Arab World, anti-austerity protest raged in Greece, and *indignados* camped in Spanish cities, the politics of occupation – and its US prospects – were up for discussion at 16Beaver, an artist-run space in New York City. 16Beaver, which for over a decade has hosted conversations with international activists, was one of various seedbeds of the Occupy Wall Street movement (Kroll 2011; McKee 2012). In New York, Occupy spawned numerous working groups, several of them comprised of artists – frequently distant from the representational structures of unionism; one such group is Arts & Labor. A trans-occupational alliance, Arts & Labor (n.d.) defines its membership inclusively: ‘We are artists and interns, writers and educators, art handlers and designers, administrators, curators, assistants, and students. We are all art workers and members of the 99%’.

One of the enduring offshoots of Occupy Wall Street, Arts & Labor sets out to raise awareness about and fight against ‘exploitative working conditions’ in the arts (ibid.), through, among other means, teach-ins and direct actions. Its members shedding light on the often-invisible precarious labour sustaining the art world (Kasper 2011), Arts & Labor has been pressing for higher labour standards throughout the art economy. In an intervention in 2013, for example, the group...
joined unions in a counter-publicity campaign, challenging the Frieze Art Fair for not hiring local union labour, at a living wage, to set up the lucrative art show, on a site made available to Frieze by the City at a bargain rate. Notably, Arts & Labor has also – through the activities of its Alternative Economies subgroup – foregrounded the need to move beyond prevailing structures of work and wealth altogether. The radical promise of artists’ labour activism, to borrow the words of Julia Bryan-Wilson (2012: 46), does not necessarily lie in a focus on ‘getting a bigger piece of the art-market pie’, but furthering ‘analysis of economic conditions attuned to larger struggles against inequality’.

This attunement is clear in what has been called the ‘Italian Occupy movement’ (Mattei 2013: 366), in which oppositional cultural workers are mixing direct action and legal strategies. A glimpse of this movement is provided by an occupation that took place in Milan on May 5, 2012. In a bold rejection of austerity-imposed restraint, a group of cultural workers and their allies took over a 31-storey skyscraper that had been sitting empty since the late 1990s. The tower’s new tenants announced themselves as ‘the multitude of workers of the creative industries…’ (Macao 2012). The early days of this occupation, named ‘Macao’, were marked by ‘magmatic creativity’ (Foti 2012a): performances, workshops, and parties; drafting communiqués, preparing gardens, and developing working groups; and deliberating over the occupation in general assemblies. Envisaged as a centre for arts and research, unfurled from atop the massive building was a banner – ‘You could even imagine flying’. A steady stream of visitors, endorsements by prominent artists, and social media exposure were not enough to protect the occupation, however: ten days in, police evicted Macao. About a month later, the group installed itself in a more modestly sized space, Ex Borsa del Macello, where it remains at time of writing.

Macao arises from familiar material conditions. One of the themes in the discussions leading up to the occupation was, said one of Macao’s organisers, ‘the way in which creative work is increasingly precarious’ (Braga cited in Cultural Workers Organize 2013: 180). The significance of art, design, and events to Milan’s urban economy is manifest, but, reflecting a classic creative-economy cleave, the rewards are skewed to ‘major names’, leaving little, says Foti (2012b), for ‘bottom-up creative classes’. Doubtless aggravating discontent, Milan’s ‘so-called creatives’, remarks another Macao organiser, face ‘gentrification’ (cited in Tozzi 2012), which makes it difficult to work and live affordably in a city dotted with unused spaces, preserved as bets on a ‘rent gap’ (Smith 1987). Occupation, in this setting, can be understood as a kind of refusal of rent, or an act of ‘autoreduction’ (see Cherki & Wieviorka 2007).

In using the lexicon of precariousness to diagnose working conditions, Macao could be connected to the activism in Milan which, a decade earlier, helped to disseminate ‘precarity’ as a keyword in an ‘alternative system of meaning … about labor market flexibility’ (Mattoni 2008: 108). Likewise, the audacity to
seize a skyscraper cannot be separated from a well-established tradition of squatting in Italy, in particular, the model of the *centri sociali*, social centres occupied and self-managed by activist communities (Ruggiero 2000). Macao, however, was the product of a desire for far-reaching transformations: to ‘create alternative models able to threaten the current mode of production’ (Braga cited in Cultural Workers Organize 2013: 186). In this Macao is not alone: it is one node on a fledgling network of cultural spaces – *Lavoratori dell’arte* – in which cultural production is linked to an emerging ‘commons’ movement in Italy (see Mattei 2013).

Organisers presented Macao as an ‘occasion for the construction of a common good’ (Vecchio 2012). The background of this vision includes a national referendum in 2011 – forced upon government by activists and critical legal experts – that prevented Italian parliament from authorising the privatisation of water management (see Fattori 2013). The movement opposing the enclosure of water used the category of ‘common goods’ to subvert the public-private binary, arguing that the institutional domain designated ‘public’ increasingly functions as conduit for ‘private’ interests to access new zones of accumulation. Harnessing the momentum of a sweeping referendum victory, a group of cultural workers, on the heels of the vote, occupied Teatro Valle, an 18th century theatre in Rome. They did so out of concern for the ‘uncertain future’ of this venerated facility: after a national theatre association was shuttered, ownership of Teatro Valle was transferred to the city of Rome, raising fears about privatisation, which could jeopardise the theatre’s cultural project (Bailey & Marcucci 2013: 397). Straddling ‘legality and illegality’, the occupiers and their legal allies appealed to a constitutional article legitimating expropriation in situations where a case can be made that a vital public need is served (ibid: 399). Insisting ‘culture was as essential for human development as water, air, and other common goods’ (ibid: 398), Teatro Valle’s occupiers leveraged the official institutional form of a ‘foundation’, writing a statute for the cultural space rooted in the principle ‘that culture and art are a collective process of wealth creation and cultural goods like the Valle should not be treated as commodities and owed privately’ (ibid: 402).

In terms of precarious labour politics generally in the creative industries, one of the challenges is to go beyond opposing precarity, and, indeed, beyond developing policy mechanisms enabling workers to better cope with flexible labour markets – to go a step further to propose and experiment with political-economic infrastructures of cultural creativity that provide an alternative to the dominant social relations of production. Such possibilities are most actively explored by precarious workers’ initiatives that do not arise from a specific concern with, for instance, employment stability or income security, but, rather, initiatives that arise from broader social movements anchored in a structural critique of inequality and enclosure in neoliberal capitalism. So although the desire that animates Macao – to ‘take ownership “from below”…’ – may not necessarily lead to a resolution of
labour precarity for its protagonists, the participation of cultural workers in occupation politics points to ways in which capacities and desires radically exceed the portrayal of cultural workers as post-Fordism’s role model (Braga cited in Cultural Workers Organize 2013: 184). After all, at the core of many of the new institutions emerging from occupation are not enterprising selves, but the general assembly, and attendant processes of horizontal, consensus-based decision-making. At a broader level, these interventions confirm that occupation is not merely about the voicing of grievances; occupation is a constituent practice signaling ‘a post-capitalist politics’ (Gibson-Graham 2006). In this respect, these interventions could be linked to traditions of workers’ control in general (see Azzellini & Ness 2011) and ‘self-organisation’ among artists in particular (Davies et al. 2006; see also Robertson 2006), domains where it is expected that ‘autonomy’ in cultural work (see Banks 2010) mean something more than having wiggle room within commercial confines.

Within, Against, Beyond
This article surveyed some of the varied ways in which the nonstandard worker in the celebrated creative economy defies its reputation for being a role model in contemporary capitalism – by, for example, exploring strategies for combating workforce fragmentation, mutually confronting rather than privately managing precarity, and turning capacities susceptible to flexible labour control against it. The organisations, campaigns, and proposals touched upon above confirm that, as Isabell Lorey (2010) remarks, ‘In insecure, flexibilized, and discontinuous working and living conditions, subjectifications arise that do not wholly correspond to a neoliberal logic of exploitation…’ Informed by a larger project on precarious labour activism, for which fieldwork has been carried out primarily in London, Milan, New York City, and Toronto, this article set out to thematise salient features of select collective responses to precarity among workers in nonstandard employment in the arts, the media, and cultural industries. It identified, first, atypical worker aggregations, in which (quasi-)employment status, rather than a specific profession or sector, serves as a basis for assembly and advocacy; second, it revealed a mounting concern about unpaid work across sectors of the creative industries, and flagged compensation proposals for redressing wageless labour; and, third, it offered examples of the participation of precarious cultural workers in wider social movements, namely the politics of occupation, which have provided a context, outside the bounds of a circumscribed workplace, for voicing grievances and asserting demands. These sorts of responses to precarisation are likely to be overlooked by research in which the lens is restricted to how cultural workers negotiate precarity within a delimited sector, a particular profession, or an individual collective bargaining unit.
The survey approach taken in this article is not without limitations. Assessing the efficacy of the initiatives documented here requires extended case study research. Nonetheless, a cataloging of different initiatives, campaigns, and proposals has the advantage of illuminating tensions between and among responses to precarity in the creative economy. Self-employed workers pooling financial resources via a social enterprise so as to access more affordable healthcare or workspace, for example, is a significant instance of mutual aid, which lessens independent worker precarity in meaningful ways; however, such efforts are not on the same plane, politically, as a collective of precarious, self-identified art workers squatting a skyscraper and declaring it a ‘common good’, in the context of social movements opposing privatization and seeking greater autonomy over cultural production. The cases introduced above – while far from adding up to a comprehensive portrait – begin to reveal a continuum of responses, ranging from those that accommodate to flexible labour control, to those that achieve incremental improvements within it, through to those that seek more radical reforms against, and potentially beyond, capitalist imperatives and relations. Going forward, an evaluation of the contribution of these efforts vis-à-vis political recomposition must grapple with a fundamental tension between accommodative and antagonistic responses; doing so, however, does not necessarily call for hard-and-fast distinctions, for reasons that can be gestured at by way of conclusion.

Maurizio Lazzarato (2013) recently lamented ‘… our incapacity to invent modes of collective subjectivation that break from contemporary capitalism.’ His chosen historic benchmark, the First International, is humbling, yet Lazzarato’s point was neither defeatist nor nostalgic. Instead, he invoked this workers’ movement to insist it is ‘entirely possible and desirable to repeat their active invention’. The strategies inventoried in this article would not appear to hold a candle to such a tall order; at the same time, it would be unwise to dismiss the potential of these strategies in the context of contemporary capitalism, where the flexibilisation of labour and the immaterialisation of production are twin tendencies. Still, to stand on ground firmer than hope, Lazzarato’s claim must be supplemented by practical experiments taking up a research question posed by Franco Berardi (2011): ‘How can [we] create solidarity in … conditions of precariousness?’ The atypical worker aggregations, compensation proposals, and occupation politics overviewed here can be read as partial replies to Berardi’s question – a question that is at the crux of the idea of ‘the precariat’ (Standing 2011; see also Frase 2013).

Rather than label an ascendant, unified, vanguard subject, the precariat is a concept, which, firstly, presumes the historical malleability and multiplicity of agents, forms, and sites of workers’ responses to exploitation, and, secondly, designates a laboratory of labour activity driven by populations differentially excluded from – but not necessarily motivated to restore – the standard employment relationship. Approaching flexible workforces in the arts, the media, and cultural industries as participants in a politics of the precariat opens a counter-narrative to
that of self-exploitation, a prominent theme of critical research on labour and creative industries. The organisations, campaigns, proposals, and direct actions described in these pages are, ultimately, helping to define, spatialise, and generate common ground – a condition of possibility for solidarity. What transpires from this common ground is contingent, unpredictable, and without guarantees – in short, precarious. It is, however, a small leap of ‘radical imagination’ (Haiven & Khasnabish 2010) to picture the emergence, from these crucibles, of, say, transnational assemblies of interns strategising against youth exploitation, globalising ‘common goods’ policy initiatives, and networks of coworking spaces providing a social base for organising the unorganised. After all, a role model always carries within it the potential to become a bad example – therein lies the promise of a properly creative precariat.

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Notes
1 Leah Vosko (2008: 132) defines the standard employment relationship as an ideal-type employment arrangement encompassing a ‘full-time continuous employment relationship where the worker has one employer, works on his or her employer’s premises under the employer’s direct supervision, normally in a unionized sector, and has access to social benefits and entitlements that complete the social wage’.
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Thematic Section:
Social Movements – Ritual, Space and Media

Edited by
Madeleine Hurd
Introduction
Social Movements: Ritual, Space and Media

By Madeleine Hurd

Social movements studies: Examining and understanding the mobilization, life and effects of sets of loosely organized networks that share a solidaristic identity based on counter-hegemonic narratives and values, launching public protests on behalf of “alternative imaginaries”.
(Paraphrase Leitner et al. 2008:157)

This collection of articles explores seven very different contemporary social movements, ranging from ostracized Waffen-SS veterans through environmentalist activists to Arab Spring protesters. These disparate case-studies are united in their attention to three central social-movement concerns: rituals and emotions; spatialities; and, related to both of these, communication and media. In this introduction, I would like to introduce these themes, drawing – so as not to anticipate the seven authors – on historical instances of social protest to give substance to my discussion.

I should begin by noting that most of our contributions are interested in micro-histories of what might be termed New Social Movement-type phenomena: urban gardening, animal rights, IVF-users’, university students’ and employees’ movements; and that all of the essays use methods inspired by both NSM analysis and symbolic interactionism. These approaches, originally part of the “cultural turn” of the 1970s, moved social-movement analysis away from its early concentration on how shifts in economic-political structures produced marginalized and disadvantaged groups, who then mobilized – according to resources and opportunities – in different types of instrumental-rational protest (Goodwin 2012; classics are Tilly 1978; Skocpol 1979; Kitschelt 1986; Kriesi 1995). After 1970, greater attention to cultural and linguistic factors combined with the challenge posed by “post-modern” NSMs to encourage scholars to look more closely at the actors’ varying world-views. Economic and political structures do not in themselves create collective identities, it was now argued; on the contrary, we must look at how class, gender and ethno-nationalist identities are “made”. People, further, do not only mobilize to their own political and/or economic advantage, even in non-post-modern times. Many powerful collective movements (temperance, neo-Nazis) had seemingly non-instrumental objectives. Scholars turned, accordingly, to micro- and mid-level analyses of, for instance, the discourses, collective frames and “social imaginaries” of counter-hegemonic mobilization. Focus shifted from causa-
tion and efficacy to the study of – among other things – the role of collective emotions and rituals, spatial frames and discourses, representation and communication. Let us take each of these in turn.

**Rituals**

What causes individuals to join protest collectives? Information and opportunities are important; but equally important (as in all thinking and action) are emotions. Scholars have emphasized the importance of the outrage that spurs involvement, group members’ mutual affection, the excitement, pride, joys and sorrows of communal action (cf. Collins 2001; Eyerman 2005; Gould 2009; Doetsch-Kidder 2012). Emotions are strengthened when shared; they underpin collective identities. Group solidarity and emotional engagement are often increased, in turn, by the moving solemnity of collective rituals (e.g., Pàez et al. 1997; Manning 1998; Berstain et al. 2000). Erika Summers-Effler (2002: 54) describes the long, uphill battle faced by those who combat repressive forces, a struggle demanding both an intense feeling of solidarity and an abundance of emotional energy. They are much benefited by the face-to-face interaction, mutual focus of attention and emotional contagion inherent in group rituals. Some of these can be very every-day. The rituals of coffee-klatches, of doing the movement’s work together, for instance, help the group maintain day-to-day solidarity. Some rituals, however, can be deeply central to group identities. James Jasper’s classic 1997 study of grassroots mobilization includes a chapter entitled “Rituals and Emotions /.../ Sustaining Activist Identities”. He cites Emile Durkheim’s statement that the “collective effervescence” that rituals create is important, in that it transports “participants onto another plane”. Rituals are affirmations of participants’ identities and beliefs, as well as of their power. As Durkheim sensed, collective rituals and gatherings suggest that you are participating in something bigger than you: you are part of history, or you are morally sanctioned, or you truly belong to a group. The emotions of rituals reinforce cognitive and moral visions as well. (Jasper 1997: 192, 194).

Such rituals can range from the every-day, through the innovative and playful, to the achingly solemn (often, in the last case, borrowing the forms but subverting the meanings of hegemonic rituals).

Rituals do more than sharpen collective solidarity. They also (as argued by Maurice Halbwachs 1992), provide the movement with narratives. They constitute an “embodied” form of collective remembering which is based on an intensely moral definition of self and collectivity. This moral-social identity implies both a shared past and a hopeful future. This is, Summers-Effler (2002) argues, particularly important to social movements, which depend so highly on the emotional energy of hope. She cites David Snow’s and Robert Benford’s (1992) term “frame alignment”: the ritual helps frame narratives of past experiences so as to confirm
the movement’s hope for ultimate success. Feelings of anticipation and hope can then be supported with regular interaction rituals, creating a feedback loop of high emotional energy.

Protest-movement rituals, of course, are not randomly concocted. Many of these happen in public spaces; and these, in particular, tend to reflect important rituals in the dominant society. But reflection can be part of subversion; indeed, reflection might be necessary for subversion. As Fredric Jameson (1981) pointed out, oppositional politics is about the destabilization of shared meanings. There has to be a language overlap, the ability to communicate: two opposing discourses fight it out within the general unity of a shared code. Rituals, as a type of embodied discourse, can do the same.

Historians, indeed, have spent a good deal of time looking at rituals in terms of maintaining and challenging power. It is a truism to note how well power-holders—ranging from medieval kings to fascist leaders—have understood the value of ritual in conferring political legitimacy. What Jürgen Habermas (1962/1989) termed “representational” public culture—the Ancien Régime’s public display of symbols, bodies, rituals—has remained an important part of the public political sphere. Ritual, ceremony, festival and monuments, performed in public places or, more recently, on television, remain useful to governmental authority. They help collectives transcend internal differences, give emotional and aesthetic power to solidarities, mark collective pasts and futures, and denote sacred space for national liturgies. The most powerful can easily survive political upheaval. As Cheles & Sponza (2001: 101) note, the “durability of ritual amidst political change means that ritual itself becomes a political prize, a kind of holy grail. Political competitors, then, not only fight through ritual, they also fight over ritual, that is, over their right to identify with powerful rites.” Oppositional movements can, of course, ridicule, parody or (attempt to) demystify existing rituals. More commonly, however, they seek to hijack (so to speak) elements of already-existing rituals, giving old forms new (but related) meanings as a short-cut to appropriating political or social legitimacy. The latter tactic can be seen in minority flag- and folk-tradition celebrations, in social-democracy’s orderly marches and in fascism’s quasi-religious forms (Warneken 1991; Griffin 1996). The rituals thus become what “floating signifiers” are for texts: powerful symbols, subject to a tug-of-war between two sides, each wishing to appropriate a specific ritual’s potency for their own purposes (for the term, Laclau & Mouffe 1985).

Let me illustrate this with the example of the early Nazis’ “street theatre”. In 1933, Sturmbteilung leader Heinz Lohmann published a memoir on his “Time of Struggle” with the nascent Nazi Storm Troopers. Most of Lohmann’s prose is, predictably enough, given over to descriptions of public meetings, marches and battles: the “political soldiers” used public space to perform rituals that imitated, and thereby contested, those claimed as legitimizing Germany’s democratic regime.
Lohmann, the patriotic hooligan from the small town of Schwelm, first tells how he and his comrades spent Sunday after Sunday training military marching: “as one’s bones learnt to stand upright, so did the soul!” Lohmann then describes his group’s first proper march. It was performed in front of the Schwelm church, together with visiting Berlin “brown-shirts”. A dozen Schwelm SA members had (he writes)

marched, in closed ranks; the song of good comrades rang out. The small troop assembled before the grave-yard. The square was black with people. SA stand forward! Right turn – March! We twenty Schwelmer Nazis joined the group column. Kommando! Sing!

This, Lohmann continues, “was already too much” for their opponents, the social-democrats and the (Jewish) communists. “A roar of fury! The first stone! The SA went over to the attack”. A lusty account of a battle ensues. A discussion followed the fight. “This fury against us! /…/ it was because of our brown shirts. They have the effect, it seems, of dynamite.” (Lohmann 1933: 50-2.)

Why the “fury”, indeed? Lohmann is seeking to show the efficacy of the SA’s challenge to a central establishment symbol: the national army. He and his fellow-demonstrators were exploiting the army’s own ritualistic spatial displays: the closed-ranks, sharply-commanded, uniformed and singing march – in a way that subverted the military march’s dominant meanings. The result was immediate and violent protest, not least from their establishment enemies. It is on events such as this that Lohmann and other SA “comrades” wrote endlessly: it is evident that the experiences and narratives of such public rituals, whose meanings sat, so to speak, in “one’s bones”, was a key emotional and framing resource.

The memory of this counter-hegemonic ritual is, in Lohmann’s book, anchored in both body and space. Paul Connerton (1989: 36-7) notes that social memory always happens in a “socially specific spatial framework”, for images of space “are relatively stable”; references thereto give the illusion of “rediscovering the past in the present”. Space, and descriptions of space, then, may – along with emotions, rituals and bodies - be integral to both collective memory and collective belonging.

**Space**

The place of protest adds to its import. Lohmann was in a symbolically laden place – the square before the town church. Historically, as Vincent Robert (1991) has shown, mass city-street protest – even spontaneous, stone-throwing, lynch-mob protests – were formed within the compass of symbolically-laden nodes of urban geography. As protest became increasingly formalized during the nineteenth-century, “rioters” turned into “demonstrators”; but their routes remained conditioned by urban power structures. It was important to invade, and challenge, symbolically significant places – indeed, contesting shared meanings leant
demonstrations (like rituals) significance. As Alberto Melucci (1994) emphasizes, public spaces are still used, above all, to make questions raised by movements both visible and collective. Jameson’s point about rhetoric holds also for the public symbolism of such spaces. They must be invaded, and, if possible, their symbols challenged and changed – only then will the revolution have conquered the sacred centers of the old order.

Religious studies’ Paul-Francois Tremlett (2012) has termed this the “production of territorialities”. He cites Occupy London’s attempt to “re-enchant” an otherwise strongly Stock Exchange-encoded “place of power”. Their campsite, next to St. Paul Cathedral, linked a symbol of a “securitized nowhere” and “mobile, dis-embedded capital” with a “moral and territorially defined somewhere or relational community”. The camp symbolized an attempt to challenge ruling spatial meanings with what, campers maintained, were practices and discourses that imbued the place with new moral meaning. The result, Tremlett concludes, was a performance which served to “imagine a world without capitalism”. As with rituals, so also – as Leitner et al. (2008) point out – do many social movements seek to strategically manipulate, subvert and resignify places, particularly those that symbolise the priorities and imaginaries they are contesting.

Let us take a more prosaic (but classic) example: November 1918, Berlin. Our newspaper-article source (DanzigerZeitung 12:11:1918) describes how an enormous demonstration, starting “in the outer suburbs, in the North, in the Brunnenstrasse, then in Moabit”, is convening on Berlin’s city center. Demonstrators have been joined by cars and trucks, “people armed with rifles, the red flag swiveling”. The demonstrators have gathered at the Imperial Palace, standing expectantly in front of the cannons which flank its front portals.

On the balustrade of the second-floor balcony a piece of red flag material glows darkly through the twilight. Suddenly there is movement, shoving, calls among the mass; a carriage comes, drawn less by horses than pushed forward by the crowding people. A white head: Lebedour. /…/ rousingly greeted /…/ there appear s, sharply delineated against the gray sky, the silhouette of a man on the roof of the palace, who tries to attach a red flag to one of the sculptures of the balustrade /…/ shortly thereafter the small red flag flew, high, from the palace flag pole. (Italics in the original.)

The palace guards “go over to the people”; the palace is now “national property”. Historians, knowing that the November Revolution will now spread from Berlin through the country – borne by socialists and mutinous soldiers via trains and trucks, but also through twice-daily and special editions of thick-headlined newspapers (our Danzig source is evidence of this) – note the significance of the recodification of the nation’s central public-space symbol.

Places can lend those who participate in collective rituals extra passion. This is true, not least, when social imaginaries define that particular place as a nodal point in members’ own moral order. Pilgrimages to and performances at “sacralized” places – monuments, gravesites – are important to many movements, and
many focus on creating and defending specific places that “stand for” their moral order (usually, places where key rituals are performed).

One’s home neighborhood can also be given near-sacral import. Most people, cultural geographers argue, do not mobilize for things in the abstract. It is “passionate attachments to particular places, things and non-humans that move people, and motivate people to defend them” (Curry 2006: 79). As Yi-Fu Tuan (2008) observes, emotional life is invested in clothing, home, and neighborhood. One’s physical environment has become precious as symbol and carrier for emotionally charged events and practices. Outside this area, the person can feel unclothed, displaced, dislocated.

This sense of belonging derives not only from familiarity with a built and natural environment. It is co-created by bodily movement and interaction. Particular practices make places what they are. It is “the dialectical relationship between the body and a structured organization of space and time that common practice and representations are determined” (Cresswell 1996: 11). Spaces become connected to one’s characteristic bodily movements.

The consequent urge to protect the space around one’s home helps explain the violent, sometimes murderous tendencies that are spurred by city streets; for power inheres in street-names and post-boxes, flags and statues, squares and public buildings. Demonstrations in these public spaces can become doubly charged, as space is claimed not only for “production of morally defined territorialities”, but as essential to the existence of the community. How does a protest movement lay claim to its preeminent right to be in such significant places – to establish its practices, its bodies, as the most legitimate for those streets?

Let us return to inter-war Germany. The date is December 1918. The Germans of the city of Posen – formerly the dominant minority, now a protesting minority – are attempting to maintain their claim that their home-city as intrinsically “German”. The German-language Posener Tageblatt (14:12:1918) tells of the intense passion this inspired. On the day of a planned mass meeting,

from early morning on, soldiers, civilians and burghers, women, girls and youths, held a demonstration over which the free and great German flags fluttered /./ during which the old German fatherland songs rang out /./ developed a momentous impact, to which no German could remain distant and which powerfully expressed that [German essence] which moves the heart of all us Germans, that which lives in us, undeniably and unbreakably.

The report details the squares and streets (giving, of course, only their German names) through which demonstrators moved. The “decoration of the houses with German flags and wimples” had made the German areas of the city “very lovely, and there were, in some streets, scarcely a house, from whose windows and gables the German flag did not wave”. They had stopped in front of Hindenburg’s childhood home to cheer with “thunderous” and “exultant” enthusiasm. A meeting was held, whereupon an additional “several-thousand-strong demonstration” marched
to the Bismarck memorial, decorated it with a German flag, and then marched through the town; long into the night, the report happily concludes, one heard Deutschland, Deutschland über alles sung throughout the city streets.

According to Cresswell (1996, a familiar landscape transmits ideas about what is right, just, and appropriate: spatial structures influence the collective’s representation of the world and thereby the group itself. This is done, not least, by spatialized performance – that is, movement through and action in the landscape in question. German Posenites give an excellent example of protesters struggling to claim – with, the newspaper maintains, tremendous emotional impact – a space defined as central to the collective’s moral essence. They visit and pay homage to what they hold to be the city’s nodal points of symbolic meaning, sacralizing an alternative city map, so to speak, while filling (the newspaper claims) the city with their bodies, their emotions, their public symbols, and their collective song. This is an extreme example of what Deborah Martin (2003), discussing neighborhood-based protest movements, terms “place-framing”. For these movements, identities are fostered by the motivating discourse of a “neighborhood” which both promotes passion and obscures residents’ social differences. Wilson & Grammenos (2000: 367, cited in Martin 2003), indeed, go further: protests against urban redevelopment use specifically spatial “alternative imaginaries” to frame their resistance. They postulate alternative “terrains of civility” within ideal-type communities, ranging from “gentrified aesthetic, ‘stable’ blue-collar orderliness, the suburban ideal, and the city beautiful ethic”. In Posen, 1918, the supposed incommensurability of two competitive “terrains of civility”– German and Polish – would, a few weeks later, lead to open violence.

Attachment to place, thus, can be incendiary. Today, debate rages over the advantages and dangers of “place framing”, that is, the mobilizational strength of local, neighborhood protest. Those scholars who point to the passions and commitment that arise from collective identification with particular places are met by those who warn sharply against the dangers of selfish, exclusionary boundary-drawing. In debating pro-environmental mobilization, for instance, David Harvey (1996: 303) writes with alarm of “a rather touching and abiding faith” in a revived “sense of place” as promoting what is necessarily an international cause. On the contrary, he warns: deep knowledge of and love for one place may actively hinder appreciation of broader, global “socio-ecological processes”. After all, many environmentalist activists see global forces as their enemies, not their allies. Local movements may react to penetration by global powers with increasing insularity, even exclusionary nationalism. The dangers of place-based, exclusionary, even nationalist environmentalism are, indeed, shown not only by environmentalist Not-In-My-Backyard movements, but the ease with which the US and European far-right has adopted ecological planks (Olsen 1999; Hurd & Werther 2013). Or, as Germany’s neo-Nazi Nationaldemokratische Partei writes, protection of the environment is protection of the Heimat.
An intact nature is the foundation of our future! National politics is environmental politics. The lack of ecologically responsible politics threatens every Volk in its substance! Economic interests must come second to protection of nature. The human is part of nature. Nature, therefore, is not simply the ‘Umwelt’ of humans, but the Mitwelt. (Bavarian NPD Party Program 2013, quoted in Hurd & Werther 2013).

Cultural geographer Doreen Massey (1995) agrees. The assumed right to speak for a territory is often based on a collective memory of inhabitancy, that is, shared experience and usage. But this means that one group defines its practices, and those of its forebears, as definitional for a given place. These practices, when enshrined as the history of the place, exclude alternative histories and groups, resulting in what Massey calls “space-time envelopes” (1995: 188). Sharma (2012) shows how the greater the elaboration of a specific history of human-nature interaction, the stronger the exclusionary claims made concerning that place’s proper present and future. Collective care for a local place leads, by this argument, not to the international cooperation needed to save the environment but to its opposite – insular, even exclusionary spatial protectionism (Barnett 2001; King 2007).

Media

How, then, to generalize local, spatial and collective attachment – how to lift the social-movement passions engendered by “place framing” beyond the local, face-to-face, and material? This problem can be examined historically. In A Nation of Provincials, Celia Applegate (1990) asks how a country as aggressively regional as Germany could ever become a nation. The answer, Jonathan Sperber (1997) postulates, lies in the mid-nineteenth-century interaction between local national-liberal movements, these locals’ neighborhood public-space performances (ceremonies and rituals), and local and national media.

The 1850s saw a burgeoning middle-class civic associational culture, and a corresponding increase in middle-class public-space ritual performance (celebrations to raise statues to national heroes, nationalist parades, public dinners for Garibaldi and the like). These ceremonies were, in turn, both covered and promoted by a growing number of small but interlinked local newspapers. Mid-nineteenth century liberals re-used traditional forms of collective expression, now imbued with liberal-nationalist meaning. These (as Sperber puts it) “discursive formations” were then externalized, distributed, represented, and made accessible to larger audiences by detailed and interested coverage in liberal newspapers, a network of fairly amateurish political journals adept at reading each other for material to cut-and-paste – and so spread the news of national-liberal actions. Collectives active in local public space were fused into a national collective through the new media of newsprint.

Let me show how this might work, by tracing another national-liberal movement: that which underpinned Sweden’s Constitutional Reform of 1865. The older system of rule by the King and Four Estates (aristocracy, clergy, burghers and
farmers) had been declared obsolete by a large set of middle-class liberals. Claiming to represent “public opinion”, they used public meetings, petitions, delegations and festivals to mobilize what they termed “the nation” for a non-corporatist parliamentary system. The motions and resolutions passed at these meetings were conveyed to the capital by delegations, petitions, and – above all – detailed newspaper reports. Opponents, indeed, denounced the entire movement as consisting solely of editor agitators. Proponents did not agree. The newspapers, they pointed out, were publishing endless accounts of “Pro-Reform” meetings, from all parts of Sweden: how could this not represent the nation? Moreover, these lists of nationwide public convocations directly challenged the Four Estates as embodying the nation. The alternative they offered was of a Sweden represented, both geographically and personally, by those notables who held public meetings in all the country’s towns – meetings reported, first, in local newspapers, and then re-told in central Stockholm organs (see Hurd 2010).

Historian David Featherstone (2005), in analyzing eighteenth-century London protest, gives the media a similar central role in providing links between what always began as face-to-face, localized collectives. Political struggles in particular localities do not (he writes) exist merely as “discrete struggles waiting to be brought together by intellectuals or broader political movements”: they bring themselves together, with the help of local and national media (Featherstone 2005: 262). Modern social-movement analysts would refer, here, to “different spatialities”, working together to create new “social movement space” by connecting different-level networks over geographical divides (Nicholls 2009, 2013). As Law & Mol (2001) put it, topological spatiality, which spans rather than covers geographic space, allows ideas and practices to move far afield. Local movements inhere in geographic space. Media allows practices and ideas, narratives and visuals to create a “topology”, connecting one place to another (see summary in Van Aelst & Walgrave 2002).

During Sweden’s Constitutional Reform, the Reform Meetings were covered – “topographically” – by local and national liberal papers. But the papers did more than just list the meetings in question. They gave detailed reports of meetings which were, if the reports are to be believed, very similar, and very formal. All followed the same parliamentary rituals; all were underpinned by strong emotions, alternating between the attentive, the enthusiastic and the solemn. It was obvious that editors strongly sympathized with the meetings’ messages. Norrköping’s liberal editor had, indeed, openly called on locals to join “the great middle-class of Swedish people” in publicizing their “patriotic convictions” in the “great votum, to add to the many that have issued from Sweden’s towns”. The meeting, when it took place, was covered in detail. It resembled dozens of others of the same ilk. The audience assembled, was formally welcomed, a chairman elected, an “attentive audience” listened to introductory words, a Question was moved and answered with “joyful acclamation”, an address was read and “enthusiastically” ac-
cepted, cheers rang out and the meeting was closed (Norrköpingstidningar 21:11:1865, 23:11:1865, also summarized in the Stockholm newspaper Post och Inrikes Tidningar 30:11:1865).

To be sure, the ritual (and, if true, the emotions involved) would help knit together the local collective. Participants, reading about their solemn and orderly meeting the next day, might be impressed; this publicly-sanctioned narrative might standardize group memory. But more important, in this case, was the newspaper report’s contribution to “topologies”. This was, after all, almost exactly the same meeting as that which appeared in other newspapers’ coverage of other meetings. Accordingly, readers could easily link it to those others taking place among the “Swedish people” throughout the nation. Not only did Sweden’s middle-class readers participate in an Anderssonian nation-building newspaper-reading ritual; they were reading about how every notable in every town (it seemed) had solemnly performed the same set of public, pro-reform protest rituals. Such accounts linked liberal networks together, and, by giving them a standard form, made them seem both uniform and powerful. Shared ritual, emotion and memory – promoted by formulaic media narratives – combined to make up a new territorial nation.

Many have identified national mass media (along with maps, school-books, and traffic laws) as key in creating national consciousness. Similar hopes have been advanced for global media – that is, social media - in transcending national for global spatialities (Leitner et al. 2008; Castells 2012). The debate on the impact of modern, social media on social movements is extensive; so is that on space. Social movements work on different levels, ranging from local to transregional to national. On the most basic level, media can link protesting networks together, by telling them, for instance, where and when to meet. But the movement’s own media (and movement-sympathetic mass media) also join in noticing, solemnifying, interpreting, narrating, providing visuals for and histories of the movement, repeating, reinforcing and standardizing the “frames” upon which the movement depends. Thus, media adds a “topographical” space to geographical mobilization. Media, finally, can be seen as a sort of space in itself. It does impose its own sets of movements, way-stations, aesthetic experiences, public symbols and participatory rituals – including rituals of boundary-drawing and exclusion.

Nicholls (2009: 3) examines the resulting interlinking of local and media networks in national and transnational networks. The linkage, he argues, results in complex topologies of contemporary social movement networks, connected by particular “relational dynamics” that, in turn, create a new sort of “social movement space”– one that encompasses the social movement as a whole. After all, spaces do not exist, so to speak; they are, rather, both defined and interlinked by practices – consisting of “polyvalent inter-connectivities” (Massey 2005: 141) rather than bounded segments of geography. Can each social movement, then,
transcend anchorage in local, material space, in the polyvalent topologies of global, social media?

Let me exemplify (and problematize) this point by a final historical example. In December 1865, the Swedish Constitutional Reform had just passed; the country (again, according to the newspapers) was rejoicing. Again, reports of local (ritualized) public-space performances were published, first in local newspapers, and then in Stockholm, in, e.g., special columns on “Expressions of Joy”. In Stockholm’s *Nya Dagligt Allehanda* (30:12:65) we find, again, lists of notices on enthusiastic ceremony. “In Hernösand, the reform was celebrated with a banquet.” The King’s toast was followed by toasts to Sweden’s new parliamentary order, the Minister of State, the “brother kingdom of Norway”, a Court Justice, a Bishop, the Mayor, the local M.P., and the town’s Reform Delegation. Further, the town had been illuminated, the streets full of “life and movement”, while

the sharp-shooting association, led by its musicians, marched through the streets and paraded outside the City Hall. The town’s poor were given an extra meal at the expense of an anonymous donor. During the banquet, telegrams were sent off to the Minister of State, Bishop Beckman, the Mayors of Stockholm and Kristiana; an answer was received from the last of these.

We find, again, the combination of new and old rituals, brought together and given new meaning in the topographic space of a newspaper narrative. Like the Reform Meetings, national coverage of these festivals helped cement the new, liberal collective, creating an “imagined community” based on simultaneous ritualistic performance. One notes, further, the summary of the complex, if festive, interplay of different media, working on different scales and within multi-level spatialities: from the local banquet and speeches, parades and illuminated city streets, to the national and even international: Hernösand-Stockholm relations spanned by the bodies of delegations, M.P.s, and the public invocations of Court Justices, Mayors and Ministers, telegrams linking Norwegian and Swedish towns. All these different spatialities were, arguably, brought together in a common “social movement space”, whose dynamics then, in turn, strongly affected the local expressions of collective belonging.

Of all these media, however, I would like to postulate that the press had a leading part. The press was the authoritative, public witness who could confirm that the rituals, both local and topographical, had been simultaneous, significant and shared. I would like, here, to use Nick Couldry’s (2003) concept of “the myth of the mediated center”. This concerns a myth propagated by the media itself. First, the media present some place and aspect of government as the nation’s “natural symbolic center” (usually, the capital city). Second, the media constitutes itself that center’s main watchdog, observer and commentator. This center is (as Kristina Widestedt 2009: 48 paraphrases Couldry) “encircled” by news media, “like the walls of a medieval city”. Editors declare it their high duty to keep this center under surveillance, and claim, in return, a near-monopoly right to control communi-
cation between the “center” and the citizens. It is their voice that defines the important; it is their coverage that establishes the relevant in the public sphere.

Media, thus, disperses narratives. Media links people, topographically, in social space. But media also collects, selects, censures and re-tells. It creates the myth of a common focus, a center of concern. Traditional news media (as media analysts point out) may fail to change people’s values, but it tells them what public issues to examine and discuss according to those values. They identify the (mythical) symbolic center. By the 1860s, Sweden’s media had already, arguably, defined Stockholm’s Four Estates’ Parliament and the Court as the symbolic center. The liberal press maintained, indeed, that it was invaluable in giving citizens information and informed commentaries on the political doings of Estates and King.

In December of 1865, however, the nation was to be reconstituted. This did not happen in Stockholm; the Four Estates could only acquiesce in their own abolition. The new nation was, in fact, reconstituted not in Stockholm, but in provincial small towns – by local notables who had declared that they made up the Swedish nation, who would elect the new Parliament, and who were currently celebrating their successes in highly medialized political festivals. The press was there. Arguably, the Reform Meetings and the subsequent “Expressions of Joy”, all so carefully covered in the press, took the place of a Swedish Constituent Assembly. The press briefly dispersed the symbolic center, so to speak, and went a-traveling – to the provinces, where careful adumbration of local public meetings were used to reconstitute the basis of national representation. The press would return to Stockholm, of course, shortly thereafter, to celebrate the new, two-house parliament. But the journey outwards, to the provinces, and the long sets of descriptions of provincial symbols and rituals confirmed both the legitimacy of the protest movement, its right to re-found the nation, and the press’s authoritative right to define the location and nature of the nation’s symbolic center.

This historical example suggests that modern concerns on media as both a danger and a resource to social-movement mobilization have their roots in media traditions established centuries ago. Mass media has traditionally focused attention through a myth of symbolic center. The gate-keeping authority assumed by the news media shut out many voices. But, conversely, what happens to politics when the myth of the symbolic center is gone?

The splintering of such a center seems inherent in the communicative spaces staked out by social media. Unedited, democratically accessible media allows increasingly decentralized and representative politics. But, as BBC Media Action research warns (Schoemaker 2013: 1), the result might be a loss of common focus (including what Habermasian scholars might term the necessary adherence to rituals of rational-critical debate). Instead, one might see further (and increasingly mutually hostile, polarized) social fragmentation. Commentators are worried about the lack of an acknowledged central public forum where people meet to
discuss issues of supposed universal concern. Social media, they argue, fractures these gazes, allowing debate – often extremely polarized – to disperse in endless, mutually unrelated chains of sub-spatialities (a tendency worsened as various platforms impose mutually discriminatory filters in what used to be “open ecosystems”, see Economist 2012, Holmes 2013: 1). Social movement space may be much reduced in meaning and impact if there is, no longer, a (mythic, but potent) symbolic centre, able to coordinate stories of local-space, ritualized endeavor.

The reader may judge on this, and other issues, in the seven articles which follow, of which each, in its own way, engages with one or more of the central issues of ritual, place and media. The three often blur, coming together in the practices that, together, define social-movement space. Social-movement space spans that of local face-to-face experiences, members’ performances in public and pilgrimage space. It uses media to create topologies of communication and, finally, imposes additional rituals of communication inherent in each social-movement medium.

Rituals and local spaces, meanwhile, are interrelated; bodies remember both. Face-to-face interaction brings emotional bodies into play, giving strength to collective engagement. Performances and words, rituals and symbolic spaces are, further, re-represented through medialized forums. The media narratives of rituals affect local groups, complementing embodied ritual memory with standardized narrative memories, even liturgies, while confirming the public significance of the group’s experience and purpose.

Further, the events can be presented both locally and in different “mythical-center” spaces; the discourses and rituals of these centers then re-infect local practices and frames. Public narratives and discussion, indeed, allow special types group boundary-drawing. Their genre-specific narratives validate certain rituals and ridicule others. Following these interlinked rituals can intensify and legitimize the group’s message; while flaunting the ritualized frames and norms of media can pose challenges to hegemonic symbolic orders. How this is done, and how we can deepen our understanding of these processes, are the subjects of the following seven studies.

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Elementary Forms of Religious Life in Animal Rights Activism

By Kerstin Jacobsson

Abstract

Many scholars have noted that secular belief systems, despite lack of a spiritual base, can possess qualities and display features similar to religion. The most well-known and forceful formulation of this is, arguably, Durkheim’s claim that elementary forms of religious life pervade collective life in all societies. This article suggests that animal rights activism can fruitfully be analyzed as an instance of “secular religion”. Drawing on Durkheim and based on a study of animal rights activists in Sweden, the article identifies a number of elementary forms and experiences of religious life in animal rights activism. These include overwhelming conversion experiences, a division of the world into sacred and profane, concern about protecting the sacred, commitment to spreading the message and living out one’s faith, the feeling that suffering and guilt have meaning, and the constitutive role of common symbols and rituals. The article argues that it is in the light of the activist group as a moral community formed around a sacred ideal that these religious elements are best understood. At the same time, the animal rights activists challenge established boundaries between sacred and profane, when dismantling the symbolic boundary between humans and animals.

Keywords: Animal rights, activism, Durkheim, secular religion, sacred, social movement, Yinger
Introduction

It is well known that many social movement activists burn for their cause. The convictions and ideals on which their activism is based are invested with strong moral and affective force, which both fuels their public actions and guides them in their everyday lives (e.g. Jacobsson & Lindblom 2012, Pallotta 2005). Rarely is this more evident than in the case of animal rights activists; conversion to an animal rights universe of meaning has huge implications for the public as well as the private dimensions of a person’s life. Moreover, few contemporary movements challenge dominant value and norm systems in such a fundamental way.

Historically, other social movements have pursued radically new ideals, for instance the extension of full human rights to new categories of people, such as women, racial or sexual minorities. However, the animal rights movement challenges us to extend our moral concern and obligation to encompass a new category of beings, namely animals. By conceiving of animals as sentient beings, as individuals with intrinsic value and rights, by viewing meat consumption as murder and modern insemination practices as institutionalized rape, and by drawing parallels between industrial meat production and the Holocaust, they fundamentally challenge dominant social practices and moral codes. Being themselves a product of cultural modernization and reflexivity, where more and more aspects of human life become open to reflection, questioning and choice, the animal rights activists thus contribute to further moral reflexivity.

I conceive of social movement activists as united by a commitment to distinct moral ideals, and can accordingly be conceptualized as pursuers of moral ideals (see also Jacobsson & Lindblom 2012). Activist groups are as much moral as social communities (e.g. Peterson 2001), as the shared moral ideals that translate into behavioral codes of imperative force are basis for their community. Following Durkheim (1912/2001), I argue that these collective ideals are conferred a sacred status by those committed to their defense. This is why I suggest that it is useful to draw parallels to a religious universe of meaning and to religious experience and practice, in order to understand the nature of commitment and activist experience as well as the consequences for the activists’ everyday life and social relationships. Thus, the article suggests that animal rights activism can fruitfully be analyzed as in instance of “secular religion” (cf. Jamison, Wenk & Parker 2000; Lowe 2001). The aim of the article is to empirically identify and theoretically understand these religious qualities in animal rights activism as well as to explore their significance for the identities and social relationships of the activists. More generally, the article aims to illustrate the usefulness of a “sociology of religion” perspective for understanding social movement activism even in a secularized society.

It has been noted by many scholars that secular belief systems can possess qualities and display features similar to religion without having a spiritual base or
belief in a transcendent reality. For instance, Simmel stated, “I do not believe that the religious feelings and impulses manifest themselves in religion only” (Simmel quoted in Yinger 1970: 86). Various conceptualizations have been suggested for religious expressions in non-traditional forms of religion, such as secular religion (e.g. Yinger 1970), functional religion (Yinger 1970), quasi-religion (e.g. Edwards 1973; Yinger 1970), implicit religion (e.g. Bailey 1997), invisible religion (Luckman 1967) and civil religion (e.g. Bellah 1967). The most well-known and forceful statement of the persistence of religious elements and forms even in modern, secularized societies is, however, that of Émile Durkheim (2001). Durkheim contended that certain elementary forms of religious life pervade collective life in all societies. He pointed to a basic division of the world into the sacred and the profane, the former being the shared sacrosanct ideals that unite a group, the symbols that represent it, and the collective rites that strengthen group allegiance, and generate the capacity to act in unison.

Empirical illustration of secular religion is provided based on an interview-study of animal rights activists in Sweden. The activists interviewed for this research all identify themselves as animal-rights activists in contrast to animal-welfare activists. Animal-welfarism is a reformist position, pleading for humane treatment of animals and focusing on improving animal protection. Animal-rights activism more fundamentally challenges humans’ oppression of animals and their claims of superiority. Being an animal-rights activist often entails embracing a vegan lifestyle. Thus, the article captures the mindset of the more radical branch of the broader animal rights movement.

I proceed by introducing the key ideas of Durkheim’s sociology of religion, which are useful for understanding the life worlds, identities and practices of animal rights activists. I also briefly discuss some alternative conceptualizations of non-traditional forms of religion, and argue for my own conceptual understanding and definition in this article, namely that of “secular religion”, for which I am indebted to Durkheim. I then locate my study in relation to previous research. Thereafter, I present my data, methods and finally the findings of an empirical study of animal rights activists in Sweden, their life worlds and experiences.

Animal Rights Activism as Secular Religion: A Theoretical Perspective

According to Durkheim, there are three fundamental elements to every religion: sacred things, a set of beliefs and practices, and the existence of a moral community. He defined religion as

a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and surrounded by prohibitions – beliefs and practices that unite its adherents in a single moral community called a church (Durkheim 1917/2001: 46).
Sacred things, in his understanding, “are simply collective ideals that have fixed themselves on material objects” (1914/1973: 159). Thus, the thing symbolizes the ideal. To Durkheim, the division of the world into sacred and profane is universal. He argued that all societies have moral ideals which are held to be sacred and inviolable, the transgression of which leads to reprisal and sanctions – whether legal or social. For Durkheim, thus, modern society is not a completely desacralized world. However, the taboos and collective imperatives enclosing the sacred are no longer of the same absolute character; with the development of modern science and democracy they become more open to reflection and critique (Durkheim 2002: 52f)

In the modern, secularized world, the sacred is most clearly expressed in the sacrosanct status that is granted to the individual, and Durkheim saw individualism as an expression of a modern faith and cult. I suggest that what the animal rights activists do is expand this individualism to encompass animal individuals as well. Animal rights activists challenge us to take account not only of humans, but to perceive animal-beings as inviolable, entitled to dignity and rights.

Durkheim (2001) defined a moral community, or church, as a group of people with shared views of the sacred world and its relation to the profane, and with shared views of how these representations are to be translated into common practice. I submit that the animal rights activist group can be understood as such a community; its members share a worldview or cosmology where animals are seen as individuals, as having intrinsic value. Animals are seen as fellow-beings capable of suffering and, equally important, as beings with a soul. The notion of soul was for Durkheim an important characteristic of religion, as there is no religion “in which we do not find a whole system of collective representations related to the soul” (2001: 183). As beings in possession of a soul, animals are entitled to dignity and respect, and for this reason, the activists strongly object to the instrumental use of animals for human ends.

This worldview translates into a coherent code of conduct, namely consistent veganism. The inviolability of the human body has become sacred, a symbol of human rights and dignity.

The animal rights activists show a similar concern for the bodily integrity of animals. They see the ingestion of animal flesh as both immoral and disgusting (Hansson & Jacobsson 2014). As will be further elucidated below, recruitment into animal rights activism can be understood as a conversion to such a worldview and mindset.

The role of rituals was also key in Durkheim’s sociology of religion. Rituals are standardized and therefore predictable patterns of behavior with a symbolic and expressive dimension to them. For Durkheim, participation in rituals generates collective feelings among the participants, notably collective effervescence, a heightened sense of awareness and aliveness without which activists would not be able to transcend individual self-interest and self-limitations. Collective efferves-
cence is important for collective action because of its transformative potential; for a moment the ritual participants feel that all is possible. This impersonal, extra-individual force transports the individuals into another, ideal realm, lifts them up and outside of themselves, and makes them feel as if they are in contact with an extraordinary energy. However, since collective effervescence is a temporary feeling – often followed by disillusionment and poor self-confidence in the absence of the group rituals must be repeated. Durkheim’s sociology of religion emphasizes the group-related functions of religious practice; that is, the social needs that rituals fill, most importantly by strengthening in-group solidarity and reaffirming commitment to the common ideal.

Drawing on Durkheim, sociologist of religion Milton Yinger (1970) developed the notion of “functional religion”. In contrast to substantive theories of religion, which focus on what religion is (its content), functional theories are interested in what religion does (Yinger 1970: 4). In the words of Yinger (1970: 11), “If we take the functional approach to the definition of religion, it is not the nature of the belief, but the nature of believing that requires our study”. This is consistent with my present interest in what a conversion into an animal rights universe of meaning does to the individual and her social relationships – the implications of such a faith, as well as its expressions, forms, and ways in which it is practiced.

Yinger defined religion as:

a system of beliefs and practices by means of which a group of people struggles with [the] ultimate problems of human life. It expresses their refusal to capitulate to death, to give up in the face of frustration, to allow hostility to tear apart their human associations. The quality of being religious, seen from the individual point of view, implies two things: first, a belief that evil, pain, bewilderment, and injustice are fundamental facts of existence; and second, a set of practices and related sanctified beliefs that express a conviction that man can ultimately be saved from those facts (1970: 7).

For Yinger, this did not necessarily imply a belief in a transcendent reality, as also inner-worldly matters can be of ultimate concern: “Injustice is bearable only if this world is written off as a temporary and unimportant vale of tears; it becomes an ultimate concern to those who are concerned only with this existence” (Yinger 1970: 533, cf. Tillich 1957).³ Thus, non-theistic belief systems can also be called religions. According to Yinger, even if people reject that which they identify as religion:

It is likely, however, that such individuals, having left some traditional religion, will nevertheless affirm their faith in some “over-beliefs”, will get emotional support from various symbols, acts, and ceremonies (worship), and will join with others in groups that seek to sustain and realize shared beliefs (1970: 11).

In the stress on symbols, ceremonies and emotions, the influence of Durkheim is marked.

Edward Bailey (e.g. 1997) has suggested the term “implicit religion”, which, he claims, can be expressed both in secularism and organized religion. Bailey pre-
fers this concept “because it keeps its options open with regard to its referent’s structural and historical origins, its social and cultural location, its mode of religiosity, and its relationship with other forms of religion” (1997: 41). He identified three defining characteristics of implicit religion: “commitment”, “an integrated focus” of one’s life and “intensive concerns with external effects” (Bailey 1997: 8f). All these characteristics, as we will see, feature prominently in the lives of the animal rights activists.

In synthesis, I use the concept of *secular religion* to denote a set of ideas and accompanying practices displaying the following features/characteristics. First, there is a distinct universe of meaning based on a division of the world into sacred and profane. Second, there is a moral community defined by its adherence to a specific sacred ideal and commitment to its defense. This ideal represents a non-theist system of beliefs and an inner-worldly utopia which nonetheless becomes an ultimate concern for its community of believers.

Finally, the group displays elementary forms of religious life in terms of distinct beliefs, experiences, and practices (such as rituals). According to this concept of secular religion (and in contrast to Bailey and Yinger, for instance), the sacred component of the belief system is still key. It is understood in a Durkheimian sense as a moral ideal, attaching intrinsic value to something, and thus as inviolable and in need of protection from contamination by the profane. Consequently, it is a specific moral ideal that forms the basis for group identification and community. Thus, a secular religion, just like a traditional religion, builds on a clear boundary between believers and non-believers, between those committed to the ideal and others. Moreover, as in the case of traditional religion, a secular religion is also based on *dedication* to the sacred ideal, which involves not only a cognitive awareness and intellectual motivation but also an equal amount of emotional engagement.

My contention is that animal rights activism contains/displays these elementary forms of religious life and can be seen as an instance of secular religion. It is the sacredness of the ideal (of animals’ intrinsic value) that sets the activists on fire, and it is in the light of this sacred ideal that their fervor, zeal and sometimes uncompromising attitudes should be understood. The moral ideal translates into an imperative code of conduct and manner. Even if the belief system (or faith) is also codified in creeds, such as the universal declaration of animal rights, and in foundational texts, such as texts by moral philosophers Tom Regan, Peter Singer, and Gary Francione, even more important here are the convictions inscribed in the hearts and the souls.

**Relation to Previous Research**

Research on animal rights activists in the US has found that animal rights activists tend to be less religious in the traditional sense than the average person; the group
numbers a larger than average proportion of agnostics or atheists (e.g. Galvin & Herzog 1992, Jamison & Lunch 1992, Jasper & Poulsen 1995, Richards quoted in Jamison, Wenk, Parker 2000). Nevertheless, as will be illustrated empirically below, the movement displays many of the elementary practices and experiences of religious life.

Two previous studies have explicitly studied animal rights activism in religious terms (Jamison, Wenk & Parker 2000; Lowe 2001), while a number of other studies have drawn parallels to religion without developing this further (e.g. Herzog 1993; McDonald 2000; Jacobsson & Lindblom 2012), or have pointed to experiences which can be interpreted in such terms. Jamison, Wenk and Parker (2000) drew on Yinger (without mentioning Durkheim), arguing that all the critical components of functional religion are to be found in the case of animal rights activism, including intense conversion experiences, newfound communities of meaning, normative creeds, distinct codes of behavior and cult formation. The authors suggested that understanding animal rights activism as functional religion helps us understand the intensity of activist commitment.

Lowe (2001) analyzed animal rights activism as a “quasi-religious phenomena”, in view of the activists’ moral orientation and outrage, their concern with purity and their common micro-interactions and rituals. Lowe also argues that texts produced by philosophers, such as Singer and Regan, have achieved a quasi-sacred status in the movement. The respondents in my study, however, are far more ambivalent about the importance of the philosophers. I find it more appropriate to conceive, not of texts or the movement as sacred objects (cf. Lowe 2001), but of animals as symbols of a sacred ideal. Nevertheless, Lowe acknowledges the fundamentally moral nature of the animal rights movement (drawing, here, on Weber and the notion of value-rational motives, rather than on Durkheim).

I differ from previous authors in emphasizing that it is in the light of the activist group as a moral community formed around a sacred ideal that the religious elements can be best understood. When Jamison, Wenk and Parker (2000: 306) ask, “What are the sources of this intensity and commitment?” my reply is “the sacred”. Without a theoretical understanding of the sacred, the religious features remain incomprehensible and exotic. The division between sacred and profane is key here, but also the fact that the activists’ representation of the sacred clashes with that of mainstream society. This is why many people react so strongly against the views of animal rights activists or depict them as extreme or even bizarre (which is not uncommon in the mass media). By dismantling the symbolic boundary between humans and animals (Cherry 2010), the activists challenge established boundaries between sacred and profane.
Data and Method

Durkheim’s preferred method was observation. However, as will be illustrated in this article, interviews can also capture the forms and experiences of religious life. Another of the classics, William James’s seminal work *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902/2002), has served as a methodological source of inspiration for this study. In order to capture the religious mind, James chose to study the most religious persons – not because these alone express a religious worldview, but because they do it most explicitly. Likewise, I chose to study persons who are passionate about their cause – not the half-hearted individuals who might be paying but passive members of an animal-welfare organization – because secular sacralism is more visible there. Rather than trying to achieve a sample that would be representative of all branches of the broader movement, including both animal rights and animal welfare activists, the study focuses on the most committed, zealous activists, those who explicitly define themselves as animal rights activists. My selection criteria were (1) that study participants were vegans and (2) that they were self-defined animal rights activists. Consequently, my findings cannot be generalized to the broader movement; what I have captured is the mindset of committed animal rights activist groups. The interviews have been aimed at capturing the life worlds and experiences of the activists as well as the implications activism has for their everyday lives. The fact that many previous studies, mainly from the US (Herzog 1993; McDonald 2000, Pallotta 2005 to name but a few), point in a similar direction (even if they have not necessarily conceptualized them in religious terms), shows that these experiences and outlooks are not extreme but rather typical for this category of activists.

This is an intensive study, based on 18 open-ended, in-depth interviews with Swedish animal rights activists, each lasting from one and a half to five hours. The activists belonged to different groups. Ten interviews were conducted in 2004 with activists engaged in Animal Rights Sweden, which is the largest and oldest animal welfare organization in Sweden. Today it seeks to combine animal rights and animal welfare activism. The remaining eight interviews were conducted in 2010 with activists belonging to the Animal Rights Alliance and a local network of animal rights activists in Gothenburg. The Animal Rights Alliance was started in 2005 as a more activist and radical alternative to Animal Rights Sweden. The local Gothenburg group has an approach similar to the Alliance, giving their moral support even to illegal actions. The activists interviewed, however, tended to be members of several different organizations, not limiting their commitment to one group only, and some were more radical than the organization to which they belonged. At least one had carried out Animal Liberation Front actions. In this article, the analysis focuses on the mindset and experiences of the activists. These tend to be shared by all the interviewed activists. I have therefore chosen to treat the informants as one group. The sample includes activists who held key positions...
in the respective organization or network at the time of the study. They either held formal leadership positions or functioned as informal leaders. The remainder of the participants was recruited through snowball sampling. Care was taken to secure diversity in terms of age and gender. Eleven women and seven men were interviewed, aged between twenty and sixty, the average age being around thirty. Most of them worked professionally, although some of the younger ones were students and a few were unemployed or on sick-leave. For all of them, the animal rights issue was a priority concern in their lives, while paid work was more a necessity.

**Elements of Secular Religion: Empirical Findings**

In the following, I will offer an empirical illustration of some key elementary forms of religious life in animal rights activism. Consistent with an approach which is more interested in what religion does than what it is, focus will be less on beliefs and more on experiences, practices and relationships.

**Experiences of Awakening and Conversion**

Return to me with all your heart (Joel 2:12)

A marked element of religious life in animal rights activism is indeed the strong experiences of awakening and conversion that activists give witness to, after which they see the world in a new light and feel compelled to act. It is a conversion to a distinct worldview which entails a transformation of the epistemological horizon of the individual (Jamison, Wenk & Parker 2000). But even more importantly, it is a conversion to a moral ideal and command. Thus, it entails not just beliefs but moral commitments and obligations. It is in this light that we can understand the dramatic and all-encompassing changes in conduct of life that accompany the changes in thinking (see also Herzog 1993, Pallotta 2005), and the imperative to give up one’s old life style and live according to new values and norms, such as unwavering adherence to veganism.

Durkheim (1914/1973) pointed to the fundamental dualism of human nature, which Shilling and Mellor (2010) conceptualize as homo duplex. As human beings we are internally divided between egoistic dispositions and moral dispositions, the latter following from our attachment to a social group. The conversion to the animal rights ideal entails a ‘push’ towards the moral side of one’s character, and giving up one’s old life thus entails trying to suppress the egoistic dispositions for the sake of the cause.

The fact that the conversion narratives are recurrent in the interview material as well as documented in previous research indicates that conversion is also social – an individual experience in a shared form. The activists interviewed testify to
have experienced a form of revelation – akin to that of a traditional religious re-

vival – whereby their eyes were opened and they saw the world as it truly is:

I was unenlightened before. Our society is incredibly good at hiding and euphemiz-
ing the situation and what is going on. We normalize that we murder and use ani-
mals. I was socialized into that […] I think that I just needed to see, someone needed
to show me what reality is like, and when I saw that and opened my eyes to some-
thing else and to what reality is like, I felt that “this I cannot support”. It felt self-
evident.6

Another said, “It was as if all pieces fell into their place and I understood that here
I have been going around for 10 years without seeing or understanding anything”. 

The conversion experience entails moving from an unenlightened state to a new 
consciousness about the world and one’s place in it, namely as a savior of suffer-
ing souls (see also Gaarder 2008).

The informants express something close to amazement at not having seen the 
connection between animals and food before, though perceiving themselves as 
being animal-friendly. Suddenly it all appears self-evident. In their conversion 
narratives there is thus a clear “before and after” (who I was and who I became) 
(see also McDonald 2000). There is also a sense of surrender – life cannot be the 
same again. (See also Joas 2000 and James 2002 on self-surrender as fundamental 
to religious experience). To the activist, the moment of conversion appears to be a 
point of no return. As one informant put it, “Once you have opened yourself there 
is no way back”.

To “open oneself” means opening up to the suffering that is constantly around 
us. The experience of eye-opening is accompanied by a willingness to live with 
open eyes, with “no blockers on” (McDonald 2000: 11), a commitment to face 
and confront the suffering that exists. Shapiro (1994) has even characterized ani-
mal rights activists as “caring sleuths”, who deliberatively seek suffering victims 
with which to empathize. Empathy and compassion with those who suffer feature 
frequently in the interview narrations (this is consistent with findings in other 
studies; e.g. Shapiro 1994; Lowe 2001; Pallotta 2005). Instead of turning off or 
looking away, the activists deliberately let themselves be affected by the suffering 
of others.

The awakening thus entails a sensitization (Shapiro 1994) and an awakening of 
sensibilities (Hansson & Jacobsson 2014), whereby the activists can almost feel 
the pain of others. “It was a disgusting picture of a monkey with a syringe in its 
neck. I reacted really strongly and could almost feel the physical pain”. As ano-
ther one puts it, “once you have opened your eyes it is so bloody painful to see eve-
rything around you”.

In the experience of eye-opening and “seeing”, meeting animals’ eyes is key, 
as is also documented in previous research (see Herzog 1993; Jamison, Wenk & 
Parker 2000; Gaarder 2008). One interviewed activist relates the following expe-
rience of watching films picturing animals suffering:
I felt so incredibly bad and it was emotional. There are things that just stay and I can never go back. It was like it was so amazingly profound and I was really sad. And when you see it there with their eyes, these pigs’ eyes are totally different from other pigs’ eyes. Like pigs going to slaughter. Or living in large [industrial] buildings. I still have those pictures. It is the eyes of some animal.

The eyes are the proverbial window of the soul and thus bring to mind that animals are beings with a soul and therefore entitled to moral consideration and concern. It is in this light we can understand Jamison, Wenk & Parker’s (2000: 315) finding that the informants drew a distinction between animals who possess eyes and those who don’t. Only the former were seen as subjects of moral concern.

As pointed out by Joas (2000: 5), conversions are basically non-intentional, while resulting in a paradoxical feeling of voluntary commitment and ineluctable force. The typical conversion pattern among the informants of this study is not that of seekers looking for a meaningful cause to dedicate their lives to, but rather of people attesting to a sense of being “hit” by the insight/revelation, like St Paul on his way to Damascus (cf. Regan quoted in Vaughan 2012). The activists can point to specific turning-points when their eyes were opened and their lives transformed. In previous research, these moments have been termed “catalytic experiences” (McDonald 2000) “epiphanic events” (Jamison, Wenk & Parker 2000) or “trigger events” (Pallotta 2008). The catalytic events typically entail both an overwhelming emotional experience and a new cognitive understanding, whereby “pieces fall into place”. Jasper and Poulsen (1995) talk of “moral shocks” and see moral shocking as one of the main mechanisms of recruitment into animal rights activism, often caused by exposure to horrifying and upsetting pictures of animal suffering. For some of my informants, the confrontation with pictures had been preceded by a sensitization by animal rights arguments or by having developed a pre-disposition to empathy towards animals – for example acquired through childhood experiences of having beloved pets – which might have facilitated receptiveness to moral shock (see also Pallotta 2005).

There are also a few (all male) informants who stress that their conversion was due to philosophical reasoning and that their feelings of compassion were developed later. Nevertheless, in the sample, an awakening caused by seeing films, pictures and other sights is the recurrent pattern of conversion and it was typically an emotionally upsetting experience: It was pictures that made me react emotionally. I was sad, angry, in despair. It tore up a lot within me.

It is well known that converts often become “hardcore”, as compared to people who have grown into a belief-system gradually, for instance through their upbringing. It is therefore not surprising, in a sample of subjects who define themselves as animal rights activists and who are all vegans, to find many who have had these conversion experiences.7

It is, moreover, worth noting that several of the activists also keep exposing themselves to re-shocking experiences. This can be interpreted as a way of recre-
ating the conversion experiences later in their activist careers (see also Jacobsson & Lindblom 2013, Hansson & Jacobsson 2014). This is a deliberate attempt to unsettle one’s “zone of comfort” in order to remain open to the suffering of animal-others:

One has to look at animal rights films […] sometimes there are new animal rights films and so on. New undercover [films] in fur farms, et cetera and that’s what I look at to remind myself of why I’m standing outside for example AstraZeneca in Mölndal and screaming. This is why I do this. Not to forget.

Another says, “When I see those pictures, then the fire is lit and there is no other way to go”. Reminding oneself through re-shocking experiences is a way of affirming one’s commitment to the sacred ideal.

**Dedication and Commitment**

Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

(James 2:17)

Conversion to animal rights activism is transformative; it pervades all aspects of the activists’ lives and it entails a totalizing experience, which is why Pallotta speaks of it as “total recruitment” (2005: 12). It is not possible to compartmentalize the animal rights issue from the daily, non-activist life (cf. McDonald 2000). For the interviewees, activism tends to be the first priority of their lives (see also Herzog 1993): “Activism for animals is very much what my life is about”, one activist says. He adds that this is what he would like people to remember him for when he is dead. Thus, the conversion means that the activist gets a new and integrated focus in life, which overcomes divisions of experience (cf. Bailey 1997: 8), something that is characteristic of religious experience (Joas 2000: 52; James 2002). Bailey’s three defining characteristics of implicit religion: commitment, an integrated focus in one’s life and intensive concerns with external effects, are thus very much present here.

Having had their eyes opened, the activists are typically overwhelmed by the suffering around them and being driven by empathy they feel compelled to reduce this suffering (see also Shapiro 1994; Jamison, Wenk & Parker 2000). They also feel called upon to go out into the world, give testimony and spread the message, and so save animal-souls. As has also been pointed out by Herzog (1993), there is an evangelical component in their involvement, and activists assume ignorance rather than indifference from the public. Thus, they strongly believe in information-spreading, through leaflet distribution or bookstalls and by talking to and setting examples for others, for instance by demonstrating that there is nothing strange about a vegan diet. Despite the fact that their own experience typically is that of having seen the truth – revelatory knowledge – they are concerned to back up their claims with scientific knowledge claims, such as findings in neuroscience that animals, including fish, are sentient beings capable of feeling pain. Striking in
the animal rights religion is indeed its combination of faith and science, a rationalist worldview and a secular faith.

The converted activist is typically convinced of the correctness of her beliefs and the justifiability of her cause, showing a combination of idealism and ideological certainty (Galvin & Herzog 1992). As stated by one interviewee, “We know that we are right. One day people will look back and think that we were right”. Another said, “Of course it is very tough to go against all that society is fighting desperately to retain. But it is also so comforting to know that the struggle I pursue is the right one”. The moral certitude leaves little room for compromise and pragmatism (see also Herzog 1993; Jamison, Wenk & Parker 2000; Taylor 2004), which has led Jasper & Nelkins (1992) to speak of animal rights activists as being on a moral crusade. As one informant expressed it, “I am uncompromising - no bloody mawkishness here”.

The intensity of commitment, the passion and the zeal of animal rights activists are well documented in previous research (e.g. Jasper & Nelkin 1992; Herzog 1993; Jamison, Wenk & Parker 2000; Taylor 2004). I suggest that it is in relation to the burning passion for the sacred that the force of the moral ideal can be understood – a force that occasionally compels the activists to break “earthly” laws. For the activists, the animal rights cause has the status of ultimate concern – it is a religious universe and mindset as much as the ideology they hold. In this light we can understand the dedication to the cause and the willingness to make the sacrifices it exacts. To live the life of an animal rights activist means embarking on “the narrow road”. Small decisions in daily life, which most people don’t even think about, such as whether to take medicines tested on animals or whether to kill vermin or not, become a matter of inner moral deliberations and a cause for remorse (Herzog 1993: 109). Moreover, the activist feels compelled to live out her faith – by taking action. It is through action that commitment is manifested (see also Peterson 2001).

A Meaning in Suffering and Guilt

But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it (Matthew 7:4)

Being committed to reduce the suffering of animal-others means that one may have to accept a certain amount suffering oneself. As Yinger has pointed out, for a religious person, surrender and sacrifice can be perceived as beneficial and religious people typically find some meaning in suffering and in “givings up” (Yinger 1970: 7-9). For the interviewed activists, sacrifices for the sake of the cause are perceived as necessary. These may include career opportunities, one’s own comfort, or a traditional family life. “Previously I had some plans for getting children but I am not particularly interested in that any more. If I eventually would want to have children it would certainly be with a vegan.” Another states:
People should not think so much about having a family or devoting their time to possessions. I think it is clear that we who are engaged in Animal Rights Sweden don’t care much about such things. We are not as materialistic as society at large […] I myself have no family and those who are most active are those who don’t have children. Of those who usually come to our membership meetings I don’t think there is even one who has a child.

Renunciation and sacrifice can be perceived as beneficial because they are signs of commitment to the moral ideal. By contrast, failure to “give up” may be a sign of the fire having died, the loss of the battle against egoistic dispositions.

A distinctive feature of the animal rights movement is the degree to which its members experience feelings of guilt and remorse (see also Groves, 1997; Jamison, Wenk & Parker 2000; Shapiro 2004; Pallotta 2005; Gaarder 2008; Jacobsson & Lindblom 2013). Having had their eyes opened, they see suffering all around them and there is no apparent end to this – billions of animals are killed each year and the world’s meat consumption is on the rise. The activists experience collective guilt on behalf of humankind, which treats its fellow-beings in such a way, but also personal guilt for not doing enough and for failing to live up to the ideals. The sacred ideal compels; it is imperative to act and failure to do so causes guilt and shame; and vice versa, pride and self-respect require that one acts. Indeed, to act is the only way to get relief from guilt; in contrast to theist belief systems, there is no external source of atonement, no forgiveness or absolution. In such a situation, increased activism becomes a secular penance (Jamison, Wenk & Parker 2000: 318f). As one informant put it, “I do this in order to quiet my bad conscience. […] I feel that I just have to do something, when I know what it [the world] is like”. Another said, “Even if it is very hard to see all this, it would be even harder to know that you don’t do anything”.

To burn for a cause always bears the risk of getting burnt out, something of which several of my informants are acutely aware (see also Pallotta 2005). As one of them related:

I know many who get burnt out and just work out of guilt – guilt, and pressure and force and who can’t feel that it is fun […] Most people can’t handle it [the feeling of inadequacy] and I am not saying that I can, but I am working hard at it […] That is something I am working on right now in a very deliberate way – to not become burnt out.

Nevertheless, while the interviewed activists bear witness to the difficulties entailed in living with guilt and feelings of inadequacy, self-reproach can also gain a positive aura, as it is a sign of commitment to the sacred ideal.

**The Moral Community and the Surrounding World**

They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. (John 17:16)

The capacity to “see” distinguishes the activists from others, and this easily leads to feelings of dissonance and estrangement in relation to the surrounding world.
(cf. Pallotta 2005). How can people look upon the world with such different eyes? Where others might just see a bottle of milk, the activist sees a product of institutionalized rape and imagines a calf-child which has been separated from a grieving mother, and where others may enjoy a delicious meal, the activist sees a murder committed. Some informants almost feel like they are living in a parallel universe and, like the Christian pilgrim, they feel like foreigners in this world. The seeming indifference of others to the suffering of animals is incomprehensible to them. “I can’t understand that people can’t see. People are so egoistic”. Another related:

I feel in relation to those who are not vegans that they are fine people, but I cannot disregard that they do not live the way I do. I ask myself, “How come this clever person does not realize such an obvious thing?” It is sad that we cannot fully understand each other.

Moreover, as the animal rights paradigm challenges the worldview of mainstream-society in such a fundamental way, many people are provoked by animal rights activists. Most of the informants report encountering hostility from an unsympathetic environment:

I can be surprised of how mean people can be or how little they care when I meet them in town. When I approach them with a petition they don’t say anything or they make remarks such as “Meat is delicious” or “I want to wear fur”.

There was a meat norm and when I breached it, problems arose. Both my parents and my friends could say “Oh you bloody vegan” and then I felt that I didn’t want to meet people who are not vegans [...] I am not surprised any more when people are unpleasant, sarcastic or make personal attacks. It has been like that ever since I began to be involved in animal rights.

The activists report having to put up with taunts from their social environment daily, and having to defend their eating habits in a way that meat-eaters do not. As it would be useless to be in constant disputes with people around them – “it would be untenable both for me and for others” as one informant put it – the activists feel that they often have to hold back: “You have to compromise all the time and pretend that you don’t care”.

A transformation in thinking and conduct of life as dramatic as that of conversion into animal rights activism inevitably affects personal relationships, and the informants experience alienation in relation to, and sometimes even ostracism from, their previous social networks and families (see also Herzog 1993; Jamison, Wenk & Parker 2000; Pallotta 2005). While for some conversion leads to the break-up of old connections, others retain their old friends. Common to all those interviewed, however, is the importance attached to the “new-founded” community, the vegan community, where they can return to regain their spirits and where they feel they can relax and not have to defend their conduct of life but just “be” (see also Pallotta 2005; Gaarder 2008). It is precisely because they are forced to segregate their “different selves”, to some extent “holding back” and “pretending
they don’t care” when at, for instance, their workplace, that they urgently need places where they can be their true selves. Thus, the interviewees say that they keep meeting with other vegans “all the time”. The activist community is also important for emotional support and reaffirmation of commitment. One interviewee talks of other group-members “sharing the grief”, and helping “carry you when you don’t have the strength yourself”.

The sense of community comes from sharing a commitment to the same moral ideal, and by implication, sharing the same way of life. Adherence to the sacred ideal – and non-adherence – provides a clear-cut boundary between in- and out-group. There is no in-between. This means that for the activists, formal organizational belonging is less important than the group-boundaries arising from commitment to the same ideal. Adherence to the ideal constructs a community of Us in contrast to Them:

Those who are uninformed of the animal rights question and who are not even vegetarians I can regard as “Them.” I may feel that those who do not understand a thing are hopeless and thick-headed, but I never say such things even if I feel like that.

Another says that, “Of course there is an Us and Them feeling … but I try to see them as ‘until now blocked’”, that is, as persons with the potential to be awakened by the message.

Even so, the commitments and practices separating believers from non-believers create a boundary of purity (see also Lowe 2001), and in-group members are concerned with preserving that purity against contaminations.

Protection of the Sacred

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Luke 12:34)

The sacred is worthy of devotion and respect; it bears with it a sense of intrinsic obligation, demanding devotion and enforcing emotional commitment (see also Lowe 2001). This means that the sacred needs to be protected from pollution by the profane; that is, from being taken over by all the mundane matters of everyday life. Sacred ideals, as ultimate concerns, stand in stark contrast to individuals’ immediate and utilitarian concerns (Tillich 1957: 1f ; Yinger 1970: 14; cf. Durkheim 1912/2001). It is in this light we should understand the activists’ preoccupation with not letting professional life, leisure interests or even a traditional family life outrival the defense of the collective ideal, namely animal rights.

Again, protection of the sacred from contamination by the profane entails a form of boundary-drawing, and all boundary-drawing serves as a symbolic (re)construction of community (cf. Cherry 2010). For instance, meat-eaters within the movements are looked upon with suspicion and even contempt, and animal-welfare activists are criticized for not going far enough in their demands. Thus, collective protection of the sacred ideal readily translates into social control. As Durkheim (2002) reminds us, not only moral ideals but also norms backed up by
sanctions are the building-blocks of the moral order. The interviews reveal that there are social sanctions exerted against apostates, such as petty gossip behind the backs of people who seem to have lost the fire and show up at meetings less frequently, or who have even reverted to meat-consumption. Members of the movement must repeatedly prove their commitment to the ideal through action. They will otherwise be labeled ex-activist and thus apostate (on the policing of dissension, see also Jamison, Wenk & Parker 2000, Jacobsson & Lindblom 2012). There is little space for “cooling” down commitment, and anyone who does will lose community bonds.

Moreover, the interviews reveal that, within the activist-group, internal hierarchies tend to arise and actions are assessed according to the sacred ideal and its defense. Sacrifices confer social status. Thus, activists are assigned positions closer to or further from the sphere of the sacred according to their actions (Jacobsson & Lindblom 2012, cf. Lowe 2001 on “moral virtuosos”). “If someone doesn’t do something for a while, that person declines in an informal hierarchy […] you have to be active to retain your position”, one of them explained. The activists also compare their actions to those of the others:

I compare myself to others, [to see] whether I do more or less than they do. Maybe this preoccupies me more than other people because right now I’m busy trying to get more involved. If I haven’t done anything for a while, I then have more to live up to.

Another purity concern is the internal debate within the movement about whether certain arguments are valid or not. Arguments referring to environment or health benefits from giving up meat-consumption tend to have less validity among animal rights activists – although they would probably find wide resonance in society. Rather, arguments about the intrinsic rights of animals are preferred. Again, the “sacred” with its intrinsic value is to be protected from the instrumental values, which belong to the sphere of “the profane”.

Mary Douglas (1991/1966) has forcefully argued that what is “pure” and what is “dangerous” depends on symbolic classification and boundary-drawing. The animal rights activists feel the same repulsion at the thought of ingesting pork or chicken as most Europeans may feel at the idea of eating cats or rats. The animal rights activists violate and challenge established symbolic boundaries in their attempts to extend moral concern and empathy to animals; they even try consciously to dismantle the symbolic boundary between humans and animals (Cherry 2010). To many people, this questioning of the exceptional position of human beings feels threatening. It is in this light that we should understand the strong reactions against animal rights activists and the aggressions that activists testify to. The reactions indicate that something sacred is at stake – for both sides. I submit that the animal rights issue is an exceedingly illustrative example of secular sacralism. As already pointed out by Durkheim, and developed by among others Joas (2000), the individual person has become sacralised in the modern world. Many people fear that human dignity will be compromised if the same rights and
obligations were extended to animals. This is why many people react so strongly against, for instance, drawing parallels between industrial meat production and the Holocaust. Here, two secular sacralisms collide – even if both are versions of the sacralised individual.

**Rituals**

A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance (Ecclesiastes 3:4)

Collective ideals are celebrated first and foremost in rituals. Vegan meals are a case in point. They are an enactment of faith and the ideal is affirmed each time a life is spared. Thus, meals carry symbolic meaning for the activists and become acts of cleansing and purification, which is why Jamison, Wenk & Parker (2000: 319) speak of eating as a redemptive act. All religions have dietary rules and food taboos (e.g. Douglas 1991). As eating is something we do several times a day, it is difficult to overestimate the importance of meals for the vegan community. Common practices separate the activists from others and create a boundary of purity (Lowe 2001), and rituals of purity and impurity create unity in experience (Douglas 1991: 2). As ritual is key to symbolic boundary-drawing (who belongs and who does not), qualifying the action of a group and making it autonomous in relation to other actors, it serves not just as moral but also symbolic reintegration (Sassoon 1984: 867ff; cf. Cherry 2010). Each meal is also a reminder of the normative clash with mainstream society. The informants for this study testify to how painful it is to eat together with meat-eaters, to experience the smell of meat etc., and to end up having to defend their eating habits against people who question their veganism. For the activists, meat-eating is profanation, while for the meat-eaters, comparisons between industrial farming and concentration camps are equally offensive. Again, two secular sacralisms collide.

According to Durkheim (2001: 317), a society “must assemble and concentrate” in order to periodically recreate itself, and in the process it also forms its ideals. Following Durkheim, then, rituals are essential for building collective identity, for sustaining moral commitment and also for invigorating the activists emotionally, as *collective effervescence* is generated in rituals. This invigorates the individual and gives her a momentary feeling of everything being possible, and thus a feeling of being able to transcend her own self-limitations. “You gain self-confidence and dare more”, as one informant said. The individual feels that she is part of something above and beyond herself. The collective effervescence and enthusiasm also help the individual transcend her own egoistic desires and tie her more closely to the collective and its ideal (Shilling & Mellor 2011). Thus rituals serve to increase the internal cohesion of the group as well as to give the emotional refill necessary for the continued struggle (Jacobsson & Lindblom 2013).
Participation in protest actions, such as public demonstrations, is a key type of ritual, by which a synchronization of bodies and fusion of minds is achieved (Peterson 2001). As one interviewed activist related:

[It] feels like a wonderful way for us in the movement to gather and march together. But also that it is public, that it is visible and noisy and that there are streamers and slogans…. You can’t just sit at home and write letters to the editor and things like that. It feels good to have this emotional outlet, that you can yell out slogans and chant together with those who you know believe in the same thing. It is important to be many, and it’s about showing others that we are many who are moving together.

As ritual-participants, the activists can feel joy and pride in their cause. According to some informants, it can also give emotional energy to share negative feelings, “it is great that someone is there to share pain and sorrow and then one gets energy out of that”. In both cases, convictions are affirmed by collective practice.

Drawing on Durkheim, Collins (2001) has argued that rituals focus attention on common symbols important to the group. Symbols representing the faith – pictures of animals – are frequently used in demonstrations and public manifestations, for instance pictures of monkeys used in experiments (see also Jasper & Nelkin 1992; Jamison, Wenk & Parker 2000). As pointed out above, among activists, a ritual exposure to pictures, such as movies revealing cruelty to animals, is also a means of reminding oneself of the cause, and of reaffirming one’s commitment.

Rituals are important in mobilizing collective action capacity and in community-building. However, it has been pointed out that rituals may be even more important for groups who see little tangible success of their struggle (Nepstad 2004: 54). Animal rights activists are of course a case in point – with the seemingly endless killing of animals for human ends. As was also pointed out above, group practice is of utmost importance for them. The rituals serve to “infuse” in the participants the sense of being on the right track and that “time will tell”, as one informant puts it.

Conclusion

This article has sought to illustrate the usefulness of analyzing animal rights activism as an instance of secular religion. Although most of the activists interviewed are not religious in the traditional sense, we have seen that there are many parallels to a religious universe of meaning. For these activists, the issue of animal rights obtains the status of ultimate concern.

The article identified a number of elementary forms and experiences of religious life in animal rights activism, including an overwhelming conversion experiences, a division of the world into sacred and profane, concern about protecting the sacred, commitment to living out one’s faith, the feeling that suffering and guilt have meaning, and the constitutive role of common symbols and rituals. It
has been suggested that these religious elements can best be understood in the light of the activist group as a moral community formed around a sacred ideal. A moral ideal held to be sacred drives the activists and creates a community of believers, based on a clear in- and out-group distinction; it is the blaze of the sacred that fuels the activists’ passion and compels them to dedicate a considerable part of their time and energy to activism, even occasionally go against the laws of “this world”. This is, in fact, true of other social movements; this analytical framework could be fruitfully applied to the radical and activist branches of other movements, as well. Nevertheless, the animal rights case is particularly interesting as it represents a very distinctive and controversial boundary-drawing between sacred and the profane. The sacralisation of the human person has here been extended to the sacralisation of the animal-individual.

There are also differences, however, between a secular religion and a theist system of beliefs. A secular faith, such as that of animal rights activism, is not necessarily a lifetime commitment. While some Christians, for instance, may cool off and apostate, belief in an Almighty God may prevent others from turning their backs on the deity. In contrast, the most intensive years of commitment and dedication to animal rights activism are for many a phase of life, after which a more pragmatic stance may prevail. It is very demanding to burn for such a cause and to be in conflict with mainstream society. The informants for this study were aware of this and expressed fear that they would lose their fervency later in life, that egoistic dispositions would come to dominate their lives. Such a loss would inevitably mean also a loss of community bonds.

Finally, I have suggested that the animal rights activists challenge established boundaries between sacred and profane by questioning our practices of eating the dead bodies of animals and the unique position granted to human beings. In doing so, they also contribute to moral reflexivity and moral development.

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Notes

1 I gratefully acknowledge the generous comments on this article by many colleagues, the research collaboration with Niklas Hansson & Jonas Lindblom and the research funding from the Swedish Research Council.

2 Durkheim has long been criticized by religious science scholars for his universalist claims and essentialist view of religion (see e.g. Masuzawa 2005). Sociologists, on the other hand, tend to see his perspective as still very productive (e.g. Joas 2000; Shilling & Mellor 2011). This article indeed is intended to demonstrate the usefulness of his approach.

3 Theologian Tillich (1957: 1f) defined faith as ultimate concern. Bellah defined religion similarly as “a set of symbolic forms and acts which men relate to the ultimate condition of their existence” (quoted in Yinger 1970: 6).

4 Their tight social bonds and intensity of commitment has led some researchers to conceptualize (radical) activist groups as sects (e.g. Peterson 2001; cf. Jamison, Wenk, Parker 2000). They then draw on Weber’s (1963) distinction between church and sect, which has meanwhile been further developed by Troeltsch (1950/1931).

5 The quotes from the Bible are intended to draw a parallel between the activists’ universe of meaning and that of a traditional religion. The quotes express, for instance, the same type of commitment and imperative to act.

6 All interview quotes are translated from Swedish into English by the author.

7 In Lowe’s and Ginsberg’s questionnaire, based on US data, only 25% of the respondents had experienced sudden conversion while (58%) responded that their engagement had grown gradually. However, their sample covered the broader movement, including also animal welfare activists.

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Go East, Old Man: 
The Ritual Spaces of SS Veterans’ Memory Work

By Steffen Werther & Madeleine Hurd

Abstract
This article uses social-movement analysis to understand the rituals, memory-work and spatialities of Waffen-SS veterans and their sympathizers. Most social-movement analysis focuses on left-wing protesters; our concern is with the marginalized counter-narratives, rituals and -spaces produced by the self-proclaimed misunderstood “heroes” of World War Two. This counter-hegemonic self-definition is essential to these former world-war soldiers who, despite an internal mythology of idealistic self-sacrifice, are vilified in West-European master narratives. We discuss how, during the 1990s, veterans and their sympathizers sought to re-place rituals of memory-work in the newly-opened East. We look at how the Waffen-SS’s ritual memory-work is “replaced” in alternative settings, including – perhaps surprisingly – Russia itself. Here, Waffen-SS veterans use new, official, semi-sacred places to anchor both an alternative identity and an alternative definition of the central meanings of modern European history.

Keywords: Waffen-SS, veterans, memory work, ritual, place, commemoration, European master narratives, World War Two, Estonia, Ukraine, Russia.
Introduction

This article uses insights furnished by social-movement analysis to understand how a group of ostracized World War Two veterans uses ritual places to challenge hegemonic understandings of European identity. Our subject is the memory work done by European Waffen-SS (W-SS) veterans, with particular focus on ritual and place. Memory work is, of course, particularly important to a group of former world-war soldiers who, despite an internal mythology of idealistic self-sacrifice, are vilified in West-European master narratives. The legitimacy of their own community is tied to the search for public acknowledgement of their role as heroic fighters. European W-SS veterans’ organizations have done much, since the war, to gain this – lobbying politicians, publishing self-justifying memoires, sponsoring commemorative services, and organizing battle-ground pilgrimages. They have, scholars agree, also re-written W-SS history, so as to fit the W-SS neatly into the European master story of the heroic battle against Bolshevism. If this revision of W-SS history is accepted, the veterans may be allowed to join the ranks of selfless, suffering heroes who, according to the EU’s own myth, made possible the triumph of the West. They may even find a place to be – a public space to call their own.

For W-SS veterans suffer a side-effect of their exclusion from Europe’s hero/victim World War Two master narrative: they are unwelcome in significant public spaces. Such places, we argue, are important. All other veterans have public-space ceremonies, memorials, battlefields and graveyards where they can legitimately appear. There, they can publicly acclaim the eternal meaningfulness of their battle. They can establish continuity with those who made the “ultimate” sacrifice, dying so that a people and an ideal might live. Not so the Waffen SS. The ability of the W-SS veterans to find and sanctify a public place, and hold, there, some sort of public communal ritual, is narrowly circumscribed. It is also closely linked to their ability to emerge into the sunshine of hegemonic World War Two discourses.

The W-SS veterans do attempt to emplace their narrative memory. This article examines, in some detail, how they go about this – that is, how they redefine both external and external discourses of World War Two and the Cold War, and how they seek to “place” this re-making through the performance of rituals at specially designated public sites.

Space and Ritual

Space matters to communal identity, especially if the community is defined as volunteers, idealistic heroes who fought Europe’s most dangerous and terrible enemy. Veterans’ rituals are an important part of celebrating the meaningfulness of their self-sacrifice. Commemorative rituals have performative power because
(as Durkheimian scholars of ritual argue) they give a direct emotional, embodied and spatial experience of shared moral ideals. Songs, slogans, flags, marches and speeches sacralise both place and participants; they heighten the bodily sensation and thus the “reality” of both ceremony and community.

Bodies are, moreover, sanctified by moving through significant places; to see what their predecessors have seen, to tread the same ground, to perform proper rituals at the traditional places. And these places are, preferably, public. Veterans (more than many others, one might argue) value public affirmation of the truths presented in their ceremonies. After all, soldiers kill and die in order to protect others. If those others do not acknowledge this, veterans might find themselves reduced to communal criminals. Therefore, to hold their ceremonies in significant public spaces, at a memorial dedicated to themselves, and to be acclaimed by national or local dignitaries and by audiences, means a good deal. It is one way of affirming the group’s participation in the pre-eminent moral legitimacy enjoyed by soldiers honored for fighting for the survival of their people, ready to die for its ideals.

But such places are usually denied W-SS veterans. Their attempts to convene and celebrate at public graves or monuments is often forbidden, severely circumscribed, and/or noisily contested. This has caused W-SS veterans and veteran sympathizers to identify space as a special challenge. Their organizations and publications continue to present their counter-narratives, to urge veterans to convene in ritual forms, and to seek out and claim public spaces. This article explores the means by which they do so.

Our sources are veterans’ and W-SS sympathizers’ own publications (and, to some extent, websites). How do these present and discuss spatial ceremonies? We have concentrated on German and Norwegian veterans. These are both vilified — that is, have great difficulty in commanding public sympathy, and thus, concomitantly, in finding a public space where they can perform their legitimizing ceremonies. In order to provide a contrast, we also discuss the Estonian W-SS veterans, for this is a group whose reception is significantly different. We concentrate on the 1990s, when new commemorative places opened up for the (now aged) veterans. Before going into our sources, however, let us briefly sketch the W-SS veterans’ organizational and ideological history.

**The Waffen-SS During and After the War**

During the Second World War, a total of around 900,000 men came to serve in the Waffen-SS. They were recruited from all of Nazi-occupied Europe. Most were, supposedly, volunteers (something much-celebrated in today’s veterans’ publications); in reality, many were drafted, particularly towards the end of the war and from less “Germanic” areas. The bulk of W-SS members remained German (including *Volksdeutsche*, that is, Germans not resident in Germany proper),
as did the leadership. “Nordic types” such as Scandinavians (e.g., the circa 6000 Norwegians who joined up) were, despite being relatively few, given high status in the association. Baltic states supplied more members, particularly in relation to their populations – 20,000 from Estonia, for instance. Estonians and similar “racial” groups were not, however, as welcome as Germans or Norwegians, even if the SS leadership did, as is well-known, continuously expand its definition of “Germanics” to be able to accept increasingly diverse “racial groups” (Heiber 1968: 134, 233; Wildt 2003: 580f; Emberland & Kott 2012).

After the war, Waffen-SS veterans found themselves increasingly ostracized – much more so, indeed, than other types of World War Two veterans. The acceptance of the W-SS as just another sort of soldier declined most dramatically during and after the 1970s, when television and politicians became increasingly focused on the horrors of the Holocaust.

But public attitudes varied according to national histories. In Germany, an initially fairly sympathetic attitude – after all, the country was full of people who had fought for the Nazis – gave way, as SS war crimes became publicized during the 1970s and 1980s, to public protest and near-total ostracization. (Karsten Wilke, among others, gives a good description of this shift.) The Norwegian W-SS men were, by contrast, branded as national traitors from the start. Not even in the 1950s was it possible for any political party to flirt with them. After the Fall of the Wall, however, Waffen-SS veterans and their sympathizers could look to new publics. In Estonia, for instance, as in other Baltic countries, and to the open disgust of West European (and Russian) commentators, the W-SS veterans were often viewed – and, sometimes, publicly and officially celebrated – as heroes who had fought for their countries’ independence, for Europe against Bolshevism.

The W-SS veterans maintained a communal identity throughout. In Germany, local veterans’ associations came together only a few years after the end of World War Two, founding, in 1959, a federal organization called the Mutual Help Association of Former Waffen-SS Members (the HIAG). Local and federal HIAG organizations were complemented by groups of W-SS veterans who had served in the same units, so-called Truppenkameradschaften. During the 1950s and 1960s, as Karsten Wilke (2011) has shown, the federal HIAG attracted quite a bit of high-level political attention as a significant pressure group and source of votes (politicians tended to overestimate its influence and membership). The organization had, at most, around 20,000 members; it had many contacts with W-SS veterans in other countries (e.g., Belgium, Holland, France and Scandinavia, a network kept up, not least, by the HIAG in-house publication Der Freiwillige). The HIAG’s influence depended, not least, on veterans’ ability to separate out and define the W-SS as a separate and relatively innocent fighting group: this image was advanced in efforts to attain veterans’ benefits and a role in the reconstituted Bundeswehr. During these early years, moreover, its mass meetings could be legitimized as part of a drive to locate and free missing comrades; they were graced by
local politicians and the German Red Cross. (For this history and that below, see Wilke 2011).

A reversal set in, however, during the 1960s, with increasingly public distancing from the Nazis’ ideology and war crimes. Divided into various factions, increasingly dismissed by politicians as irrelevant and irredeemable, and hurt by the publicity given SS atrocities, the federal HIAG dissolved in 1992/3. Local chapters often survived, however, as did associations based on veterans of the same units (the Truppenkameradschaften mentioned above), but W-SS veteran groups were becoming increasingly taboo during the decades that followed. The increased attention paid to the neo-Nazi right during the 1990s, finally, adversely affected the veterans’ attempts to achieve legitimacy. Even those W-SS members who distanced themselves from Nazi ideology found themselves publicly jeered, as part and parcel of a repugnant Nazi resurgence. Today, no West European country tolerates public W-SS demonstrations, nor are W-SS veterans invited to participate in official World War Two memorial ceremonies.

The W-SS veterans are, of course, increasingly aged. But their organizations can depend on next-generation members. In the 1980s and 1990s, there was pressure from the Truppenkameradschaften to recruit new members from among younger far-right movements. Many of the W-SS Truppenkameradschaften now have younger members, often in leadership positions. While some of these next-generation sympathizers are more interested in heroic WWII battle memories than in politics, and others are relatives of veterans, many are also neo-Nazis (Wilke 2011: 365f). Such members, while welcomed as bringing young blood to the Truppenkameradschaften, have also led to the movement’s further ostracization. Still, the HIAG’s old publication Der Freiwillige is kept on its feet, despite the dissolution of the HIAG itself, by younger members, working together with a neo-Nazi publishing house. Der Freiwillige’s acclaimed aim, today, is to link older and younger generations in a common cause. The same ambition animates Ein Fähnlein, a lavishly illustrated newsmonthly that celebrates German WWII-veterans, and particularly the W-SS. Its sub-title is “dedication to duty and tradition” among “young and old volunteers!” (their italics).

A sample front cover of Der Freiwillige (February 1993).
These periodicals, together with newsletters, websites, etc., keep various veterans’ organizations up-to-date on publications, events, and political sympathizers; they publish pictures, celebrate heroes, re-write history, and generally work to infuse life in national and pan-European W-SS veterans’ movements. There was and remains much memory-work to be done: re-telling (to the outsider, it seems, endlessly) the history and experiences of SS battalions and veterans, reporting on and contesting negative reports on SS activities in the main-stream press. Then there are angry notices of attacks on SS and Nazi graves, a sign of continued ostracization. The tone is equally polemical when reprinting (the few instances of) pro-SS political speeches or describing marches undertaken by various right-wing groups who, like themselves, are seeking to redefine dominant World War Two narratives. Finally (and in this, they are similar to most social-movement publications), the SS veterans’ newsletters give significant textual and pictorial space to their own community events. They note members’ birthday notices and deaths; and they write substantially on festivals of commemoration.

Much of their work is, understandably, concentrated on revising the historical image of the W-SS. This is particularly evident in the HIAG’s informal successor, the internationally-active “War Grave Memorial Foundation ‘When All Brothers Are Silent’” (the Kriegsgräberstiftung ‘Wenn alle Brüder schweigen’). The veterans themselves have remained organized, often internationally, in both this Foundation, in local remnants of the HIAG, and in the – often international – Truppenkameradschaften. More and more, as the veterans themselves began to die off, the iconized survivors function as the center of admiration of (some) family members and of younger W-SS supporters. It is very difficult to say how many people are involved, however: membership numbers are unreliable and/or unavailable. Dur-

![Book-cover of revisionist book published glorifying the role of the W-SS at Narva and advertised in organs sympathetic to the W-SS.](image-url)
ing the 1990s, there were, perhaps, around 10,000 active veterans and veteran sympathizers. Der Freiwillige claimed 8000 subscribers; W-SS festival arrangers in Estonia would speak of thousands of participants. None of these numbers can do more than give a feeling of the general order of magnitude of European W-SS sympathizers. (See “The next generation” 2001; Freiwillige 2000/46/2; Raabe & Speit 2005; “Hintergrund” 2011; Wilke 2011: 365; “Ein Zeitzeuge” 2001).

All W-SS survivor organizations build on trans-European networks. Being “European” is important to the veterans’ self-image. It allows them to regale in the W-SS’s supposed trans-European history as a bridge between e.g., Danish, Norwegian, Estonian, Latvian, Finnish, Belgian and Dutch “freedom fighters”. This is, as we shall see, an important part of their revisionist historical self-image. The “Kameradenwerk Korps Steiner” and the “Truppenkameradschaft Division Wiking”, for instance, are important veteran organizations for all Scandinavian W-SS men, as most Norwegians, Danes and Swedes served in one of these units during the war. These complement national W-SS organizations such as the Norwegian “Frontkjemperforening” (Front Fighter Association). The Frontkjemperforening, currently led by a next-generation right-wing extremist activist, long drew sustenance from an in-house journal: Folk og Land, founded in 1948 by functionaries in the Quisling party Nasjonal Samling and with a circulation, when shut down in 2003, of 3000 (Folk og Land 1983/8; Hårseth 2010; Telemarkavisen 2012).

The Estonian W-SS veterans’ organization, finally, also relevant to our analysis, has a history that is both more discontinuous and more happy than either its German or Norwegian counterparts. Initially organized abroad, Estonian W-SS veterans’ associations were welcomed home, after 1989, by prominent politicians and by parts of the populations. They remain numerically strong, when considered in relation to the national population. The “Union of Estonian Freedom Fighters”, founded in 1992, claims around 2000 members (here, they are able to draw on the anti-Soviet partisans “Forest Brothers”). After the turn-of-the-century, the Union was complemented by a veterans’ organization based on the W-SS unit “20. Waffen-Grenadier-Division of the SS” (which had been a primarily Estonian division), and, for younger right-wing extremists, the 2007 “Club for the Friends of the Estonian Legion” (see Kultuur ja Elu 2009: 2, 68 as well as websites “eesti-leegion” 2013; “metapedia” 2014).

Our study uses concentrates on these W-SS groups, using W-SS veterans’ and sympathizers’ publications and websites during the 1990s, drawing primarily on reports given in Der Freiwillige and (what could be termed) the “next generation” magazine Ein Fähnlein. We will also use sundry German and Norwegian in-house publications (e.g., newsletters from Kameradenwerk Korps Steiner and the War Memorial Foundation, the Neues vom Kameradenwerk Korps Steiner e.V and the Mitteilungsblatt der Kriegsgräberstiftung “Wenn alle Brüder schweigen”, hereafter Neues Korps Steiner and Wenn alle Brüder). We mine these for reports on
rituals of memory and place. First, what is this memory to contain; second, what ceremonies are involved; and, third, how are they emplaced?

**Recasting Narratives: Europe’s Victimized Heroes**

Waffen-SS veterans and their sympathizers do not stoically accept ostracization. As Wilke points out, their main rhetorical point is, indeed, victimization. They have been demonized (they complain) by the victors in World War Two, who rewrote history to suit themselves. The “correction” of this dominant version of history is, hence, one of the veterans’ most important tasks. Their publications seem, accordingly, obsessed with historical facts.

First, and importantly, the veterans’ associations claim to represent only the Waffen-SS, not the SS as a whole. The W-SS had, they continue, little or nothing to do with war crimes – which are, moreover, vastly exaggerated. (Both premises are demonstrably false.) Second, the W-SS is worthy of the honor accorded by other World War Two veterans – and more. Not only were they all idealistic volunteers; they were also the first true pan-European warrior group to be mobilized against Bolshevism. And their battle has proven not only just, but, with the Fall of the Wall, victorious (Wilke 2011: 17; for veterans’ own works, Straßner 1958; Mabire 1980; Krabbe 1976/1998). As an author in the German veteran publication *Der Freiwillige* put it,

> Perhaps NATO – perhaps the unification of Europe is only a continuation of our will, our determination to ensure the freedom of Fatherlands in the European Fatherland [...] It was, say what you might, we who did the preparatory work, while the others still were blind. (1995/7)

SS-veteran Henri Fenet, formerly of the French 33rd Waffen-Grenadier-Division “Charlemagne”, agreed (his speech was printed in the 1998 *Freiwillige*). The SS had fought “for Europe, for a European Community and against Bolshevism”:

> After a half-century, history has justified our mission [...] We have paved the way to independence and self-sufficiency, and now the Europeans are walking down the road, that we, then, paved. (1998/44/1: 22).

The story of being both the misunderstood victims and heroes of history is thus important to W-SS veterans’ associations. Their publications and speakers repeatedly propose the alternative, a heroic history of “Europe against Bolshevism”. This has consequences, as we shall see, for the memory-work practices of the W-SS veterans themselves. For SS veterans not only speak and write; they also commemorate, assemble and remember.

In-house publications always cover commemorative rituals well; those of W-SS veterans and their sympathizers are no exception. Reports on W-SS veteran ceremonies follow a standard form, one recognizable, indeed, from accounts given by veterans’ associations throughout the West. Speakers and participants – bearing flags, inscriptions, sometimes uniforms – assemble, preferably at a signif-
icant public and/or hallowed site. They are, again preferably, flanked by attentive on-lookers. The text often opens with the description of the group’s solemn assembly (sometimes marching up, sometimes staying in formation), music, words of welcome, a speech – often, from both a military and civil authority; additional performances, songs or poems, from younger members; the communal singing of significant songs (the titles carefully enumerated) and, according to the report, an attendant “solemn mood” (including, sometimes, not unmanly tears). The descriptions often end with praise of the good military order maintained, the summing-up of the event as significant and moving, and, sometimes, a transition to subsequent hearty camaraderie over food and drink.

The W-SS veterans’ versions of these ceremonies follow the same pattern. To be sure, there is a frequent absence of civic and military authorities and outside audience. They may have to hold their meeting in a secret, hired locale; they may interrupted by police and hecklers. There is careful avoidance of their most well-known symbols (compensated, in part, by obligatory inclusion of the old SS Treuelied, whose words provide a thinly veiled stand-in for the once-celebrated SS motto Unser Ehre heisst Treue, that is, roughly, “Our honor is our faith”). But the basic form is the same. The reports on W-SS veterans’ meetings do not seek to diverge from reports from main-stream veterans’ associations.

The tone in is different, though. Those writing about, arranging and participating in the SS veterans’ ceremonies tend to assume the reproachful and strident voice of the misunderstood righteous. They are, further, often isolated. They have little or no access to public space or monuments. They are forced either to visit important sites as private tourist groups, to commemorate their heroic community in tucked-away, private places, or to face down loud expressions of state and public opprobrium. It is much less fun to celebrate heroic sacrifices in private spaces, or in circumscribed and contested public space, or as a sometimes appendage to other vilified groups (e.g., neo-Nazis). But the W-SS’s veterans’ counter-narrative has been treated with contempt by main-stream politicians and media. The W-SS has, today, no public presence in West European commemorations of the victims-and-heroes of World War Two. What does this do to communal feeling; how do the veterans’ organizations react?

No Place To Go

Access to significant place is important to community memory-work. Place anchors memory; group pasts are (often) spatially imprinted. Doreen Massey (1994, 1995) describes, indeed, how this anchorage can lead to bitter battles over places. Different groups can have competing “space-time envelopes”, trying to establish their usages, their symbols and histories, in an exclusionary claim to a particular place. Such rivalry becomes particularly intense when the places in question are already hallowed in public memory and/or tend to host communal ceremonies –
squares in front of palaces and parliaments, churches, grave-yards, monuments. Here, the place itself evokes respect. Even casual visitors might acknowledge this by solemn and attentive looking and speaking. One scholar speaks of group memory’s “spatial practices”, the perceptual engagement “with an environment that is itself pregnant with the past” (Ingold 1993: 53; see also Hodder 1985: 14). This is where War Memorials are; this is where one finds the Grave of the Unknown Soldier. As Michael Elliott (2011) has pointed out, today’s public-space soldiers’ monuments are no longer erected in order to inspire the young to emulate. Rather, they are meant to invoke memory and respect for dead soldiers. This memory is solemn and moving. At its most effective (e.g., the Vietnam Soldier Memorial in Washington, or the battle-field graveyards of British World War One soldiers), those at the site are effectively called to invoke the dead as their martyr-like forebears: the monument promotes an acknowledgement that their sacrifice was both meaningful, and done for us.

Finally, the place is further invested with meaning if it is “officially” designated – by an acknowledged authority, a church, state or institution – as a traditional site of community-affirming rituals. Like the dominant public sphere, “legitimate” public space contains utterances and actions which, when done according to specified forms, can claim full public notice and import. Public rituals performed at such places – full of group memory, semi-sacralised, acknowledged as publicly significant – are much easier to think of as deeply meaningful, as transcendental.

Unsurprisingly, then, veterans seek to conduct their ceremonies in such spaces. On Canada’s “Remembrance Day”, various newspapers detail acts of public commemoration: “At City Hall, hundreds gathered as wreaths were laid at the cenotaph” – “let us all pledge to never forget our past to pay tribute to those who gave their lives for freedom”, newspapers quote the Edmonton Mayor (Maimann 2013). Korean war veterans long protested their public invisibility in both the US and Canada. They were propitiated, most recently, by an official Canadian invitation to a celebration at the National Capital Region. Note both the place, and the ritual, as detailed on the invitation: They were to launch a memorial photo exhibit, view a Book of Remembrance, and participate in a ceremony at the National War Memorial (website “Anniversary” 2013). Veterans’ Remembrance Day in Union Grove, Wisconsin, takes place at a cemetery (with memorial plaques, “They will never be forgotten”), and involves uniforms, flags, marches, martial songs and music, wreathes and prominent speakers (both politicians and army). It is, according to a veteran interviewed in the Union Grove’s own video, effective: “The cohesiveness and camaraderie is strong, the spiritual transcendence is unique” (website Union Grove 2013). Official sanction in public space, for communal memory-work, embodied in spatialized ritual: who could ask for more?

From all such things W-SS veterans, families and sympathizers were, as the 1990s progressed, excluded. But they had by no means given up. Each year, veterans (albeit increasingly few and aged) and their younger supporters meet on
significant dates to re-affirm their community and remember the fallen. Each year, they organize pilgrimages to significant graveyards and battle-fields. They have had to do much of this in private or incognito. The Kameradenwerk Korps Steiner’s in-house 1996 invitation to an “Anniversary celebration” (published in Neues Korps Steiner, 1996/8/16) gives painful acknowledgement to the dangers of publicity. “For well-known reasons, we do not wish to have our meeting at the usual place. We have found a place, which is equally beautifully located, also in the North German area.” Those wishing to find out where this was would be told after they had sent in a participants’ card; the information could (evidently) not be posted in the advertisement, nor (the arrangers warned) be communicated orally.

Despite hostile public opposition, lack of official confirmation by army, state, or church, contested or denied access to significant places, however, W-SS veterans continue doggedly to seek public places in which to commemorate war dead. But they run into problems – hecklers, for instance – with, it seems, deleterious effects on ritual ceremonies. Let us look at how such commemorations, the memory-work of oppositional history, may be described in in-house websites, newsletters, Der Freiwillige and Ein Fähnlein; and how public opprobrium disrupts.

We will set the stage by describing a neo-Nazi attempt, orchestrated in 2012, to claim German war dead on behalf of a version of war history supported by the W-SS. Covered in the W-SS-friendly publication Fähnlein (2012/3), the story illustrates the difficulties inherent in the far right’s attempts to find uncontested commemorative space.

On the 8th of May, neo-Nazis in Pomeranian Demmin were to march to the harbor and throw a wreath into the river – in memory of (among other things) war-time dead, here defined as victims of “Anglo-American” war crimes. The writer opens with an account of the Anglo-American atrocities (that is, presents the history that frames this march and the counter-narrative is to propose), and then ushers in the hero – the “peaceful and solemn sorrow-march of the Volks-treuen movement in Demmin”. There were, supposedly, 230 men and women present, marching “to commemorate the war dead as well as the victims of deportation, murder and imprisonment”.

The text follows standard ceremonial order, describing marchers moving in well-disciplined columns. They were accompanied by “ethnic Demminer” well-wishers; “and also from the windows and balconies many families and citizens looked on”. As yet, the only disruption came from a small, timid group of “anti-fascist shindiggers”. But this did not last. At the Town Harbor was a “somewhat more whipped-up rabble, loudmouth left-wing extremists and do-gooders who bellowed their stale old ‘Out with the Nazis!’” Unimpressed (the article continues), the marchers silently continued to the agreed-upon harbor site, where they listened to a neo-Nazi leader give a speech, a young woman read a poem, and then bequeathed a wreath to the river waters – where, the text concludes, “anti-fascists”
swimming to steal it were heroically defeated by a fellow-marcher, who threw himself full-clad into the water in the wreath’s defense (Fähnlein 2012/3).

The fact that the Fähnlein reprinted this story of neo-Nazi memory work shows the interest of W-SS veterans, and of those who espouse their cause, in public demonstrations on behalf of historical revisionism. They, like the marchers, wish to use ritualized movement through a public space to claim the memory of war-dead for their own. It also shows the disruption that occurs, even in the heavily-edited narrative, when that procession through public space is challenged. As long as locals are (openly) sympathetic to the cause, the solemn commemoration can continue. But when the loud-mouths begin to shout, the text on the marchers is no longer solemn, but angry and defensive; while the wet wreath-rescuer is certainly out of ritual sync. The march loses its footing, so to speak, and becomes a tale of battle rather than of transcendental moral meaning.

The dangers of disruption are witnessed in other texts concerning commemorative events, including those orchestrated by W-SS veterans themselves. W-SS veterans have an easier time finding public places in Baltic States. But even there, disruption is a problem. Take, as evidence, the English-language website narrative of past and planned W-SS-veterans’ demonstrations posted under the title “Latvian SS Legion” (2010). The website shows two pictures: “Veterans of the Legion remembering the Battle of More” (around and on top of a defunct tank) and “Veterans of the Latvian Legion remembers [sic] their fallen comrades” (black- and formally-clad elderly men kneeling, amidst flags and in front of on-lookers, to put down wreaths at a monument). The narrator continues:

Tomorrow at March 16 the Latvian Waffen SS Legion remembrance day will be celebrated [...] Occasionally at this day Legion war veterans and their nationalist supporters with flags takes a route from the Dome square to the Monument of Freedom. They put flowers at the monument to remember fallen comrades and remember the hard days of war.

But, the writer continues, the day is also “regretted by others” – “loud and angry”, the “Russian nationals, Socialists and others”, who in recent years have harassed those partaking in the ceremony – so much so that “this date is no longer a remembrance of war victims but rather a fight”. This is, the author concludes, because “history is always written by the victorious side” (website Latvian SS Legion 2010). Here, again, is an emplaced fight about history. The rituals of place and communication with the dead, in defense of one communal memory, are openly and unpleasantly disrupted by hostile on-lookers. The marchers’ right to define the memory, for the sake of the nation, is contested. The ceremony is weakened.

Opposition, obviously, matters. We can return to theorists of communal ritual. Durkheimian scholars define such rituals as invoking and involving sacred forces – in the Durkheimian phrase, the locus of a people’s “ultimate concern.” According to Terence Turner (1977: 144), the efficacy of ritual within a group depends...
on the ritual’s ability to make the actors feel that they are in unmediated contact with a “generative principle” or “transcendental ground”. Or, as John MacAlloon (1984: 251) puts it, rituals cause internal group conflicts to melt away; they are transcended into an immediately experienced higher, unifying ideal.

This, MacAlloon argues, also applies to civic rituals (his example is the Olympic Games). But here, the community can claim wider significance for its “transcendental ground”. A ritual pure and simple, he postulates, states that “all contents represent the most serious matters and are completely true”. But then there is the “ritual festival”. This makes similar claims, but on behalf of the audience, as well; the local community is included as part of the community. Finally, MacAlloon postulates, we have a “ritual spectacle”. Here, the audience independently and demonstratively shows agreement with the “truth” of the ritual performance; it creates supportive rituals of its own. Cheers, flowers, flag-waving, throwing hats and streamers, singing along and applauding, all contribute to the consecration of the ritual as ritual spectacle. As MacAlloon puts it, this allows the statement that “all contents represent the most serious matters and are universally true” (MacAlloon 1984: 242-256, italics in the original).

Those who tell the stories of ceremonies afterwards seem aware of the significance of audience mood and recognition. On-lookers are often described (or, today, interviewed) as giving evidence of being moved; they are affected by and share the performers’ solemn and elevated mood. For if, conversely, such audience support is clearly lacking, the spectators missing, silent, apathetic, amused or hostile, the ability of ritual performers to claim general or even local, communal validity for their spatially-based narrative is severely circumscribed. This is situation faced by W-SS veterans.

The ritual-performers are, moreover, particularly vulnerable to audience disdain when the marchers need to create a mood that is solemn, proud and valorous – as is common with the dual “hero-victim” narratives sponsored by veterans of lost wars. Indifferent, amused and hostile audiences reduce the ceremony’s claim to validity. Even if such audiences are explained away as consisting of an alien minority (as in the Latvian case), their behavior seriously disrupts spatial memory work. The marchers are open to marginalization, even ridicule: it is they who are out of place, making unjustifiable and particularistic memory claims.

What can W-SS veterans do? One option is to eschew public space: to be content with (what MacAlloon would call) a ritual pure and simple. Many such rituals are, in fact, described in Freiwillige and Fähnlein. Take, for instance, a quite recent meeting of one of the last surviving local HIAG groups (Fähnlein 2012/3). They had hired and filled a hall (the writer tells us). The mood (he continues) was festive and enthusiastic, as confirmed both by representatives of other W-SS divisions and notables from related organizations. Eight W-SS divisions were represented by actual veterans; the bulk of the meeting was made up of younger sympathizers. The meeting was opened, the ladies and gentleman welcomed, partici-
pants sang the Deutschlandlied (“Deutschland, Deutschland über alles”), Guten Kameraden and the old SS Treuelied – the narrator states, “with all their hearts, whereby a few comrades could not mask one or two tears.” This mood was proper for what followed: remembering “all the fallen comrades from the Wehrmacht, Luftwaffe, Kriegsmarine and Waffen SS”. These fighters were linked, in turn, to “all the German women, children and men, victims of the inhuman bomb war, the victims of sexual outrage and violence”. Finally, homage was paid to “all the comrades of foreign nations who gave their life for the freedom of Germany and Europe, as well as all the fallen comrades of our Gemeinschaft.” A wreath was presented by “the younger comrades”; veterans’ names announced and applauded; and the ceremony closed (ibid.). No audience, no disruption: as re-told, the ritual was successful. But oh, that it could have been a ritual spectacle!

But the W-SS veterans have no public place. Political spaces, war memorials, city streets, even graveyards, are off-bounds. In Norway, a bronze placard-graced memorial stone does exist. It was erected by the Frontkjemperforeningen during the 1970s, in a clearing in the woods in Bamble, and was long the site of yearly commemorations (supposedly gathering 100-200 veterans). The stone remained undisturbed (probably because no-one knew it was there) until media publicity led to its vandalization, in 1993, by left-wing activists. A member of the Frontkjemperforeningen (as well as the Kameradenwerk Korps Steiner) had attempted, two years earlier, to get the Bamble church to incorporate the stone in its graveyard – an attempt, one might say, to gain the added protection and legitimacy, one supposes, of being on holy ground. But in vain; instead, and to his disgust, he was “outed” by local main-stream media as a right-wing extremist (see, e.g., Folk og Land 1983/8, 1993/10; Telemark Arbeiderblad 1993, Telemarkavisen 2012).

Or take the situation in France. A 2012 issue of Ein Fähnlein account of the commemoration of the French W-SS’s dead shows similar placelessness. The “SS-Division ‘Charlemagne’ – Gedenken in Bad Reichenhall” documents the torturous process necessary to commemorate (what the publication termed) the “murder” of twelve French SS-members. The dead were buried in a Bad Reichenhall churchyard; but in 2007, their memorials, to which W-SS veterans (the writer claims) had long travelled, were removed by city authorities in a “night-and-fog action”. The W-SS veterans were not to be deterred. In 2012, eighty of them travelled to the village and, ignoring the “provocations” of a massive police presence, held a remembrance ceremony – not in public, to be sure, but in a rented room in an inn. The author details the usual rituals: the trumpet playing the W-SS song Ich hatte einen Kameraden, the poem read out by a “young comrade”, the speech detailing the cruel outrages of the victors, and the singing of Treuelied (Fähnlein 2012/1).

What about the grave – the place where the dead could be directly invoked as evidence of transcendent communal truths? “In answer” to the authorities’ removal of the SS gravestone, the narrative goes on, “certain comrades from the area”
had created a “mobile” memorial (pictures are included). This portable birch-log memorial is borne into the graveyard by two SS veterans (only two SS veterans were allowed in the graveyard at a time, the local authorities had decided). Other veterans enter, pair by pair, lay wreaths and take photographs, and then leave. Finally, two veterans take the wooden monument away again. The article ends with the slogan “Ewig lebt der Toten Tatenruhm” – in temporary and portable memorials of birch-logs (ibid).

No place, no official confirmation, no sympathetic audience. What might be done? As one peruses the W-SS publications, one finds that much of the solution lay in seeking out significant places outside of West Europe. But how could this work?

Effective commemorations can, in fact, be held on foreign ground, if the patch of earth is held to be significant at home. Indeed, the bodily experience of far-off sites venerated as “holy” can be strongly moving. Maurice Halbwachs (1952/1992) has described a type of spatial exaltation – the combined pilgrimage and tourist-goal – which has its roots in Holy Land travel. When pilgrims move through a (communally) sacred site, treading hallowed ground, following the footsteps of the sanctified dead, they experience significant privilege: the individual is briefly lifted up out of the masses. The euphoria of direct contact with the sacred is intensified by taking place in an unfamiliar context, framing the feeling of “awe and reverence” with a sense of (what anthropologists might term liminal) disorientation (see discussion in Olick & Robbins 1998; Scutts & West 2008).

This type of sentiment can, it seems, be transferred to non-religious sites. The emotional pull of the West’s battlefield pilgrimages (a form of tourism that took off after World War One) is evidence of this. Brad West (2009) has interviewed Australians visiting the World War One battlefield Gallipoli, a sacred place whose story allows an “enchantment of national [Australian] history”. The Gallipoli visitors, indeed, described the experience as unique, intense and emotional; several claimed, further, to now realize that “they died for us” (West 2009: 262).

For veterans, the feeling of being in contact with those who died before is, arguably, an important part of the construction of meaningful community. This is one reason for the high popularity of pilgrimages to war memorials; it holds also for visit to gravesites and battlefields. The latter places are physically imbued with ancestral memory: we stand where they stood, we see what they saw. Indeed, the bodies of those “who died for us” may be part of the earth upon which we walk.

W-SS veterans seek, like other veterans, to claim such sentiments as their own. It is difficult to do this in the Western Europe for which they supposedly fought. During the 1990s, indeed, public hostility to neo-Nazi manifestations (in which the W-SS veterans were, willy-nilly, included) drove them increasingly to foreign parts. Luckily, World War Two had covered a lot of ground. Where, then, to go?
Estonian Brothers-In-Arms

“The Waffen-SS Marches Again”, “The Waffen-SS As Freedom Fighters”, “Distorted History” – headlines were spurred by East and West European W-SS veterans joining in public World War Two commemorations in the Baltic states (see The Algemeiner 2012; Junge Welt 2012; Huffingtonpost 2012; taz 2012; Af-тонblad 2013). Ritual celebrations at the “historic SS battlefield” close to Narva especially outraged them. What was happening here?

The actual history of the Estonians’ involvement in the W-SS, as sketched above, is, perhaps, relatively irrelevant in this context. What matters is W-SS veterans’ ability to argue that they had volunteered not to fight with Germans, but to fight against Soviet annexation. In the Baltic States, this has resonance. Bitter memories of poor treatment by the occupying Nazi power have been overlaid by bitter memories of occupation by the Soviet Union. The result is an alternative moral interpretation of World War Two, where Russia is the evil villain – a divergence from the West which Stefan Troebst pithily summarizes as Gulag versus Holocaust (Troebst 2005; also Wulf 2007; Bottici 2010).

It was during the 1990s, when the Baltic State toleration and encouragement of W-SS veterans’ celebrations reached its height (in what commentators termed “the war of monuments”, see Brüggermann & Kasekamp 2008; Smith 2008; Wulf 2007), that Scandinavian and German W-SS veterans first contacted their Baltic comrades. Within a few years, West European W-SS veterans would learn to use this unexpected commemorative space, situated among and honored by a people whom the W-SS had once held to be an expendable, non-Germanic people, in W-SS memory work.

They were aided by the fact that Estonia houses significant SS battlefields. One of these has, indeed, had long been the object of W-SS veterans’ veneration: the site of the Battle of Narva. Fought in 1944 while retreating from the Russians, and manned, on the German side, by (mostly) W-SS units, this was, in W-SS veteran parlance, Europe’s “only real SS battle”. The Third (Germanic) Armored Corps, which played a major role, was, moreover, unusually “European”. Formed to be the flagship of the international volunteers’ movement, it included German, Scandinavian, Dutch, Belgian and Estonian soldiers. Its commander, General Felix Steiner, remains an idol for many W-SS veterans (including, of course, our old friends, the Kameradenwerk Korps Steiner). It was easy, therefore, for W-SS veterans to incorporate the battle into stories of their heroic defense of Europe against predatory Bolshevism (info14.com 2006; for example, Landwehr’s revisionist 1981 book).

During the 1990s, the battle site was adopted by nationalist Estonians. In 1993, the Estonian veterans of the W-SS Battalion “Narwa” invited German veterans to visit. Der Freiwillige (1993/39/11) proudly reported that representatives of the Norwegian Frontkjemperforening had joined Erhard Heder, the German chairman
of the Truppenkameradschaft Wiking and a delegate from the Kameradenwerk Korps Steiner, in an Estonian expedition. The Germans (in a pattern which mirrored continuing power hierarchies and which would, it transpired, be typical for West European W-SS veterans and sympathizers visiting the East) had arrived with a trailer of relief supplies. Speeches were made and further donations promised to “our brothers in arms” (no empty words: as German main-stream media later noticed, Western W-SS veterans donated on a fairly major scale; see daserste.ndr.de 1998).

In 1994, W-SS veterans and sympathizers from Germany, Scandinavia and Estonia met again, this time celebrating a pompous veterans’ ceremony in Narva itself. The chairman of the Kameradenwerk Korps Steiner took advantage of the opportunity to contrast the Estonians’ public and official ceremonies in honor of W-SS veterans to the “contempt” expressed in the Germany: “You, in your young democracy, can stand by your past; we in our 50-year old [democracy] cannot do it” (Freiwillige 1994/40/10). The contrast was, indeed, telling. The W-SS veterans’ press had been able to report on the presence Estonian military of the commanders-in-chief at the 1993 meetings; again, in 1995, 1996 and 1997, it noted the presence of high-ranking politicians, priests and military personnel at Estonian SS veteran ceremonies (Freiwillige 1993/39/11, 1995/41/7; Neues Korps Steiner 1996/8/16, 1997/9/18).

This was emplaced, ritual recognition at its best. No wonder West-European W-SS veterans and their sympathizers continued to flock to the site. The commemorations were, of course, progressively redefined so as to focus less on the Estonian W-SS and more on the supposedly pan-European nature of both historical and present SS ideals. As early as 1994, at the Narva commemoration, the German chairman of the Truppenkameradschaft of the Wiking Division ended his speech with the words “Long live Estonia. Long live Germany. Long live Europe.” The Freiwillige reporter, who had reproduced the speech in full, endorsed this: the Estonian meetings would, he hoped, “someday” develop into “European soldiers’ meetings” (1994/40/10). His hopes seem realistic: after all, the Korps Steiner had established an Estonian Aid, which contributed goods and money to Estonian veterans’ associations, and also, eventually, paid for an on-site stone memorial, commemorating the entire Korps Steiner (Wenn alle Brüder 2006/3; Freiwillige 1993/39/4, 1993/39/5).
The West-East relation did involve some friction. The Estonians’ first concerns, however much they welcomed outside West European input, were nationalist. The European W-SS, by contrast, was uninterested in the heroic story of Estonia’s national survival. Their story concerned Europe. Narva was referred to as Europe’s “Thermopylae”, the W-SS troops’ retreat becoming, of course, an indirect victory. The self-sacrificing and idealistic W-SS men had, in the end, saved Europe. As the Korps Steiner leader put it in 1997, “Just as, today, stories are still told of the Spartan warriors of King Leonidas, great in historical renown, so shall, in after-years” – in different places, on the Narva river and “before Leningrad” – history celebrate the W-SS men, the “earliest Europeans”, who had fallen in the battle of Narva (Neues Korps Steiner 1997/9/18). Or, as another speaker put it, “it was we [Waffen-SS Germans] and our European volunteers who alone stopped Stalin’s armies’ advance to the Atlantic” (Neues Korps Steiner 1997/9/18). The myth was not of Estonian survival, but of the salvation of Europe: the only reason that all of Europe (and, implicitly, the rest of the West) were not taken over by Communists had been the self-sacrificing endurance of these “first Europeans” (Fähnlein 2012/1).6
Coverage of a “Veterans’ Meeting of the European Volunteers in Estonia”,

*Ein Fähnlein.*

This narrative was presented in conjunction with the dedication of an additional on-site stone, that of the W-SS Regiment Norge in 1996 (the regiment Norge had been a part of the Korps Steiner). This ceremony had had been prepared for the previous year. In 1996, the *Neues vom Kameradenwerk Korps Steiner* (1996/8/16) tells us, in a rather chatty manner, how “we” – German, Norwegian and Swedish veterans – proceeded to a W-SS ceremony, holding reunion meetings and visiting
memory sites on the way. The usual singing of the Treuelp lied and other “soldiers’ songs” was followed, this time, by less typical activities. This time, the veterans had public acknowledgement.

First, an Estonian “dignitary” reminded those present of “the proud freedom battle of the Estonian people, who together with the German Wehrmacht fought against Bolshe vism”. The account continued by noting the “self-evident” presence of local priests and Mayor. Further, two Korps Steiner members who had earned the Ritterkreuz medal (awarded, in its time, by Adolf Hitler himself) had been personally welcomed by State President Lennart Meri, who, in turn, “gratefully accepted” an honorary membership in the Kameradenwerk Korps Steiner (see coverage in Neues Korps Steiner 1996/8).


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The Norwegian veterans’ *Folk og Land* (1996/7, 1996/8) described the stone in detail. It stood proudly on church grounds in near-by Vaivara – that is, on hallowed ground – and was formally dedicated to the members of the Regiment Norway. The stone, *Folk og Land* continues, carries inscriptions in Norwegian, German and Estonian – “In Memory of the Fallen”. Its inscription would also seem to link East Europe to Germany, in that it tells of how the regiment travelled through Croatia, Russia, Estonia, Latvia and Pomerania to Berlin. (A photo of the memorial re-appears on the title-page of *Der Freiwillige* 1997/43/5, flanked, here, by the Norwegian flag.) The Norwegian national anthem was played and the stone blessed by a priest. There followed a re-print of the celebratory speech by the Mayor of Vaivara:

> We only know, that many soldiers from the European peoples became heroes on this site […] The monument stands in honor of the Norwegian soldiers, their hardihood and self-sacrifice. It is in memory of their undefeatable determination to be free, with which they also helped us Estonians. (Ibid; also *Folk og Land* 1996/8.)

Thus did Estonian statesmen get on with local and visiting W-SS veterans.

The Vaivaria site, today, includes stones and plaques commemorating the participation of Norwegian, Danish and Flemish SS troops. A visit to these stones is often included in what has become annual W-SS veterans’ and veterans’ sympathizers’ battle-field pilgrimages to and ceremonies at Narva. The annual meeting
is, nowadays, one of the high points on the calendar of European veterans and their sympathizers. Virtually all pertinent forums carry admiring reports on the festivities. In August 2011, for instance, *Ein Fähnlein* describes the meeting as “the European volunteers’ veterans” meeting *tout court*.

Nationalists in countries within the former Soviet Union could, thus, provide European W-SS veterans with both significant places and public acknowledgement – both becoming increasingly scarce elsewhere. Indeed, in 1994, Norwegian W-SS veteran Arnfinn Vik was able to report at a (private) W-SS veterans’ meeting that work was proceeding on additional monuments and places – not only “a commemorative stone monument in Narva”, but also one at “Krasnoye Selo” – for “we are certainly be most sympathetically met in the East” (*Folk og Land* 1994/9). One could put it, somewhat provocatively, that the Scandinavian and German veterans functioned as European volunteers in the Baltic war of memory of Gulag *versus* Holocaust.

What additional places had been found?

**Go East, Old Man: Ukraine, 1992-2010**

It must have been an unusual sight: in June 1993, about three dozen elderly men and women standing in an East-Ukrainian potato-field, singing enthusiastically and to accompaniment of a trumpet. The song was the SS Treuelied; and they faced a recently-erected wooden cross (3.6 meters high; of oak, of course), bearing a placard with the legend: “1941-1945 / To Honor of the Fallen / The First European Armored Division” (*Freiwillige* 1993/39/2).

The singers were W-SS veterans and their families; and the inscription is, as usual, somewhat misleading. The “First European Armored Division” refers, in fact, to the W-SS Division Wiking. In 1993, the veterans were, in their own words, staking out an SS graveyard, established in 1942 and subsequently abandoned. Seventeen years later, in 2010, the Ukrainian Ministry of the Interior would sign a fifty-year contract leasing the field to the innocuous-sounding German Association of War Graves (Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge; see [www.volksbund.de](http://www.volksbund.de) and *Wenn alle Brüder* 2010: 2) through which, in fact, the W-SS were working. W-SS veterans had found still another place to be.

The story began in 1992. The collapse of the Soviet Union – as W-SS veteran and Wiking leader Eberhard Heder explained in *Der Freiwillige* (1993/39/2) – had increased veterans’ interest in seeking out “the far-scattered traces of a fateful past”. Two veterans, accompanied by a guide and a translator sympathetic to the cause, had taken off, caravan in tow, toward the East. Their goal was Uspenka (formerly Uspenskaja) in East Ukraine. Here, the W-SS Division Wiking had once had its supply base, and here – as the expedition knew – was a Division Wiking grave-yard. The expedition intended to contact the Mayor of Uspenka, as well as those townspeople upon whom the SS had been billeted. Heder hoped that
the expedition would “use the opportunities and conditions of such a visit to proclaim good will” (*Freiwillige* 1993/39/2).

Good will was expressed by the substantial load of relief goods, including clothing and medicine, stowed in the veterans’ caravan. This was (one would supposed) to ensure a welcome in Uspenka; Heder maintained that another purpose was to obtain an official designation as relief transport and thus facilitate the border crossing (ibid).

In Uspenka, Heder’s second, same-issue *Freiwillige* article tells readers, all went very well. The veterans were “greeted with friendliness” by the director of the local “Kolkhoz”, who shook their hands and took them into the village. There, Heder continues, they met villagers, while the director held a short speech. “Dear German veterans! We have been waiting for you. We have prepared ourselves for your visit. It is good, that you are back in Uspenskaja after fifty years”. The audience applauded. Heder answered (truly from the heart, he writes) that “We were in your village earlier. Then we were eighteen-nineteen years old. And we had fought with all the passion and power of youth. But your soldiers, too, your current grandfathers, were also fighting for their fatherland” (ibid).

The veterans then distributed the goods they had brought were and were, finally, “lavishly entertained”. The writer repeatedly expresses gratified astonishment at the sympathetic, “friendly and approving” attitude shown by the local population. They had been toasted in vodka; given a feast; they had sung a song for the villagers, and had joined in the latter in their own renditions of the songs Kalinka and Katjuscha. “Filled with contentment”, Heder concludes that such a welcome would be impossible were it true that the W-SS had used “arson, terror and rape” – as the Soviet divisions had (ibid). For once, it seems – albeit in far-off Ukraine – witnesses and audiences, the local population, were held to confirm the truth of the SS’s revisionist view of its own historical role and character.

The next step was to establish a commemorative pilgrimage site. Heder writes that “official Uspenka” approved of the idea. In summer of 1993, thirty-two W-SS veterans and sympathizers arrived at the village; it is they who erected the wooden cross. A “proud Wiking” elaborated on the cross’s inscription in *Der Freiwillige*, as follows:


During the following weeks, four additional veteran groups visited the cross in the field. Two more crosses were soon erected. *Der Freiwillige* (1995/41/8, 1995/41/11) announced and coordinated annual excursions thither, and published celebratory accounts of the visits, all emphasizing that the veterans were always greeted as “friends”.

The final aim, however, was to get official sanction for the site. By 2007, the veterans, now operating through a “German-Ukrainian Association” and, later, the
fairly respectable German association *Der Volksbund*, were working hard to establish the field as what the W-SS-veterans’ *Wenn alle Brüder* (2007/3) now called the “Soldiers’ Graveyard of the Three Crosses”. And they were doing well. There was a dedication ceremony, visited by enough visiting dignitaries and approving audience to, indeed, qualify the ceremony (at least on paper) as a ritual festival. A Ukrainian Orthodox minister and an evangelical preacher alternated in leading devotions and prayers, while veterans and sympathizers were joined by members of the village population. The entire was, the *Wenn alle Brüder* author maintained, a great success.

The German-Ukrainian Association ended by calling for additional contributions to further develop the site (*Wenn alle Brüder* 2007/3). In 2010, the climax came. The W-SS veterans’ German War Grave Memorial Association published a special issue of *Wenn alle Brüder*: “Uspenka – only a few mile-stones for an extraordinary project” (2010/2). At this point, the Ukrainian Ministry of the Interior signed over the field, now with a wall enclosing 300 square meters, newly-planted acacias and a new commemorative stone on behalf of Wallonian veterans, to the *Volksbund* (to whom, in a complicated maneuver, the *Kriegsgräberstiftung* donated money ear-marked for developing the Uspenka site). The W-SS Wiking and its comrades had, in short, found a second pilgrimage site: a W-SS graveyard with commemorative stones and crosses dedicated to themselves, acknowledged by both local public and state. A good place, in short, for much-publicized and successful ritual festivals; a good sop to communal self-identity.

**And Deep in Enemy Territory: Norwegians in Russia, 1998**

Were there more worlds – or, rather, public sites – to conquer? The Norwegian veteran Arnfinn Vik, as noted above, had already mentioned “Krasnoye Selo” (*Folk og Land* 1994/9). As we have seen, Estonian anti-Soviet sentiments afforded veterans of the W-SS, now redefined as Europeans fighting Bolshevism, with memory sites within the former Soviet Union. Why not, then, Krasnoye Selo, where, in 1942/42, for instance, the SS Legion Norge had been stationed – that is, just outside the city once known as Leningrad?

To commemorate the W-SS there would, one would think, necessitate some creative thinking. By no stretch of the imagination could the W-SS veterans present themselves as ancient “allies against alien occupation”, as the Vaivara Mayor had put it. But history could be re-interpreted in other ways. Had not the W-SS tried to liberate the Russians from the Russians themselves? Or, as *Folk og Land* put it in 1998 (7), the only reason that the W-SS volunteers had had to fight Russian soldiers was because they, the Russians, had been “the first victims of Bolshevism”. But Russian soldiers (the author hastens to add) had been valorous, too – all fighting for their fatherland, here as in Ukraine – and it was time, it seems, to let by-gones by by-gones.
It did take some time to put this myth – and site – in place. Years of veterans’
travel to Russia and Krasnoye Selo, in order to meet with (and hand over money
to) various officials and local politicians, were followed by direct negotiations
with Krasnoye Selo’s Orthodox ministry (see Monitor 1999/1). This, together
with continued donations all round, turned the tide. In 1998, a memorial stone to
the Norwegian “volunteers” was erected and dedicated on church property just
outside the city of St. Petersburg.

The Krasnoye Selo stone, as pictured in Folk og Land 1998/7, “Reconciliation – Co-
hesion- Affection. The Legion’s memorial over the fallen Norwegians /…/ One le-
gionnaire describes the dedication as the greatest that has happened in the history of
the Legion.”

Folk og Land (1998/7) gave first-page coverage to the dedication of the stone,
which stands “on the grounds of the Russian church – and is under its protection.”
Per Storlid, the moderately reliable eye-witness who does the reporting, continual-
ly emphasizes that the (W-SS) dead are being, finally, honored and protected. The
ceremony itself was “moving”, making “a strong impression on the many Norwe-
gian and Russian [!] war veterans who were there.” The notice is full of hack-
neyed Slavic romanticism. “Mother Russia, through her church, has taken these
fallen foreigners, once enemies, to herself as her own, forever”. The priest who does the blessing is described almost ecstatically – his eyes shine with “mildness and wisdom”, as evidenced in his words “All dead have the right to a place where they can be remembered”. The visitors feel “a friendliness as from an old acquaintance”. The stone awaits, under a Norwegian flag, a be-ribboned wreath in honor of the dead, and an anonymously bequeathed bouquet. After a very lengthy religious ceremony, performed in full regalia and with the help of three additional officiants, the priest asks if he may put a Russian orthodox cross on the stone. Storlid records the response: “no, no-one has anything against that”, for “in this way Russia’s church takes this memorial explicitly and visibly in its care and protection for all time.” The stone is unveiled, the flag and ribbons donated to the priest, and the Norwegian national anthem (but not the Treuelied) is sung. Jørgen Høve holds a brief speech on the subject of reconciliation. The newsletter’s picture of the stone shows inscriptions (in Norwegian, with a Russian translation, and under two clasped hands: “For Freedom and Reconciliation – To the Fallen Norwegians” (ibid, italics in the original).

This article is flanked by another, a brief, anonymous addition to the piece’s memory politics (Folk og Land 1998/7). Here, a W-SS veteran reminisces about his time at Krasnoye Selo. His had been the task, every day, of standing before “the legion” and calling out the names of the dead. The dead men (he writes) had been friends – he had remembered the good times, “common happiness, common sorrows, common fight and common battle. The strong bands of brotherhood in arms shall again be knotted between those who stand in formation in gray rows, and those who lie under the earth.” In this edition of Folk og Land, the Norwegian SS veterans have found a way of commemorating their dead, and thus themselves – solemn, meaningful, and very much emplaced.

The W-SS itself, it seems, was not mentioned. Neither the SS insignia nor the words Waffen-SS appeared on the Russian stone; they were not mentioned in speeches. This meant that Norwegian and Russian antifascists could accuse the veterans, in a 1999 demonstration against the memorial, of having deceived the community: they had been silent on their membership in the W-SS, and had also kept quiet about the fallen soldiers’ volunteer status. They also brought up the fact that money had changed hands between veterans and priests, not least at the ceremony itself (see www.vespen.no). These protests were ineffectual. On the contrary: shortly after the protest, an additional stone was erected and blessed, this time on behalf of the Flemish SS veterans (Wenn alle Brüder 2006/4). A major propaganda point had been won. If SS veterans could find public, officially blessed places for ceremonies just outside St. Petersburg, that is, amidst what had once been deepest enemy territory, how could they be denied legitimacy and place in Europe itself?
Concluding Remarks

A military unit, argue Ender, Bartone and Kolditz (2003), is based on a particularly intense form of comradeship. There is “the feeling of freedom and power instilled in us by communal effort in combat”. But there is also the true comradeship that appears “only when each is ready to give up his life for the other, without reflection and without thought of personal loss” (quoting Gray 1970: 46). This particularly strong, often idealized comradeship, is an important part of any legion’s experience. Army leaders must (Ender et al continue) respect this; for them,

there is no event more important to the preservation of unit morale than a soldier’s memorial service. /…/ It is an officer’s solemn duty to preserve the memory of a fallen comrade and in doing so communicate respect and concern for the living soldiers in the unit. Far from being mere impression management, the common expectation is that the commander is personally involved and deeply emotionally moved. The shedding of tears is accepted and not viewed as a form of weakness. (Ender et al 2003:n.p.)

These intense feelings of comradeship and sorrow, and the equally intense need to publicly display such feelings, may be part of what drives the W-SS veterans’ and, by extension, veterans’ sympathizers, to their unrelenting commitment to commemorative ceremonies. It is at least as important, it seems, to the W-SS sympathizers who never experienced the war itself: the ceremonies are intense and valued because (one might conclude) this is the closest that those born after 1945 can get to what they see as the pre-eminent experience, the most meaningful battle. To find a counter-hegemonic heroic myth and a place to be are, arguably, appendices to this emotional commitment. But the sentiment is indeed swaddled in new apparel; and the Emperor’s new clothing has implications for proposed revisions of the history of World War Two and of Europe.

Each of the ceremonies detailed above cement the myth of heroic Europeans volunteering against Bolshevism. The anti-Bolshevik / European profile of the fighters is thus all that matters; the fact of fighting an expansionist, racist, genocidal war under German leadership is constantly erased. On none of the monuments do the two letters SS appear. There is, of course, a set of codes that allow those with even a little knowledge to read the messages correctly: inscriptions (on stones in Hungary and Austria) which read “Their Honor is Faith”, citations from the Treueldied, or even the self-designation “Europe’s soldiers”. Still, this self-designation leads thoughts far from the real W-SS. Images of benign internationalism are reinforced by the consistent addition, at each site, of memorial stones to various nationalities, each designated by neutral terms such as the “Fallen Norwegians” or “European Armored Division”. And in this guise, particularly in the areas once part of the Soviet Union, the W-SS’s new self-identification seems viable.
The determination to refashion themselves, publicly, as the fascinating forbears of modern Europe, has further implications. The organizations covered here call for recognition of the W-SS as soldiers (if not soldiers pure and simple: they are very proud of their European-wide and volunteer status). As such, they claim a place in the ranks of loyal, true soldiers everywhere. It is notable, indeed, the degree to which W-SS veterans’ organizations constantly mention reconciliation. The Estonian ritual festivals are, exceptionally, about brothers-in-arms: the Russians are still the enemy. But in the Ukraine and in Russia itself, as in, for instance, France, Germany, and Scandinavia, the message is very different. All soldiers are honored. Only the Bolsheviks, as insubstantial, here, as the Jews whom Hitler accused of causing world war, were evil. All those who actually fought tend to be exonnerated.

This is not unique to organizations sympathetic to the W-SS. Australian visitors to Gallipoli – ushered around, it should be added, by Turkish guides – find both Australian and Turkish soldiers innocent, patriotic victims of German manipulation and malice (West 2003). Of course, that battle was not strictly comparable to the slaughter, often of civilians, brought about by parts of the W-SS. But even that can be forgotten and forgiven between soldiers. It was regrettable, writes Storlid (Folk og Land 1998/7) that “the fight that these volunteers who fought against Bolshevism was simultaneously a war that brought the Russian people unending suffering and losses”. But this was only because the Russian people were “the first victim of Bolshevism”. For the rest, each man was fighting for his fatherland; and so each must be remembered and honored. True to their “European” status, the W-SS veterans’ publications claim that the veterans have advanced far further than any modern politicians in terms of reconciliation. After all (it seems), they were reconciled with the men whom they once tried to kill. And this is possible because they had once tried to kill the others – because they were soldiers.

True, honorable soldiers, according to veterans’ publications, never hate the enemy. This was particularly true of the W-SS soldiers (as opposed, various W-SS veteran publications maintain, to English, American, or – here they slip – Russian soldiers). Politicians are among “the post-war born ingrates” who still bear malice for battles fought in the War. The “old soldiers, who were once forced to fight each other /.../ have long ago made peace with each other” (Wenn alle Brüder 2005/1). Or, as Wenn alle Brüder put it in 2004:

Of course, at that time, there arose hate as a result of propaganda and experiences, but there were also instances of high respect and deep understanding for the situation of oppositional soldiers, which could be tied to the idea of a reconciliation between peoples after the end of the war (2004/4).

Indeed, illustrative examples of “honorable” or “soldierly” actions join positive statements about former enemies in filling the pages of veterans’ magazines (see e.g., “Slik treffes tidligere fiender”, Folk og Land, 2002/3). When an article on the
Uspenka monument-erecting expedition is entitled “Trip of Good Will”, it says something about the self-understanding of such men. The Ukrainians and Russians, themselves excellent soldiers, can bear no ill-will; all were honorable, all were true, and all were fighting evil. Let the W-SS come.

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**Notes**

1 We owe thanks to the Expo Archiv in Stockholm for the material we use for this article. We owe special thanks to Jan Raabe, of "Argumente & Kultur gegen Rechts" in Bielefeld, for his help to Steffen Werther in making material available.

2 The Waffen-SS (W-SS, known until 1940 as the SS Verfügungstruppe) is to be distinguished, nominally, from the “Allgemeine” (General) SS. The W-SS was a relatively small proportion of the SS as a whole, created in order to partake in battles together with (but not as a part of) the German Army. However, arguments that there was no overlap between the two SS organizations do not hold; there was, historians have shown, a fairly regularized exchange of personnel.

3 Hilfsgemeinschaft auf Gegenseitigkeit der Angehörigen der ehemaligen W-SS.

4 Estonian names: Eesti Vabadusvõitlejate Liit; Eesti Relvagnerideride Diviisi Veteranide Ühendus and Eesti Leegioni Sõprade Klubi.
Also known under its title, “Wenn alle untreu werden”. In the SS's WWII song-book, the “Treuelied” is listed just after the “Deutschlandlied” and just before the notorious “Horst-Wessel-Song”. See Wilke 2011: 192f.

The exploitation of the Sparta/Thermopylae topic has a long German tradition, with a peak during WWII. See: Roche (2013).

See, also, inscriptions on the highly controversial Hungarian memorial stones. For the checkered history of the SS-veterans' Budapest monument (dedicated to SS divisions "Totenkopf" und "Wiking"), Wenn alle Brüder schweigen, Mitteilungsblatt Nr. 1, February 2005.

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Lovable Anarchism: 
Campus Protest in Japan From the 1990s to Today

By Carl Cassegård

Abstract
This is a paper on the transformation of campus activism in Japan since the 1990’s. Japan’s so-called freeter movements (movements of young men and women lacking regular employment) are often said to have emerged as young people shifted their base of activism from campuses to the “street”. However, campuses have continued to play a role in activism. Although the radical student organisations of the New Left have waned, new movements are forming among students and precarious university employees in response to neoliberalization trends in society and the precarization of their conditions. This transformation has gone hand in hand with a shift of action repertoire towards forms of direct action such as squatting, sit-ins, hunger strikes, and opening “cafés”. In this paper I focus on the development of campus protest in Kyoto from the mid-1990s until today to shed light on the following questions: How have campus-based activists responded to the neoliberalization of Japanese universities? What motivates them to use art or art-like forms of direct action and how are these activities related to space? I investigate the notions of space towards which activists have been oriented since the 1990’s, focusing on three notions: official public space, counter-space and no-man’s-land. These conceptions of space, I argue, are needed to account for the various forms campus protest has taken since the 1990s.

Keywords: Campus protest, Japan, precarity, direct action, space, counter-space.
Introduction

An unusual performance took place at Kyoto University in February 2009, on the day of the annual entrance examinations. In front of the big camphor tree before the main clock tower one of the university’s part-time librarians, Ogawa Kyōhei (1969-), started singing in a seemingly improvised way while dancing and making movements vaguely reminiscent of a strip-tease performance.

So it’s five years and then out, right?
But I’ve worked here on and off for altogether seven years.
Yes, seven years, here at Kyoto University.
So it’s about time for this, right?
[he shows how his head will be cut off]
Is it really!!
No, no, no, no!

Next to him an oil drum was standing, painted in big white brush strokes with the word “Kubi” – a common word for being fired which also means neck or getting decapitated. The oil drum was filled with water that had been heated by his comrades in Union Extasy and was in fact a bath tub, in which Ogawa was soon bathing stark naked, all the time singing or shouting at the top of his voice to the high-school students who were walking by on their way back from their entrance examinations: “Let everybody pass!! Let everybody pass!! Kyoto University, let everyone enter!! And stop cutting off our heads!!”(Ogawa 2010b).1

Union Extasy is a union for the university’s part-time employees which was founded in 2007 by Ogawa and another librarian, Inoue Masaya (1971-). At the time of the oil drum bath, it had just initiated a strike to protest against the part-timers’ employment conditions. In particular they turned against the university’s so-called “five year rule”, according to which part-timers would at most be able to hold on to their jobs for five years. Setting up a tent-like struc-
ture next to the camphor tree, a well-known symbol of Kyoto University, they quickly gained attention and much laughter through their drastic methods, which struck some observers as charmingly clownish and others as outrageous and provocative. A big tuna head was placed in front of the tent to get the message through. In April they turned their shack into Kubikubi Café, a place for pleasant talk and cheap coffee which was in existence for over two years, serving as a gathering place, as a center for disseminating information and, for a time, as the temporary residence of one of the union members.

The union’s activities illustrate the rise of protests against “precarity” and “neo-liberalism” on Japanese campuses in recent years. They also illustrate the tendency among campus activists today to resort to spectacular acts of direct action that often involve the occupation of space – e.g. sit-ins, hunger strikes or opening cafés in shacks or tents. That campus based anti-precarity protest and direct action go hand in hand is a trend that can also be seen in many other countries today – e.g. the wave of student and faculty protests against “austerity” or “corporatization” in California, Québec, Chile, the UK, Italy and elsewhere, which have involved flash mobs, kiss-ins, blockades, traffic disruptions, house occupations, street theatre, the painting of government buildings, nightly “snake-march” demonstrations with no pre-determined route, and casseroling (banging pots and cans from balconies and windows), apart from ordinary street demonstrations and dance parties (see Connery 2011; Ayotte-Thompson & Freeman 2012; Lagalisse 2012; Caruso 2013).

In this article I will attempt to shed light on the interconnection between anti-precarity protest and direct action by focusing on the role played by space in activism and on how this role has changed over time. Tracing the development of campus protest from the 1990s until today in Kyoto, I will attempt to answer the following questions. Firstly, how have campus-based activists responded to the ongoing transformation of Japanese universities into profit-driven corporations that increasingly subject students and staff to perceived market demands? Secondly, what motivates activists to use direct action in general and space occupations in particular? I will show that a sensitive instrument for tracing the process of shifting forms of action can be gained by relating them to theories of public space. A third question will therefore be: What use have campus activists made of space and how have they conceptualized space?

Let me briefly flesh out the theoretical background behind my choice of focusing on space. The publicness of a space is not a static given and can be an object of contestation. In the course of struggle, space can be used in various ways, and I will distinguish between three ways of conceptualizing space: as officially recognized public space, counter-space and no-man’s-land. Officially recognized public space is largely attuned to the rhythms of mainstream life. Such space can be important to political challengers since it helps them project messages to a wider public and to authorities – to participate in what Habermas (1989) calls a public
sphere where citizens deliberate on their common affairs. Patricia Steinhoff points out that this use of space has been prominent in student activism in Japan, which has always gone “beyond campus issues to engage the major political issues of the day”, often in close collaboration with oppositional political parties, labor unions and other civil society groups who were engaged in the same protest movements (Steinhoff 2012: 73). At the same time, there are limits to how radical the demands and the conduct permitted in such space can be, since they need to be considered legitimate or in tune with the normative expectations of the surrounding society.

However, campus-based movements cannot be understood solely by focusing on their contribution to the mainstream public sphere. Spaces for direct action often assume the character of what Lefebvre (1991: 381ff) calls counter-spaces. These are spaces for the provocative visibilization of behavior that is subject to sanctions or stigmatization in mainstream public areas and therefore normally hidden or bracketed. Typically the very right of activists to use the counter-space is contested. While part of the aim of Kubikubi Café was certainly to promote the union’s voice in the public sphere – the café serving as a place for interaction with passers-by, for gaining the attention of local newspapers, and for exerting pressure on the university – it was also a counter-space that intentionally and gleefully “desecrated” a symbolic spot on the main campus and whose very existence was a gauntlet thrown to the university. The popularity of direct action in today’s campus activism has gone hand in hand with an increasing prevalence of counter-spaces.

Direct action on campuses cannot be understood in isolation from a third kind of space which I will call no-man’s-lands (see Cassegård 2013). These too are places permitting behavior considered contrary to mainstream norms, but unlike counter-spaces they are not created in order to challenge these norms publicly. Instead they thrive on official neglect. Waste and garbage, things that are free to pick up for anyone who feels like it, belong to this world.

Although seemingly unrelated to politics, no-man’s-lands have political import since they are places where activists and other people can spend time relatively sheltered from mainstream norms in times when not engaging in publicly visible acts of confrontation. During their drawn out struggle with the university, it was important for the participants in Kubikubi Café to be able to use the campus as a no-man’s-land, taking electricity and water from nearby buildings and gathering firewood from construction sites to heat their oven in the winter. Unlike many other public spaces, such as streets and squares, campuses are places where such resources are relatively abundant and accessible to activists.

Paying attention to how activists use space helps us to see that activism is not always oriented to participation in the public sphere or towards instrumentally working for social change. In particular, access to alternative arenas such as counter-spaces or no-man’s-lands has been important in processes of empowerment –
the strengthening of people’s self-confidence as political actors. Empowerment can be furthered through activities that at first sight do not appear political: it can be about escaping isolation by discovering and associating with likeminded people, having access to spaces relatively free from outside sanctions, or engaging in protest activities as a form of practice when political stakes are seemingly insignificant. The way activists navigate between or combine various forms of space is often conditioned by the degree to which they see empowerment as an urgent task (see Cassegård 2013).

**Background: New Cultural Movements and Precarization**

For a long time, campus protest in Japan was virtually synonymous with the student movement, usually bringing forth associations to the radical so-called New Left groups that had used the campuses as bases for rallies and street demonstrations in their heyday in the 1960s and 1970s. This student activism weakened and lost popular appeal in the late 1970s, being discredited by political failure, violent sectarian infighting and dogmatism. Severely damaging the reputation of New Left activists was their tendency to get embroiled in violent sectarian infighting. Even more devastating to their image was the development of terrorist groups like the United Red Army, a militant grouping who murdered 14 of their own for their alleged lack of revolutionary zeal in their hideout at Mt Asama in 1972. Among many radical activists in Japan, this so-called Asama Sansō incident achieved iconic status as a powerful symbol of the New Left’s failure (Suga 2003, 2006; Igarashi 2007; Oguma 2009; Steinhoff 2012).

Since then, radical youth activism has made a comeback, especially after the turn to the new millennium, as can be seen in today’s precarity movement or the movements against war or nuclear power (see Cassegård 2013). This activism, however, has usually not been campus-based. Participants have often been so-called freeters, young people without regular employment, a group which has increased rapidly in Japan since the early 1990s, rather than students. With its use of performances, art, music and dancing, this activism is typical of what Mōri (2005) calls “new cultural movements”. In contrast to the widespread image of the New Left these movements are said to be characterized by an open and loose network-structure, ideological diversity, more egalitarian and individualist forms of organization, and a predilection for art, performances and fun (Mōri 2005, 2009a; Hayashi & McKnight 2006).

This cultural activism became known to the wider public through the rise of protests against precarity among freeters. However, it is important to point out that it was not simply a reaction to the deterioration of economic conditions during the so-called lost decade which followed the so-called economic “bubble” of the late 1980s and early 1990s. Its roots can be found in bubble-years themselves, which was a fertile period of experimentation in which new forms of protest and
organization were tried out among young people outside the established Leftist
groups (Kohso 2006: Toyama 2008). A decisive contribution was that it offered
forms of action, organization, style and “thought” that were no longer felt to be
tainted by the negative legacy of the New Left and which matched the needs and
desires of the quickly growing freeter stratum.

Although freeter activism has generally taken the “street” as its preferred scene
of action rather than university campuses, the rise of freeter activism has not
meant that universities have lost their role as platforms of activism. New Left
groups dating back to the 60s continue to exist on several campuses. Even more
significantly, the processes that have produced freeter activism in society at large
have also fuelled the rise of new forms of activism on campuses. In line with the
international trend towards “managerialism” or “New Public Management”
(Goldfinch 2004, Dunleavy et al. 2006), universities in Japan have increasingly
adjusted to the role of service-providers on a capitalist market. This shift is part of
a wider neoliberal trend in Japanese society, if neoliberalism is seen broadly as
social and economic transformations under the sign of the free market, including
the institutional arrangements to implement this project (Connell 2013: 100). In
Japanese higher education, this shift was accelerated by a 2003 law turning na-
tional universities into national university corporations. The incorporation took
place 2004 and forced national universities to rely more heavily on private fund-
ing, making them more similar to private universities, at the same time as they
became more tightly supervised by the Ministry of Education (Tabata 2005,

A question that has received scant attention is how activism on the campuses
has changed under the influence of this shift. While the mass-media has reported
on the repressive measures directed towards some of the remaining New Left
groups, far less attention has been paid to new forms of activism that have
emerged in recent years in response to the neoliberal transformation of universi-
ties. These newer movements cannot be viewed exclusively as student move-
ments. Largely they have emerged among university employees who protest
against their precarious labor conditions. Spanning student and labor issues, they
take aim at the transformation of universities into corporations that increasingly
need to secure their budgets through attracting private funding and investment,
raising student fees where possible, and curtailing the costs of the labor force by
increasingly relying on short-term contract employees.

From Students and Employees to Freeters

Campus activism today is not just a student movement and also not just a move-
ment among employees. Behind its emergence lie social processes that are in-
creasingly transforming both of these groups into a condition of “freeter”- likeness. The precarious situation of students today has often been pointed out.
“The majority of universities are no longer institutions for producing middle-class, white-collar workers, to say nothing of Japan’s future elites, but temporary camps for chronically jobless youth”, Sabu Kohso states (2006: 416). Asato Ken, founder of the General Freeter Union, emphasizes that since students are now part of the precarious worker stratum, the time has come for them to fight, not for the workers, but as workers (PAFF 2003). The lack of openings for stable employment after graduation has its factual background in the overall increase in university graduates in addition to processes of deregulation and economic slowdown (Hommerich 2012: 212f).

That many students face an uncertain future after graduation is not all. Already as students, they enter a milieu on the campus that has been transformed in a neoliberal direction. Four interrelated areas can be discerned that have aroused student protest in recent years. One is the burden of student fees, with a movement arising both in Tokyo and in Kyoto against the “blacklisting” of students who fail to pay back their student loans (Ribault 2010). A second has been the time-consuming job hunting, which many students feel that they need to engage in already in their second or third year, reflecting the increasing competition for regular employment (see e.g. Nagata 2010). A third area is the suppression of political student activism, with Hōsei University (see Saitō 2009; McNeil 2009; Yabu 2009) and Waseda University (see Suga 2006: Suga & Hansaki 2006) in Tokyo being particularly notorious examples. A fourth, related area has been the gentrification of university campuses – a process which Bose (2012: 816) refers to as the “material transformation of campuses into ‘commercial spaces’ with an increasingly visible corporate presence”. Typically, this has involved the reorganization of campus life to allow a greater role to privately run cafés, restaurants and convenience stores along with a concomitant rebuilding and prettification of its physical infrastructure and attempts to ban, remove or tear down manifestations of the culture of student activism, such as standing signboards, shacks or rooms for students’ circle activities or dormitories strongly associated with student self-rule (such as Tokyo University’s Komaba Dormitory). A group that pioneered the protests against campus gentrification was the “Society for preserving the squalor of Hōsei” (Hōsei no binbōkusasa o mamoru kai). This group was formed by Matsumoto Hajime – later a leading activist associated with the Amateur Riot (Shirōto no ran) – when he was a student at Hōsei University in 1997. Aghast at the transformation of the university into what he saw as a preparatory school for work, he started inviting students to nabe (hot pot) parties on the campus, creating “liberated zones” where they would also camp. These gatherings were not political demonstrations so much as playful acts of sabotage against the prettification of the campus, but they were popular and easy to imitate and soon spread to other universities in Japan (Amamiya 2007: 226-238; Matsumoto 2008a:95-102, 2008b: 38-66, 70-75; Takemura 2008).
While these changes were happening, there was also a conspicuous flexibilization of employment for university staff (e.g. Shiraishi & Ono 2005). As will be discussed below, university employees have played a leading role in protesting against this flexibilization. However, their protests should not be seen as separate from the protests of the students. The activism of students and employees has developed in interaction with each other and today new forms of solidarity appear to be taking form between these two groups. Below, I will illustrate this development by discussing campus activism from the 1990s onwards in Kyoto, focusing to those episodes of activism in which Union Extasy’s two founding members, Ogawa and Inoue Masaya, have been involved.

**Kinji House, or “Cleaning is love”**

In the 1990s Kyoto became the place for a strong student activist ferment, which saw students at Dōshisha University develop Japan’s first so-called sound-demos (street parties), as well as much activism related to feminism, queer and AIDS. In the early 1990s many students still felt it was easy to find employment and found it easy to take breaks in their studies in order to pursue interests such as theatre or engaging in activism while making their living on irregular work (Noiz 2009: 17ff; interviews with A and B, 2011-07-23 and 2009-08-20; with D 2010-06-27 and 2010-07-29).

In contrast to Tokyo, where many activists who pioneered the new cultural forms of activism were students who had chosen to migrate out of the still New Left-dominated campuses, in Kyoto the new cultural movements were largely campus-based. One reason for this was the relatively strong tradition of non-sect student activism at universities like Kyoto University or Dōshisha, which meant that activists critical of the New Left factions had less need to find a base of activities outside the campus (Ogawa 2010a: 80; interviews with activists C and D, 2010-03-19 resp. 2010-06-27). A second reason for the continued importance of university campuses in Kyoto may have been their relatively liberal management, which made them more tolerant of New Left groups as well as newer non-sect groups to a higher degree than in Tokyo (C, activist in Kyoto, interviews 2009-09-24 and 2010-03-18).

One offspring of the activist ferment in Kyoto was the creation of Kinji House at Kyoto University in 1995, one of Japan’s few examples of large-scale squatting. The prime mover in this enterprise was Ogawa, who had entered Kyoto University in 1989. As he looks back on Kinji House, he emphasizes the importance of the year 1995 for activism in Kyoto.

> There was a feeling that things were being born and people got connected. Gays, sex workers and others got movements started and this was bound up with expression, performances, dance and poetry... One felt that if this feeling would spread the whole world would be happy... I too existed in the margins of all that, participating
Together with a few friends he opened Kinji House in an empty building on Kyoto University’s North Campus for a few months in 1995. This was a building scheduled for demolition that had been left empty after the death of the ecologist and anthropologist Iwanishi Kinji (1902-1992). At the start, the participants were mainly non-sect students at Kyoto University and a nearby art college. They kept the house going from early June to late August – a period when the university was relatively deserted by students – sun-bathing on the roof and sprinkling water on each other with hoses. In the house, they opened a café and a bar, a dance studio, a radio station and a gallery for exhibitions.

The exhilaration participants felt in the beginning was expressed in the cleaning up they started as soon as they had moved in: “A place belongs to the ones who clean it”, Ogawa writes, adding that “cleaning is love” (Ogawa 1997: 227f). In these early days, an exciting uncertainty appears to have existed about what would become of the project: “Rather than ‘what should we do?’, Kinji was ‘what will become of it?’”, Ogawa writes (ibid. 231). His choice of words indicates that the participants felt enveloped in something that they could not fully control, but which they nevertheless experienced as thrilling and pleasurable.

Was there an idea behind Kinji House? During the occupation, there was no explicit political message which activists used to justify the occupation. A letter which Ogawa sent to the dean of student affairs at the time states that he had been guided by three ideas. The first was “direct action”, a concept which he gives his own twist by explaining that it means to try an action and see what it leads to rather than to execute an already finished plan. Hence it is an action that “does not oppose the system with a system, but directly expresses one’s feelings”. The second was the idea of action based on rhizomatous networks, i.e. on autonomous individuals rather than a group will. The third was the idea of constructing a “place for traffic, a factory, a place welcoming everything and constantly changing” (ibid. 228f). Later Ogawa also referred to the attraction of an empty space with free electricity and heating where people were free to do what they wanted. In addition, he explains, there was something “extra” which everyone treasured, and that “extra was probably our dream” (ibid. 229).

At the time, there had been a vogue of interest in the idea of squatting among activists in Kyoto, fanned by publications introducing European anarchist or autonomist movements such as Actual Action and BURST CITY. Ogawa himself had previously lived for short periods in empty rooms or in self-made huts on the campus, learning how to gain access to water and electricity and how to make fires. Often this was done stealthily, but sometimes the squat was conducted in public, as during a three-day squat when he opened a “love hotel” called “Je t’aime” after having gotten his hands on a twin bed. Ogawa was also interested in exploring lifestyles that dispensed with the idea of a fixed home. He became well-
known for the isōrō (a word meaning to live in other people’s houses) lifestyle he embarked on in the latter half of the 1990s, systematically moving from one acquaintance to another (Ogawa & Ogawa 1999).

One of his friends described him as an isōrō artist, pointing out the similarities between isōrō and children’s play (Yamamura 1997b). Ogawa appears to have thought of isōrō and squatting as existing on a continuum, since both problematize the relationship between ownership and use of space. In both squatting and isōrō space tends to conceived of not only or primarily as a stage for participating in the general public sphere, but rather as a space which is free to use for creating and living beyond the norms and regulations of mainstream institutions, as no-man’s-land.

In the end, Kinji House self-destructed because of inner conflicts – many triggered by the arrival of young yankī (“hoodlums” or members of the yankī subculture) who moved in during the summer vacations. Some were violent, used thinner, and refused to attend meetings. In August the electricity was cut off and people started to dwindle. When the police entered and arrested some of the yankī, the university used the occasion to close the building. The few remaining squatters offered no resistance. “Rather than resisting, we helped cleaning up”, Ogawa writes, describing “the great sense of powerlessness” he felt when the house was emptied of their belongings. Soon after, the building was demolished by the university (Ogawa 2006: 235).

The violence and fatigue Kinji House engendered shows how easy the sense of possibility and freedom of a space with no institutionalized, shared rules can disintegrate. “Kinji aimed at becoming a square but failed and ended up as a vacant lot”, one of the participants writes (Yamamura 1997a). The reason for this assessment was the diversity of participants which meant that communication broke down and that there was an uncertainty about what rules were valid. Other participants described Kinji House as a “wonderland of hoodlums” or as “fatiguing” because of the need to maintain diplomatic relations with people who did not share your premises. Ogawa himself points out that the failure was not that there was any closed sectarianism, but rather that the ambiguity and unwillingness of anyone to take responsibility hurt participants (Ogawa 1997: 233, 230ff).

Some thought that I, who triggered it all, was irresponsible. They would probably not listen if I suggested to them that we should do something together again. As for me, I have lost the self-confidence to suggest such things, or rather I’ve lost all desire to do it [...]. But “what will become of it?” ought to be something good. I don’t understand. The only thing I can say is that “what will become of it” and “whatever” are different. The difference lies in curiosity. As Kinji gradually slipped out of control, as it finally overwhelmed me and when it was actually destroyed, I was unable to utter a single word. But in reality it never slipped out of control. What really happened was that it gradually transformed into a “whatever”. Curiosity is love. As love waned, cleaning too became scarce and the house became dirty. (ibid. 231)
Ogawa’s ideal of an *isōrō*-life as well as the Kinji House experiment can be seen as manifestations of a wish to create an open, unregulated no-man’s-land beyond the sway of institutions, money and status. He describes himself as close to anarchism. Being unconnected to confrontation or militancy and driven primarily by the dream of a world where everyone can have fun together without hierarchies or money, this might be described as what Oda Masanori calls a “lovable anarchism”, more interested in creation and expression than in ideology (quoted in Aida et al. 2008:93). Rather than seeking confrontation, it hopes to remain undetected or that the world will be won over and tolerate its projects.

**Fun as Resistance – the Case of Ishigaki Café**

For a few months in 2005, a café existed on top of the stone wall surrounding Kyoto University’s main campus on a conspicuous spot near the Hyakumanben crossing. Because the café rests on a small platform five meters above the ground and lacks walls, customers got a good view of the crossing below. The structure was especially striking at night, when it seemed to hover like a phantom over the crossing. Some customers described it as a “house above the trees”, others as a “secret base”. The platform could be reached through a ladder from the pavement. Shoes had to be taken off before entering the café platform, where coffee was sold for 50 yen per cup, allegedly the “cheapest in Kyoto”.

One of the activists who helped create the café was Inoue. At the time he was a master’s student in Italian. His favorite hobby was *kabuki*. He had a history of unconventional living. He had rebuilt his dormitory room into a field for cultivating rice and later squatted for three years in a small hut which he built just outside the dormitory (interview, 2007-07-19; Inoue & Ogawa 2009). When the university in the autumn of 2004 announced its plan to tear down part of the wall in order to create a barrier-free entrance, he and a few others – the group, which started at four, eventually included more than ten persons– reacted by camping on the site to physically prevent the demolition. To protect themselves against the cold, they brought a *kotatsu* (a low blanket-covered table with a heat source beneath). Soon they had constructed a tower-like structure topped by a roofed platform. At the suggestion of a visiting waitress, they turned the tower into a café, the Ishigaki Café (literally “stonewall café”) (Inoue & Kasagi 2005; Kasagi 2006).

They managed to keep the café running for seven months, from January to August. Activities included live music, *bon* dancing, lectures, film showings and parties. Bigger events were a symposium with well-known radical intellectuals in May, and the Ishigaki dormitory festival in July with live music and noodle-selling on the pavement below. Meanwhile outdrawn negotiations were held with university representatives, ending with the university agreeing to leave part of the wall intact. After the settlement, the activists celebrated by arranging a festival
that went on for three days with live music, speeches on the street, and bon-dancing, before finally closing the café (Inoue & Kasagi 2005; Shinohara 2005).

During the period of its existence the café claimed to have served many customers, a majority of whom were non-students such as school kids, tourists, and families with children. It appears to have made a relatively successful appeal to people who would otherwise lack interest in student activities. By using the form of a café the activists created a space that was considerably more open and easy to enter than protest groups or organizations with a more traditional form. Compared to Kinji House, the café was a much more organized space. Rules such as the banning of alcohol were imposed on the space to create an environment that was welcoming and friendly to visitors.

A certain tongue-in-cheek traditionalism was characteristic of the activists in the café. As Inoue explained, the choice of a tower (yagura) was a respectful nod to previous struggles. Wooden towers were built during the Sanrizuka struggles in the 1970s by farmers who sought to prevent the construction of present-day Tokyo Airport. The idea of building towers was also a tradition among rebellious students at Kyoto University, who, he says, in all their actions would “start by building a tower”. Inoue and the other activists also liked to speak about Kyoto University’s tradition of “trouble-making” and expressed an elegiac love for the university’s tolerant “shabbiness”. Today, they lament, the squalor of Kyoto University is disappearing, with new stylish buildings like restaurants, cafés and convenience stores being built all over the campus. “If you take away the underground smell it will cease to be Kyoto University” (Inoue & Kasagi 2005).

The students claimed to be driven primarily by a desire for fun rather than by any serious political commitment. “Ishigaki Café was truly a ‘space for mischief’”, Inoue and another participant, Kasagi Jō, exclaimed triumphantly afterwards (ibid.). “More than anything else, Ishigaki Café was born from the desire for fun and enjoyment”, another participant says (Shinohara 2005: 202).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, preserving a stone wall struck many of the more serious political activists on the campus as nonsensical and lacking a political aim (e.g. C, interview 2010-03-19). To the participants, however, fun was not unrelated to resistance. To Inoue and other activists, the act of causing mischief and trouble was clearly itself a source of fun. Conversely, Kasagi explains that it was as fun that it constituted good resistance. To perform simple café activities like selling cheap coffee and interacting with customers was in itself an act of resistance against the campus homogenization. One participant points out that Ishigaki Café was a “counter-space” protesting against the trend in society to homogenize space, visible in the creation of new monumental spaces and chic restaurants on the campus (Shinohara 2005: 194-200). They expressly distinguished their activities from those of more traditional student movements.

Ishigaki Café wasn’t a place for appealing ardently to visitors to get them to support our opposition to the removal of the stone wall. […] There was no need for us to en-
gage in any particular political activity. Everyday talk and pouring coffee would in themselves constitute a performative resistance to the campus reorganization [...] (Kasagi 2006: 65f)

Like Kinji House, the café involved the occupation of a space, which was torn from its officially designated use. Much more than Kinji House, however, it was established as a visible challenge to university authorities. The activists set up a tower on one of the most conspicuous spots imaginable, where everything going on in the café would take place in full visibility, and this visibility was itself something they thoroughly enjoyed. If the squatters in Kinji House thought of their project as a foray into no-man’s-land, Ishigaki Café is better understood as a playfully and self-consciously established counter-space.

Hunger Strikes at Ritsumeikan and Kyoto Seika University

The year 2007 was an important year for campus activism in Kyoto. Several events occurred that led activists to protest against measures taken by university managements that appeared to increase the precarious situation of employees and students. At their height, these protests included two sit-ins during which activists engaged in hunger strikes. In both episodes, counter-spaces were briefly established in which elements of fun were prominent, but unlike in the case of Ishigaki Café, these elements were now wedded to “serious” causes and to an attempt to reach out to the public with a message.

The first of these episodes took place at the Kinugasa campus of Ritsumeikan University. Endō Reiko, a part-time lecturer in Italian and vice chair of the General Union, initiated a four-day hunger strike (conducted 17-20 July) to protest against the university’s practice of hiring teachers on yearly renewable contracts with a maximum length of employment of four or five years. Already in 2006, the union had conducted a strike among Ritsumeikan teachers to protest against the practice and the university had responded by excluding union members from proceedings and threatening them with non-renewal of their contracts. When the university refused to renew her contract in 2007, Endō responded by initiating the hunger strike. A tent was put up at the campus which she called the Hunger Strike Café. Next to it was a flag with the words “Not just hungry, but angry”. Her demands were for secure employments for irregular staff and a renewal of her contract. Backing her were not only the General Union but also the newly established Union Extasy and several other unions. When I asked her why she chose a hunger strike as her means of protest, she answered that it was the best way to get attention. She only had four days and couldn’t do a permanent sit-in. One alternative might have been to make a “performance”, but that would have required too much time and effort (Endō, interviews 2007-07-19 and 2010-04-29).

The university did not rescind its decision, but Endō’s action inspired other activists in at least two ways. Firstly, it directed attention to the so-called “3-5 year
rules” which later also became a prime target of Union Exstasy. Following the incorporation of national universities in 2004, they and many private universities introduced a system of hiring staff on one-year contracts to cut labor costs. These contracts were renewable, but with a limit at 3-5 years.

This limitation was controversial, since it introduced an extra element of uncertainty in the lives of the staff and since no special legal basis existed for it. The Labor Standard Law only specifies that if contract renewals are repeated several times, a decision not to renew the contract cannot be taken without rational reason. The limitation thus seems to have been introduced by universities mainly in order for them to keep their freedom of action, i.e. their freedom to refuse to renew contracts should the need arise (Endō 2009).

Secondly, the very form of the protest – the hunger strike – inspired several other activists in Kyoto, including student activists. The second spectacular sit-in that year was performed by a student at Kyoto Seika University, Yamada Shirō, who, citing Endō as an inspiration, went on hunger strike for a week (5-13 December) to protest against the high university fees, setting himself up in a hut (which Union Exstasy helped him build) with TV and kotatsu on a conspicuous spot on the campus. Yamada was also a participant in the movement’s circles at Kyoto University, which inspired him to start raising chicken and pigs on the campus as a source of alternative livelihood. He thus expanded his repertoire of action by making use of campus space as a no-man’s-land. He also succeeded in making himself heard in the wider public sphere by getting Kyoto Shim bun, the local newspaper, to cover his hunger strike. Later he was central in setting up the Black list association, a group that carried out sound-demos in Kyoto against the blacklisting of students who failed to pay back their student loans, a movement that soon spread to Tokyo (interview 2009-09-24; also see Shiraishi 2008; Yamada 2008; Yamada et al. 2010).

Yamada provides us with several clues to why direct action is attractive to activists today. These clues have to do with the similarities between direct action and art. To start with, artistic activities as well as direct action are often performed by individuals or small groups, who rely on impact rather than large numbers. Yamada explains:

In a trial of strength, we are sure to lose. Better than that is to use a little imagination, irony or humor, including setting up weird buildings... What matters is not how many handbills you hand out or how many hours you spend in conferences, but rather something I think can be called art. In practice, it means doing what you think is fun where it will attract attention. (Yamada 2008: 171)

Shiraishi Yoshiharu comments that in Japan “there’s no organization of students that can conduct a strike, like in Europe or North America, so what Yamada did was that he used his own body as a stake in the struggle instead” (Shiraishi 2008: 172). In a situation in which many students are reluctant to engage politically and activists lack the backing of existing student organizations, the numbers and re-
sources necessary for demonstrations of a more traditional kind were simply not be available.

A second similarity to art is that these acts are meant to be more than mere means to achieve some purpose. As Yamada stresses, the acts are meant to be enjoyed for their own sake, even when they are physically excruciating. “I wasn’t thinking about dying or anything else as desperate as that”, he states about his hunger strike, “I just wanted to do it in an enjoyable way” (Yamada 2008: 170).

A third similarity is that, just like many art works, many of these acts seem to aim at producing ambiguity. Their power stems from their ability to upset norms rather than from clear-cut political messages. Yamada’s principle of not asking permission from the university authorities for his activities is an example.

When I started raising chicken[s] on the campus, some guys engaged in some nonsensical circle activities came and asked me if I had permission from the university. Of course I hadn’t. Again, when the people of the music circle wanted to do a guerrilla live concert, even they went and tried to get permission. Then they got upset when they were refused. Sure, I understand their anger, but why on earth ask for permission in the first place if you’re doing a guerrilla live? Pretty strange, in my view. In any case, that’s why I go on doing my things without asking permission. I’m ready to discuss with people if they have complaints. Not with authorities, but with other people who use the place. In that vein, by doing things without permission people will finally just think “Oh there they go again”. What’s really important is to create an atmosphere of not asking permission. (Yamada 2008: 171)

The power that statements like these, which by themselves are clear and unambiguous, have to create ambiguity stems from the struggle that is latently or openly taking place over the use of the campus and in which onlookers are invited to choose a side. While some will identify with the authorities, others will feel drawn to the activists. Ambiguity arises because the question “Is this really defensible?” reveals itself as posed to society itself, rather than at the activists.

Taken together, these similarities between Yamada’s actions and art suggest a conception of space that combines an orientation to participation in the mainstream public – as seen in the emphasis on direct action as a means of getting attention or in the attempt to influence onlookers by producing ambiguity – and an orientation towards enjoying the setting up of a counter-space as a goal in its own right – as seen in the emphasis on having fun or not asking permission.

Kubikubi Café and Union Extasy

2007 was also the year when Union Extasy was founded by Inoue and Ogawa, who at the time were both working as part-time librarians at Kyoto University. The union at first made itself known chiefly through its pranks – arranging barbecues on the campus or sailing down the Kamo River on a floating kotatsu during the 2008 “freeter May Day” demonstration. The playful attitude was evident from the start in the big signboard near the campus entrance through which it an-
ounced its existence. Next to a smiling, violin-playing grasshopper was the text: “We want ecstasy in our work like the grasshopper. But no death by starvation, thanks!”. They also distributed pamphlets asking if the reader enjoys his or her workplace: “Everybody, do you enjoy your workplace? Can you sing ‘la-la-la’ while cleaning up? Do you have tea time when you can sing ‘la-la-la’ while pouring up tea?”. The text goes on to encourage everyone who doesn’t feel like working, not to join their union, but to set up their own unions.

As for the union’s name, Ogawa had insisted on “extasy” since it suggested something usually not associated with unions. By insisting on ecstasy in work, they wanted to formulate something close to a refusal of work: “Ecstasy in work is close to ‘I won’t work’”, leaning more towards something akin to eros than to work (Inoue 2008; Inoue & Ogawa 2009: 37). The demand for ecstasy in work is easy to understand as a thinly disguised stab at capitalism. If alienation is part of all wage labor, raising the demand for ecstasy is to demand the impossible of capitalism, namely that it abolish itself.

Despite the playful attitude, this time Inoue and Ogawa took aim at a subject generally regarded as “serious” – the precarious working conditions at the university. Part-timers make up 2,700 of the university’s employees, including teachers, librarians, janitors and guards. Most of them (85 percent) are women and like female irregular workers elsewhere in Japan their salaries are drastically below those of regular (mostly male) employees. At Kyoto University, part-timers earn 900-1200 yen per hour, a typical freeter wage, and they have almost no possibility of entering regular employment. As Ogawa (2009b) points out, this is a matter of exploiting female labor. The fact that wages are lower than for regular employees is justified by the university with the argument that the wages are only meant to be “supplementary” – i.e. that the work is “housewife part-time work”. Today, this justification rings hollow since the universities are shifting from regular to irregular employees on a large scale, the latter including many single people who cannot rely on a family to supplement the income. With the five-year rule, which stated that contracts could at most be renewed for a period of five years, the position of such workers was made even more insecure.

Like many other universities, Kyoto University introduced this rule in 2005 after the university’s incorporation. To protest against it, Ogawa and Inoue went on strike in February 2009 by setting up the shack that later became known as Kubikubi Café. This was a timely juncture, since the first employees scheduled to fall under the rule were some fifty employees whose contracts would end in early 2010. As inspirations for the café, the union quoted Ishigaki Café and Endō Rei-ko’s hunger strike.

The union’s methods made some laud it as an example of “cultural” activism or “collective art” (Mōri 2009; Amamiya 2010: 194). However, the fact that it was engaged in a drawn-out conflict in which it needed to represent many employees at the university meant that less playful aspects of activism gradually
came to the fore. Inoue and Ogawa both state that they learnt a lot about “responsibility” during their campaign and that they felt that they had grown closer to the struggle of the labor movement (Inoue & Ogawa 2009: 40f; Ogawa 2010a: 80). Another aspect that had not been as evident in the briefer sit-ins performed by Endō or Yamada were the sacrifices involved in out-drawn campaigns, which tended to harm the human relations of ordinary life. Ogawa used the simile of nukadoko, the bran used for fermenting vegetables into homemade pickles that needs to be stirred by hand every day.

I used to take good care of my nukadoko, which I look on as a living thing that helps me and greets me as I return home every day. It needs to be stirred every day. If you eat it daily, it is a simple matter since you just need to put in new vegetables and mix them into the bran. But if you can no longer return home daily, taking good care of the nukadoko becomes hard. (Ogawa 2010c)

In its struggle with the university, the union achieved almost none of its aims: the five year rule is still in force and Inoue and Ogawa both had their contracts terminated. In February 2010 the university director agreed to meet for collective bargaining but restated that it needed to maintain the five year rule to press labor costs. Further rounds of collective bargaining proved unfruitful and court verdicts also went against the union. Meanwhile, the efforts involved in keeping the café running were taking its toll on the private lives of the activists. In June 2011 Ogawa withdrew from the union and in the autumn the café closed down, after more than two years in existence.

The union did succeed, however, in catalyzing a movement of part-time staff in the Kansai region. Following its example, similar unions such as Union Socosoco sprang up at other universities in Kyoto (Yanbe 2010). It also took the initiative to the first “Why temporary employments?” symposium, which it arranged in Osaka in February 2010 together with other university-based unions in the Kansai region with which it formed a network for collaboration. These symposiums have since been held every year – a good example showing that Union Extasy did not merely set up a counter-space but also participated in the public sphere and contributed to the public debate about temporary employment.

**Direct Action, Space and Empowerment**

Two trends stand out in the development of campus activism sketched here. One is that campus activism has become increasingly focused on precarization and neo-liberalization. The actions of Endō, Yamada, Union Extasy and Union Socosoco all target the transformation of universities from institutions relatively independent of the market into profit-driven corporations in which teachers are turned into flex-workers, students are mass-produced for a precarious labor market, and campuses are increasingly subject to control and surveillance (and prettified by chic restaurants and glass-covered facades).
A second trend has been the tendency for activists to resort to direct action, in particular by using counter-spaces as a way of participating in the public sphere. Let me recapitulate the conceptions of space informing the activities described above. In Kinji House, space was hardly used at all as a way to transmit a message or to protest, but primarily as an arena for exploring the possibility of living differently. Put in a nutshell, Ogawa’s ideal was to live in no-man’s-land rather than to be an activist in mainstream public space. In Ishigaki Café there was a valuing of counter-space as such, but not yet much of a political message beyond a defiant demonstration of the possibility of an alternative life. In more recent activities, such as Endō’s and Yamada’s hunger strikes or Kubikubi Café, political messages came to the fore, although important elements of counter-space remained. Over time, then, activities appear to have become more oriented to achieving public visibility and to participation in the public sphere, although recent activism still makes use, albeit in varying degrees, of all three kinds of space.

Why has the rise of a campus-based precarity movement come about in tandem with an increasing reliance on direct action? Interestingly, as the case of Ishigaki Café demonstrates quite clearly, the turn to direct action in the form of setting up counter-spaces appears not to have followed, but rather preceded the adoption of issues such as precarity. It thus cannot have been caused solely by any need for activists to direct public attention to the issue of precarity. How, then, can the turn to direct action be explained? Yamada’s remarks on the similarities between art and direct action suggest one possible answer, namely the existence of pragmatic concerns behind the choice of artistic methods. In the absence of organizational support, resorting to activities like sit-ins and hunger strikes is one of the few available means activists have to gain attention. Endō too states that the hunger strike was the best way for her to get attention, considering the limited time she had. For Union Extasy as well, setting up a café at a conspicuous spot where it was a constant irritant to the university management may have been a rational choice for a small union that could not threaten to call out many members in a strike. Yamada also points to the fact that there may be practical considerations behind the emphasis on enjoyability. He explains that if you are on your own, you don’t manage to continue unless the activity is fun. He frankly admits that there are limitations with the artistic forms of activism inherent in their low number of participants. Actions flare up but do not last, and they are often ignored by the mass media. It goes without saying that a movement gains more weight the more people it is able to mobilize (interview, 2009-09-24).

Still, the sit-ins, hunger strikes and cafés cannot be explained solely as a strategic choice to get attention or to keep spirits up. Getting attention is important, but mainly from the perspective of participation in the public sphere – as a means to spread a message and exert pressure on opponents. Several of the activities described above, such as the antics engaged in by Union Extasy, appear unnecessary or even counter-productive from the point of view of swaying public opinion.
But why would direct action have any intrinsic value beyond strategic concerns? As mentioned, having access to alternative arenas outside mainstream public space can be important since such spaces are crucial as spaces for empowerment. Although spaces like Kinji House or Ishigaki Café were criticized or looked askance at by some activists as being too preoccupied with mere fun or play, the playful activities they engaged in may have been important as a form of practice or training for challenging authorities. They furnished participants with experiences that later helped them to use direct action in other struggles which had more “serious” causes but which to a considerable extent were waged using the same playful style.

Play often involves a play with the categories of the dominant order in society, including spatial ones. Jacques Rancière (1999) points out that the dominant order is not simply discursive, but also a spatial “ordering of the sensible”. When protesters make themselves visible in public they often do so through a rejection of given spatial arrangements. What I would add is that playful redefinitions of space do not merely come about through counter-spaces. No-man’s-lands can be important arenas for exploring new uses of space since they provide activists with spaces relatively sheltered from interference by authorities. Such spaces are hospitable to those who are not yet empowered enough to openly confront the latter, they can be important in providing access to resources needed to sustain counter-spaces, and – as Kinji House illustrates – the attempt to create or expand no-man’s-lands can itself be the goal of activism.

Arguably, the need for spaces for empowerment has been greater in Japan than in many other countries. Although campus-based activism in Japan shares some characteristics with contemporary campus-based protests against austerity or neoliberal university management in other countries, the negative legacy of the Japanese New Left has meant that activists in Japan have had to grapple with a negative view of political activism in the general public. It has also meant that those activists who have attempted to break with the negative legacy by developing new forms of activism have been handicapped by their inability to rely on existing movement organizations and networks. This may explain why campus-based activism in Japan is still relatively small-scale and why broad mass-mobilizations involving older social movement organizations have been hard to achieve. In these years of reorientation, when new styles of action are being invented and new networks formed, there is also a need to “play” with space so as to increase empowerment. The playful forms of direct action in which campus-based activists in Kyoto have engaged from Kinji House onwards have been part of this trend. This playfulness has remained strong even as the precarious situation of university employees and students have become pressing concerns in recent years.
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Notes

1 The performance is shown in a You Tube video: “Kubikiri shokuinmura Suto 3.4 nichime Part 2 Doramukanburohen 2009/2/26”; [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2SZaT-4Y7oQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2SZaT-4Y7oQ) (accessed 2012-11-20).

2 The article is based on fieldwork conducted in Japan 2005-2011. The investigation was conducted through interviews, participant observation and analyses of texts. Material about Kinji House consists mainly of essays and reports left by participants, and interviews with Ogawa and two other participants carried out in 2010. Accounts of Ishigaki Café can be found in Inoue & Kasagi (2005), Kasagi (2006), Shinohara (2005), Shishido (2005). My account is based on five visits in 2005 and several conversations with Inoue and other participants. Kubikubi Café’s activities are well documented by abundant material on the union’s homepage and their blog ([http://extasy07.exblog.jp/](http://extasy07.exblog.jp/)). I made altogether 32 visits to the café and events arranged by the union during 2009-2011. I also used various other texts written by Inoue and Ogawa (e.g. Inoue 2008, 2009; Inoue & Ogawa 2009; Ogawa 2009a, 2009b, 2010a, 2010b) as well as reports by visitors and journalists (e.g. Amamiya 2009, Matsumoto 2009, Mōri 2009b). In addition to interviews with activists named in the text, I also make use of four additional interviews with former activists (referred to as A, B, C, D) active on campuses in Kyoto in the 1990s.

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Klimax Working for the Climate:
Through Humor, Play, and the Redefinition of Space

By Robert Hamrén

Abstract
This article focuses on the strategies of protest employed by the climate-change activist network Klimax (circa 2007-10). My questions are: What, in their view, was the main threat to our environment? How did they protest against it? The study is based on a close examination of twenty – four protest actions, undertaken during the years 2009-11, as described on the movement’s own KLIMAX homepage. I am interested in how the website’s narratives and visuals demonstrate the ways in which individual actions’ specific protest strategies challenge the current social order. The analysis of these texts and visuals is based on concepts and theories derived from Cultural Studies, textual analysis and theories of representation, research on New and social resistance movements, emotion sociology and cultural–social approaches to place.

Keywords: Climate-change activist, Melucci, redefinition of space, emotions, counter-symbols.
Introduction

This article investigates the strategies of protest employed by the climate-change activist network Klimax (circa 2007-10). What, in their view, was the main threat to our environment; how did they protest against it? Klimax activists envisioned a society that no longer depends on fossil fuels, and they took direct action against sources of carbon dioxide emission such as coal-fueled power plants, cars and airplanes. The network had affiliates in Stockholm, Gothenburg, Uppsala and Malmö; it was a city phenomenon; and it was most active between 2007 and 2010. The organization, which kept no membership register, seems to have consisted of loosely knit groups and of individuals recruited for events through social media. Why is the movement interesting?

The study of social movements encompasses several different scholarly paradigms. Interest in and questions concerning what takes place in civil society has ranged from inquiries into movement strategies, influence and resources to questions of how a single movement may manifest itself differently in different countries. In the early 1980s, European research on social movements was marked by increasing interest in identity, as formulated by constructivist sociological theory – that is, the cultural processes by which collective identity is created. Alberto Melucci is a principal representative of this turn towards social groups whose concern lies not only with political power but also in defending personal autonomy and publicizing the risks of the Western lifestyle (Wettergren & Jamison 2006: 12 ff.). KLIMAX activities fit into this paradigm: protests centered on ecologist personal autonomy were coupled to a great ability to gain Swedish media attention.

In his 2010 book on Swedish street festivals and the “right to the city”, Ulf Stahre describes KLIMAX. The movement arose when the Stockholm Reclaim the Streets movement was disappearing. Reclaim the Streets had arranged protest actions meant to reclaim the city from the injustices of capitalism and the pollution of automobiles. KLIMAX picked up on the idea of street festivals, but adapted to new purposes. Their program may well have been inspired by the British organization Plane Stupid, which launches direct protest against air traffic and airports. Stahre sees KLIMAX as unique, however, in its symbolically expressive manner of protesting. As we shall see, organization members were fond of role-playing (e.g., blocking traffic dressed as polar bears). By 2009, Stahre notes, KLIMAX actions were in decline; the KLIMAX homepage notes no protest action later than December 2011. This is not uncommon; many so-called “new” social movements have limited life-spans. As Melucci puts it, new social movements are more “nomads of the present” than embedded in a long-term historical process. (Melucci 1989/1992: 69). So what might such a “symbolic expressive” style of protest mean in this case?
Sources and Methods

This article is based on a close examination of twenty-four protest actions, 2009-2011, as described on the KLIMAX homepage. I do not attempt a complete or anthropological description of the events; rather, I am interested in website narratives and visuals. These show how the website re-told and represented the movement to its own members and to the public. Today, the KLIMAX homepage server is closed; but the author can supply complete screenshots, etc., upon request. My analysis of these texts and visuals is based on concepts and theories derived from Cultural Studies’ textual analysis and theories of representation, research on New and social resistance movements, emotion sociology and a cultural-social approach to place.

Let me illustrate my approach by describing a 2010 KLIMAX “action”. In March 2010, Gothenburg KLIMAX members blocked access to a supermarket meat counter. According to the website, the activists wanted to focus attention on the adverse impact of meat consumptions on the environment. Visuals were supplied, such as that below, which shows an activist holding up a placard whose “Meat counter cordoned off because of climate changes” is framed by black-and-yellow zebra stripes (a police cordon signal). This announcement warns bystanders of approaching danger. Further, the website report tells readers, the activists offered people alternative, vegetarian food, and distributed vegetarian recipes.
The homepage gives the following narrative:

This year in the month of March Klimax Gothenburg arranged a blockade of the meat counter at a superstore. For no fewer than 45 minutes they managed to remain in the cold temple of consumption frenzy and take up discussion about the climate effects of meat. They saved some of the customers from the desperate robot-like migration between the shelves, the desperation over the choices and the anger that there never is a really good choice (klimax.se, 2012).

This is a battle of symbols. The activists are challenging established power structures through presenting alternative systems and practices. They strengthen their challenge by showing the public that their “alternative” life-style is feasible, in a public performance of personal, embodied, esthetically articulated practices. These practices included (as we see in the quote above) not only food, cooking hints and arguments, but an alternative to the consumers’ patterns of movement, which were interrupted through the use of contra-symbols.

Climate-friendly recipes, traffic-warnings of cordoned-off areas of meat, “vegetarian food” – all show symbol manipulation. Melucci (1989) describes this presentation of counter-symbols as typical of new social movements. Personal, public performances of this counter-symbolic world are (argues Melucci) a new social-movement medium, effective because they illuminate the dominant system’s hidden and arbitrary codes. A social movement’s aim must, by this argument, be to provide the public with an alternative symbolic system from which to re-interpret individual and collective experiences.

Melucci also argues that collective actions have a taken on a new guise which makes political effectiveness and success less important. Conflicts now take place at a symbolic level. The organizations are, he maintains, self-reflective. They can be seen as laboratories where actors test their ability to challenge dominant cultural codes.

This seems to apply to KLIMAX’s actions, as re-told and communicated on their homepage: their publicly-communicated actions challenge the social system at a symbolic level. The website is one example of such communication; but more important, if one believes website texts, is on-site communication with the public. Passers-by and observers are actively engaged during KLIMAX actions. According to the homepage, KLIMAX activists routinely contact and involve bystanders, inviting them to read placards and inverse adverting, enjoy free performances, to participate in discussion, singing, dancing, foot-ball, to eat gifts of vegan food, coffee and cakes, to “shop” at free shops. Above all, observers are invited into the humorous counter-use of symbols. Activists are often dressed up as animals, Santa Claus or clowns, a sort of “play” with power relations which introduced their own alternative to the prevailing social order.
Challenging Emotions in Place

The action described above is very much about claiming place. The redefinition of the significance of a given place is a recurring feature in KLIMAX action. The supermarket, above, is first charged with negative emotions. Supermarket food stores, advertised as places of joyful exercise in self-expression, bodily enjoyment and family-care, are here described cold and frenzied temples of consumption, places of “desperate robot-like migration” which produce only anger. KLIMAX activists seek to change the emotions of the place, and thereby the meaning of the place itself: they generously distribute “environmentally friendly” recipes and vegetarian food, and do so even with a touch of humor.

The use of humor in connection with civil disobedience has a long tradition. It not only ridicules repression and hierarchy, while articulating an alternative state of being. Humor also creates feelings of joy (Lundberg 2008). And joy (if one is to believe the text) would deprive the temple of consumption frenzy of its meaning. Place is included in this challenge to the prevailing symbolic order. The website narratives recount contra-symbolic actions which mean to redefine the places where they occur – be they commercial sites, transportation hubs or places of mass production.

Cultural geographers such as Tim Cresswell (1996: 3ff) claim that we apply various meanings to the word place. Sometimes we refer to a building or a geographical place with a certain meaning. At other times the word appears to have no specific geographical spatial reference, for example in “everything is in its place”, “you must know your place”, “she was put in her place” etc. These phrases intimate that something is correct, that something or someone fits in a certain context but not in others. One’s “correct” place is determined by one’s relationship with other people or objects. Expectations and norms are coupled to a person’s place in the social structure and to the activity that takes place in a geographic location. Thus, “place” has a social as well as a spatial reference. Since the social system first and foremost serves those in power, the norms of place serve ideological functions as well.

Social and spatial place join to form the normative landscape, where something may seem perfectly proper in one place but entirely out-of-place in another. According to Cresswell, this normative landscape is constantly being re-created. It is when spatial ideologies come in conflict with each other that the “proper” nature of places becomes visible. This is also the moment when climate activists (for example) can challenge the normative landscape and bring forth an alternative understanding of the spatial and social place.

Above, I mentioned the KLIMAX text’s reading strong negative emotions into a particular place, and the text’s evident attempt to introduce an alternative tone. Emotions are also a weapon. The fact that activists flout expectations and norms associated with particular social and spatial places raise passions. One should,
perhaps, complement the idea of dominant and counter-dominant symbolic and spatial orders with that of emotional structures. Indeed, Ron Eyerman (2005) claims that emotional structures order society. Anger can motivate activism; feelings of shame can stand in the way of social engagement. Emotions set organizations in motion. It is the collective feeling of an emotionally bonded “we”, independent of time and context, that makes a social movement possible. Such emotional ties are strengthened, further, by the collective protesters’ ritual practices and symbols. Sara Ahmed (2004) has looked, further, at how certain objects become emotionally-charged movement symbols. In accounts of KLIMAX actions, the airplane and the car are two such symbolic objects. Both can be related to anger and fear.

Ahmed brings up fear as one emotion that she believes to both regulate and invalidate social norms. The narrative of global warming is a “successful” image of menace, which constantly recurs in the media, and which is used extensively by environmental organizations such as KLIMAX. The threat of a “climate collapse”, presented as spelling the end of mankind, is always present as a KLIMAX under-text: With terrific speed (their website argues) the world is moving towards a total catastrophe. The future of humanity is at stake; we must go in an entirely different direction. (klimax.se, 2012). This apocalyptic vision is always present, often communicated, and is one inducement to action.

I am convinced that emotions not only strengthened KLIMAX organizationally, but were a necessary element in its strategy. KLIMAX actions were meant to generate specific emotions that would then affect both (imagined) audiences and the activists themselves. Humour, whose effect is often joy, is one such emotion. Another (one that pervades KLIMAX texts) is fear. The production of certain emotions not only helped establish sympathetic contact with audiences, but helped motivate the activists themselves. By appealing to emotions like joy and fear KLIMAX engaged its audiences, inviting them to participate in the emotional culture the network shares.

KLIMAX Actions: Sitting in A Round-About

My first example of symbolic and emotional struggle over the meaning of place is an action that took place in Uppsala in 2010. KLIMAX occupied a traffic roundabout in order to call attention to environmental problems and to issues of city planning.

On Sunday, April 17th, Uppsala’s Klimax “occupied” a bit of land, the roundabout traffic circle at the intersection of Kyrkogårdsgatan and S:t Johannesgata. The website provides the movement’s own version of the events. Activists spent the time planting vegetables and drinking coffee, while ten bicyclists rode around and around them in the traffic circle, including one dressed as a polar bear, carried along on a bicycle trailer. KLIMAX activist Per Tjäder went on record as saying
that the action was in order to observe the Small Farmers’ International Battle Day, in memory of nineteen peasants murdered by military police in Brazil. (The placard in the picture reads “The land is occupied by Uppsala’s landless peasants”.) The occupation thus seems meant to contrast personal, peasant production of food and “social and constructive” activities such as bicycling and coffee-drinking against environmentally disastrous practices such as driving cars and highways, car pollution, and global land-robbing practices:

By delaying traffic we also want to show problems that are in today’s city planning in Sweden. Enormous areas are left for drivers who make our environment dirty and destroy our climate, while social and constructive activities must stay in the periphery. The problems with lack of food in the world today is exacerbated by the fact that one uses agricultural products as fuel in our cars, at the same time as the highways occupy more and more of the best agricultural land in the world (klimax.se, 2012).

Note the symbols involved here (again, interestingly, including patterns of movement). A traffic circle is meant to keep traffic flowing. Those entering the circle give precedence to vehicles (cars) that already are in the circle. The activists break the flow by using the “wrong” kind of vehicles in the traffic circle, hindering cars from entering. They also transgress norms about how bit of land inside the roundabout’s interior circle should be utilized, and thus show that it is possible to think differently about what and whom the place serves. The traffic circle’s small patch of lawn is given direct associations to agriculture and food. Through their action, they call attention to the fact the automobile traffic takes up place and claims otherwise useful land.
Coffee, placards, planting vegetables in impossible places, riding round and round, stopping traffic with bicycle-borne polar-bears: the activists’ protest actions bear some resemblance to carnival-like events. According to Strindlund & Vinthagen (2011), such actions do not set out to engage the authorities in political dialogue. Rather, they play pranks on (and thus, arguably, subvert) the authorities. This kind of performance was used effectively, not least, in the non-violent Indian liberation movement. It remains popular: at the G8 meeting in Scotland 2005, a group of activists actually dressed up as clowns (ibid: 280).

Dressing up as an animal, of course, is also – as Timothy Ingalsbee (1996: 270) points out – a way of intensifying an ideological message. In this case, it signifies the activists’ ecological identification with nature. For the environmental movement, the polar bear is a recurring symbol. It has great media appeal. The link between the diminishing Arctic icecap and the polar bear’s extinction is a prevalent symbol of the vulnerability of the earth. Cars, of course, are another key KLIMAX symbol. The automobile is presented as a global threat, not only because of emissions but because biofuels threaten the food supply of the third world. The reference, here, is to ethanol-powered cars. To plant, drink coffee, and bicycle around in an occupied round-about become a set of anti-car, symbolic acts of resistance: the actions show and offer “alternatives”, not least to the waste of limited resources, especially those of poor countries.

The “Climate Clash”

Actions playing “pranks” against, for instance, car-directed city infrastructure, are a recurring theme in KLIMAX. Cars are already heavily charged symbols in modern society: as wrecks, penis extensions, environment rogues, symbols of city/village, as carriers of high or low social status. In the eyes of KLIMAX, cars and the inner-city motor roads represent a threat to the environment and to people’s health. The car is also a socially unjust means of transportation. On its homepage, KLIMAX states that

many people cannot afford to drive a car, but must use public transportation, travel on bicycle or walk. The fact that these latter forms of transportation are far better for the environment, and for people’s health, hardly needs reiteration, but we think it is important to stress that there are also egalitarian forms of transportation (klimax.se, 2012).

KLIMAX’s means of spot-lighting this problem has been to arrange what it termed “climate clashes” in larger cities such as Stockholm, Malmö, Gothenburg and Uppsala. In this, KLIMAX was inspired by the so-called “culture clashes” arranged twenty years earlier in Stockholm. These #clashes had started off as traffic blockades but subsequently turned into a sort of cultural festival, hence their name (Stahre 2010: 185).
In their “climate clashes”, KLIMAX brings together a series of emotionally loaded symbols and ideas which challenge the connotations of the place. This can start with posters advertising the event. Below, for instance, we can see how an upcoming action is announced, in a combination of meaning-carrying entities; smoke, a lonely child trying to eat up the car, the black background, the dove smoking a cigarette. (The slogan reads, “For a car-free inner city and a sustainable society”.) Together, the images form a kind of horror vision of a future society. Placing a baby child – the symbol of future generations, innocent and natural, something to safeguard – in a horrible, insecure place, far from nature (save in its perverted, smoking-dove guise) and parents, says something not only about who has right to the city, but just who is in the wrong place: drivers and cars.

To disturb traffic by physically sitting down in the middle of the city street is what Cresswell would describe as transgression (of the normative landscape). This is what KLIMAX activists did; and they got strong reactions. According to the KLIMAX homepage account of a “climate clash” action in Malmö, things became rowdy when some drivers refused to stop: they would detour around or simply drive straight ahead (klimax.se, 2012). The KLIMAX homepage describes how about two hundred activists gathered and chanted slogans, attacking “motorism” in order to “save the planet from a climate catastrophe”. They blocked a heavily trafficked city street. True to type, the activists had quickly carried out a table at which they offered coffee and home-baked goods. A polar bear made a little welcome speech on [from on top of] a [city] electrical box and a penguin went around collecting money for KLIMAX. The police were present but made no attempt to break the blockade. Nor were lines formed, as drivers were quick to find short cuts in one of the side streets. Also, many chose to drive straight on over the traffic island between the roadways in order to avoid waiting. Buses were let through and were greeted with hand-waving and cries of joy (klimax.se, 2012).
This description of a “climate clash” may be considered characteristic for this type of action. An underlying threat is often cited, in this case a future climate catastrophe. The message of apocalypse is, moreover, given from within a particular, symbolically-laden place. In this case, it is a heavily trafficked road which the activists transform into a “performance stage”. Theater expert Dirk Gindt (2007: 39-40) defines “theatricity” as songs, slogans, flags, costumes (polar bears and penguins) and the like that differ from the customary and normal. The “theatrical” action takes place in a kind of extended context – a public place – outside the ordinary stage. The public place, as Cresswell points out, has its own ideological association and meaning; and this, in turn, contributes to the theatric event. (For similar analyses of environmental activism, Alaimo 2011: 45.) The heavily trafficked road has a symbolic content which KLIMAX challenged, altered and “extended”, so to speak. A transportation route was transformed into a recreational place, an invitation to get out of the car, meet others, take a coffee-break. The website text also goes into the emotions involved. There is a playful (polar-bear) welcome from a city infrastructure perch; no waiting was involved; busses become positive symbolic objects, a kind of ally, greeted with hand-waving and shouts of joy.

**Rudolf the Red-Nosed Reindeer**

The free hand-out of food and coffee is typical for KLIMAX actions. Commercialized consumption is ranged with car emissions as an environmental problem. KLIMAX has protested against consumption in actions in shopping arcades. According to Cresswell (1996: 160), shopping arcades are prime examples of places that try to hide their historical origin by appearing as something “natural” that just “is”, rather than the result of series of social relations created by capitalism, each with its unique meaning. A prime, if not public, place for intervention.

The organization’s homepage describes, accordingly, how activists mingled with Christmas shoppers in a city shopping arcade where, according to the website text, they “dumped” masses of cinnamon buns. They were dressed as Santa Claus (the pictures shows one such, holding a package on which “?? Christmas joy??” is written), distributing Christmas cards and carrying a poster with the slogan “Santa Claus hates Christmas ham” (the Swedish Christmas dinner focuses on ham). Instead of using polar bears to show their identification with animals, an activist was dressed as the red-nosed reindeer Rudolf. Activists also made suggestions and demands. They (according to the text) “called for restraint and reflection on what Christmas is all about”, as well as general de-commercialization and a six-hour workday. Again, the norms defining what belongs to and goes on in a given place, this time a shopping arcade at Christmas, are used to frame and strengthen a *challenge* to that content and those actions – in the form of humorous, reinterpretable theater.
The emotions engendered by this action were good: the activists were, according to the homepage, met with “encouragement and warm smiles”. But their joyous invitation to reinvent the place was suddenly stopped. This was not, after all, a public space: it was private and commercial. Security guards set in “violent intervention […]” they were wrestled down, and were mocked for their beliefs (klimax.se, 2012).

The Swedish Christmas celebration comprises a number of phenomena such as Christmas gifts, food, mulled wine, window displays, advent-calendar TV-shows, year-end sales, etc. Although some go to midnight mass and early service on Christmas Day, Sweden is relatively secular; and so consumption plays a central role in the celebration. Buying Christmas gifts and food is the natural thing to do. Here KLIMAX succeeded in transgressing the rules for behaving suitably within this (semi-private) place, which lead to security-guard action.

At the same time, however, they claimed that they had won approval of those present in the arcade. Klimax urges people to do something different, to slow down and reflect, calling for “restraint and reflection on what Christmas is all about”. The symbolic world is very much like that of a church. It invites people to participate in spirituality in the form of higher, communal values, including communal coffee and cakes.

Like Christmas, moreover, this type of action has its own history and tradition. Demonstrators dressed up as Santa Clauses are not new. In the 1970s, the Danish non-violent theater group Solvoguen arranged several anti-consumption demonstrations (Strindlund & Vinthagen 2011: 97). They would, for example, take merchandise off the shelves in department stores and distribute it among the customers as truly “free” gifts. Like the Klimax activists, the Danish activists were seized by the police during what the participants called a “violent” episode – indeed, it led sympathetic shoppers to protest against the police. One is lucky, however, to be so successful in creating a counter-space. Cresswell (1996: 24) writes that those who transgress the norms are often themselves considered abnormal – including, of course, activists who transgress in public.
Bill-Boards as Contested Places

KLIMAX had other places, as well, in which it could use the strategy of appealing to emotions of shame, guilt, pleasure – as well as to people’s sense of irony (humor and joy). These were billboards. KLIMAX’s homepage has uploaded several pictures from actions, without captions, featuring bill-board advertisements whose messages have been altered – so-called reverse advertising. Scholars link this phenomenon to the concept culture jam, activism where the actor infringes on well-known signs and symbols. (In Sweden, Adbusters are probably among the most well-known logos saboteurs.) Åsa Wettergren (2005: 174) traces culture jam as an ironic resistance technique to the French Situationist Internationale and its détourner (inversion, turning upside down). The 1960s Situationists claimed that the spread of consumption culture and mass media transformed society into a seductive spectacle, blunting working-class activism. Their answer, détourner, involved exposing the “spectacle” by creating situations or visions of another, possible world. How did KLIMAX use reverse advertising to this end?

Consider the pictures below.

The first picture is a billboard advertising the travel agency detur (their non-capitalization and italization) with the slogan “where the sun shines!”. The joyful image of bikini-clad female, sea, sun and beach, headed “Winter 2010-2011”, endorses the slogan. If your buy a vacation through detur, you will get the happiness of sunny and warm weather – a scarce commodity in Sweden, where summers are short and winters long. (The female featured is another matter.) But that joy is then openly belied. The woman brandishes and even seems to caress a large, prominent tattoo of a “no flying” sign, a crossed-over airplane. The sight of this, emblazoned prominently on the woman’s arm, brings consumption-culture’s stream of emotionally-laden symbols to a jolting halt. Many people know that flying is bad for the environment. The aim is to remind people with travel plans of the negative environmental consequences of flight. I would call the tattoo an “ironic trope” (Lindgren 2011: 91f). The airplane becomes an object
associated with “doing wrong” by contributing to climate change. The picture’s signification has been reversed; new connotations have changed its original message.

The second website picture features an advertisement for a conservative party’s pet project, “Bypass Stockholm” – that is, the plans for a new, partially under-ground Stockholm expressway. The proposal had not met with approval from all sides. Rather, the plan to construct additional expressways has been criticized for producing more traffic and greater carbon dioxide emissions. The image has been “turned” by using masks as ironic tropes – less seductive and more shocking than the tattoo. The two serious-looking conservative politicians, supposedly radiating statesmanlike concentration, are now both muzzled, worried-looking, dressed-down as construction workers and seeking protection against emissions – and therefore comical. Moreover, the politicians stand very close together under the conservative party’s logo – the circle enclosing the word TOGETHER. A viewer might think that perhaps without the masks they are together, united for a “better” environment; but with the masks they look more like two oddly-groomed figures huddled together to protect themselves against the emissions caused by their own proposition. If, as Wettergren argues (2005: 179ff), cultural symbols serve the purpose of regulating people’s options by codifying good or bad choices, KLIMAX’s interference with this last image recodes its message and diminishes its political impact.

KLIMAX used ironic humor as a strategy in another protest against the Bypass Stockholm project, this one outside Stockholm’s Royal Palace. They chose this location because they supposedly wanted to appeal to the Swedish King for help, entreat ing him to “live up” to his Christmas Speech of 2010. As their petition (reproduced on their website) put it, “In his Christmas speech 2010, the King compared earth to an apple, and life here on earth the King called fragile as dew on the skin of the apple.” We agree with the King, the petition continued, and therefore “are confident” that the King, soon to meet with Catharina Elmsäter-Svärd, Swedish minister of infrastructure, would urge her to rethink the Bypass. “Say to her”, the petition continues, “that to build a six-lane expressway on this beautiful apple
is to build us firmly into automobile traffic” – and this in a situation when, rather, one must “build” traffic “away”. Say (the petition continues)

That you are merely King but that you feel uneasy about the situation and are forced to bring this up. Not only will the road run close to Drottningholm [Palace] and an important world universal heritage but it will also ruin the possibilities for life on this fragile, beautiful apple, and that you now want to talk about this over lunch. That if we are to survive, Bypass Stockholm must be stopped (klimax.se, 2012).

This message is, like many KLIMAX texts, both well formulated and has clear ironical undertones (“merely King”, “not only” run close to the Palace but destroy life on earth, “talk about this over lunch”). KLIMAX often makes ironic use of material from other texts: in this case, they also take out an intertextual loan from the King’s Christmas speech. The humorous result exposes power relations. The King’s Christmas speech metaphor may very well have presented His Majesty’s emotional standpoint on nature’s needs, but when quoted in the KLIMAX text it seems threadbare and ineffectual. The petition, indeed, invokes the King as an ally, but this invocation is ironic; and it is in this irony that gives the text its explosive political effect. The text confirms Melucci’s claims about this kind of network: the form is in itself both result and expression of resistance against the established institutions.

The petition is presented at a location which is chosen with care: next to a heavily trafficked road outside the royal palace. This is, of course, more or less expected of petitioners to the Court. However, in this case the activists do not transgress the expected spatial behavior and the presence of KLIMAX does not lead to a redefinition of the place – unless using this place to present such a heavily ironic petition, obviously not meant to be taken seriously (“merely King”, “you now want to talk about this over lunch”) is itself a challenge to emplaced traditions of King-subject, government-citizen authority.

Altogether New Places: Giving Things Away

A recurring KLIMAX feature is the so-called “free-store” event. The point is to create a place from which commercial consumption can be excluded, thus encouraging “right” feelings such as sharing and generosity. At a free-store, people take what they want free of charge, and leave off things they wish to give away. The KLIMAX website characterizes the free-store a way of “practicing alternatives to the capitalist system” (klimax.se, 2012) – or, as the placard on the picture shows, “FREE-STORE – SHOP FOR REAL – CONSUME SUSTAINABLY HERE WITH US”. An activist describes the phenomenon on-line:

A for-free-store is a concrete, above all fun way to decrease carbon dioxide emissions and environmental effects that come from newly produced goods. Put up a couple of tables and clothes racks in the city, get together friends and strangers and let clothes, gadgets and toys find new homes. […] a for-free-store is a concrete alternative to capitalism’s unsustainable market and eternal growth. In future Klimax
for-free-stores we think there should be room for free services such as bicycle repairs, haircuts, and dumpstrad food [food recovered from supermarket dumpsters] (klimax.se, 2012).

The activists goes on to write that the ties between people are strengthened by the exchange of gifts, and that it teaches people to be more generous. “By sharing you can achieve security [in] that your neighbors will share with you when this is what you need. In this way, everyone gets richer without having to exploit anyone” (klimax.se, 2012).

According to the activists, if no alternatives to the consumption society are offered ruin will be the consequence.

Capitalism has led to the greatest inequality in wealth, the greatest mass starvation and the poorest distribution system in history. Capitalism’s fixation on growth has caused a climate chaos that may be the death of humanity and the world. (klimax.se, 2012).

In this description, an apocalyptic view of humanity’s future is paired with a view of an alternative humanity which has more fun, is more generous, is more egalitarian, lives more ascetically and is more conscious in its consumption. Altruism is seen a solution to the coming crisis. Some of this may seem nostalgic. To advocate a non-commercial exchange culture connotes a will to struggle for a pre-industrial, more pristine culture. “Evil” is placed in consumerism, as exemplified in the shopping arcade. On the other hand, I believe that when the activists speak of virtues such as thrift and generosity, they refer back to traditional humanistic
values. Thrift, simplicity and self-restraint are, indeed, the values that most often characterize the ecological discourse (Alaimo 2011: 44).

I quoted Sara Ahmed, above, as saying that emotions are not only things people carry within them. Emotions circulate in interactions between people; objects can be associated with emotions. It is evident that in the actions described above cars and airplanes, for example, are associated with expressions of negative feelings while the for-free-store is associated with positive feelings. The free-store is, “above all, fun”. KLIMAX practices seem often meant to call forth well-being, irony, concern and even sympathetic identification.

This contrasts with studies done of other environmental movements. Take, for instance, animal rights activists. As Jacobsson and Lindblom (2013) show, these activists compare industrial meat production with extermination camps. They are often driven by a sudden awakening to the fact that animals suffer. In order to evoke feelings of disgust in themselves, they may start the day by looking at films or pictures depicting mistreatment of animals. The radical animal rights organization is ideologically anchored and has a clear goal: to stop industrial meat production. Here, we are faced with a fundamentalist worldview.

KLIMAX’s use of playfulness and humor, and way in which it “easily” shifts between different symbols, is interesting insofar as its activists are also usually portrayed as fundamentalists. Of course, my comparison is based on website texts and visuals; Jacobsson and Lindblom use interviews. Nonetheless, the contrast is striking. The animal rights organization attempts physically to stop something that is being done. KLIMAX acts out its resistance on a playful, symbolic level. In this, the movement falls outside the prevailing and popular image of environmental activists. Perhaps this is intentional – perhaps the focus on pleasant fun allows KLIMAX to reach its audience more effectively, by side-stepping the view that environmentalism is a matter of dour sacrifice? Or does it devalue and trivialize the message?

Conclusion

As a rule, social movement research focuses on issues such as organization, identity formation, globalization, resource mobilization, political power etc. In this article, I have taken a closer look at individual actions and their meaning in terms of opinion-making, that is, the manner in which the specific protest strategies of individual actions challenge the current social order. I have chosen to focus on a different aspect of one of today’s networks, one that shows greater flexibility than do the mass movements of the industrialized society, not least in its decentralized and symbolically charged resistance. This aspect also appears to be imbued with playfulness and humor, in contrast to, e.g., Swedish animal rights activism. At the same time, these activists do view the “climate threat” in strong emotionally negative terms.
In today’s society, which Melucci sees as characterized by the increasing importance of the symbolic, one may take it for granted that communication is essential to the function of many social movements. I have, accordingly, analyzed the communication, the narratives presented on the KLIMAX website. My focus on these climate activists was initially sparked by an interest in how various environmentalist groups view questions of humanity’s place in and responsibilities towards nature. There exist several parallel discourses about nature: nature to be discovered and mastered, as a threat, as a source of income, as something to be valued for itself, etc.

Surprisingly, it appeared that “nature” was very much absent in KLIMAX rhetoric. There was general talk of a threat from increased carbon dioxide emission and a subsequent climate collapse, and there were the activists who dressed up as animals. The rest of the references were to city, roads, cars and humans. The focus, evidently, was not on ecology, but challenging the current social system (first and foremost transportation policies and people’s consumerist life styles).

In order to challenge the prevalent view of city, transportation and consumption KLIMAX arranged climate crashes, free-shops, protests in shopping arcades, blockades of superstores, different types of culture jam (anti-advertising), and so on. A characteristic feature of the actions was KLIMAX’s attempts to create space for alternative ways of thinking and acting in relation to specific socially-determined places. In an almost ritual manner, they used “inappropriate” actions and things to make it possible to use the original places and situations for pause and reflection. They challenged their audiences to think new thoughts, to give up the capitalist and technocratic society, to become physical and participate in the overturn of the symbolic system. They played not only on feelings of shame but of laughter, in efforts to change opinions. They were, thus, typical “new social movements”, bent on winning the battle over the creation of meaning, and following Wettergren’s (2005: 179) precept: if information is to carry meaning, it must catch the attention of the recipient and affect him or her with its challenge and questioning, through identification with emotive and cultural symbols.

Whether KLIMAX succeeded in affecting its audience cannot be answered within the scope of this article, but they certainly made use of well-known emotive and cultural symbols. Narratives recur to allies and positive emotional objects, symbols of vulnerability, symbols of respect (and perhaps light ridicule): polar bears, a baby, Santa Clauses, bicycles, busses, the King, vegan snacks, thrown-away food and free clothing and services. Then there were the objects constantly cited in negative emotional contexts, to be resisted and avoided: cars, meat, airplanes, shopping arcades and holidays that encourage consumption. These sets of objects were played out against each other in the narratives presented on the KLIMAX homepage. If, as the researchers cited here have argued, power is situated in symbols, then KLIMAX has shown that a mastery of cultural codes allows one to challenge established thought patterns and ways of life.
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The Revolution *Will* be Uploaded: Vernacular Video and the Arab Spring

By Peter Snowdon

Abstract

The vernacular online videos produced by the Arab revolutions constitute an unprecedented (though not unproblematic) historical resource for understanding the subjective experience of the ordinary people who find themselves on the front line of revolutionary struggle. But they also effect a sea-change in the way in which we view and understand YouTube itself. This article argues that the political significance of these videos lies less in their explicit content, than in their aesthetics - that is, in the new formal and sensory propositions that they constitute, the ways in which they “redistribute the sensible” (Rancière).

The prologue proposes, following Judith Butler, that “the people” who are the subject of history are essentially a performative event, rather than a pre-existing entity, and that to write about revolution therefore requires a performative and allegorical approach. The first section reviews the current academic notion of “vernacular video” in the light of Ivan Illich’s work of the early 1980s on vernacular language and values, and argues that a stronger, more political conception of the vernacular is necessary to do justice to these works. The second section offers a close reading of one particular video from the Libyan uprising, and argues that it offers less an example, than an allegory of the dialogical relationship between the individual and the collective that defines the moral economy of the vernacular. The article concludes by proposing that the right response to such videos is not (just) more theory or criticism, but rather to seek to emulate their radically egalitarian forms of practice.

Keywords: Ivan Illich, Judith Butler, revolution, Arab Spring, YouTube, online video, vernacular, Libya.

Introduction

Not the least extraordinary thing about the Arab revolutions of 2010 onwards is the fact that they have given rise to an exercise in popular self-documentation on an unprecedented scale. In this, they have an obvious precursor in the Iranian Green Movement of 2009, which might be considered an outlier event from the same series, a first tremor announcing the larger earthquake to come. But whether we include Iran in 2009 or not, this ongoing sequence is, I believe, the first time since the invention of the cinema that the people have not largely left it to experts, professionals and/or outsiders to film their attempts to overthrow an oppressive order, but have instead seen it as part and parcel of their revolutionary action, even as part of their revolutionary duty, to film each other as together they made and unmade history, day in and day out.

The result has been, for the viewer, an almost overwhelming proliferation of material, archived and made accessible in quasi-real time via online video-sharing websites. These videos do not simply sit there on YouTube, either, waiting for us to stumble on them: they are always already in circulation, posted and reposted via Twitter and Facebook, as well as being passed on through more private communications channels, such as email. They are not static objects waiting to be discovered and analyzed: they are part and parcel of a much larger dynamic process, in which what matters most is not any specific video itself, so much as the affective energy that they gather and transmit as they travel through the complex online-offline ecosystems these events have carved out across the region, and beyond. These videos are, then, not primarily videos, so much as one vector among many for the ongoing work of mutual self-mobilization that makes revolutionary social change possible, or at least, conceivable (Aouragh & Alexander 2011).

This double character, matching massive volume with high velocity, makes this phenomenon even harder to pin down – if indeed it makes any sense to refer to these videos as a single phenomenon at all. After all, no single viewer, however dedicated, is ever likely to be able to view enough of these videos to establish with reasonable confidence what might constitute any given sample of them as “representative”. At the same time, one does not have to watch so many of them before one comes across one or more which do not simply record events that were, or aspired to be, significant, or even exceptional, but which also produce an exceptional effect upon the viewer, even when that viewer is remote, unfamiliar with the context, and has little or no prior emotional connection with the content.

This article represents a first step towards trying to elaborate an approach to the videos from the Arab revolutions which can do justice to them, both as a mass phenomenon that is too vast ever to be fully encompassed by analysis, and as a series of singular events whose perceived value is related to, but not entirely dependent upon, their online and offline contexts.
In the first section of this article, I propose a theoretical framework for considering these videos collectively as an emerging “vernacular” practice, based on the sense given to that term by Ivan Illich in his work of the early 1980s. In doing so, I am applying Illich’s political conception of the vernacular to a realm (online video) where the term has generally functioned up till now as a purely descriptive category. But I am also actively extending it to a domain of practice – the Internet – to which Illich himself never applied it, and I do so in a way which he might not have approved of, though I would argue that this extended usage is indeed consonant both with certain strands in his own thought, and with the views of some of his closest friends and intellectual heirs (Esteva & Prakash 1998).

These online vernacular practices differ from their offline forbears in part because they are emerging practices, rather than established ones (Mackey 2010). Their vernacular status is less a given, than a projection: we are watching territory being claimed, contentiously and performatively, rather than merely observing a state of affairs whose status is securely established and largely consensual. As such, these videos represent not so much the continuation or renewal of an earlier practice, as an aesthetic (that is, sensory and formal) revolution in the way that online video is perceived and used. Following Jacques Rancière, I propose that we should see the aesthetic dimension of these videos as integral to the political proposition that they represent. In this perspective, they function less as the documentation or representation of a political process that is already given in reality, than as a “redistribution of the sensible” that makes new forms of political process possible. In doing so, they prefigure a new order that is at once, and indissolubly, political and sensory (Rancière 2000).

In the second section, I turn to examine what this “aesthetic revolution” consists in when viewed close up, through the detailed discussion of one particular video from Libya. Building on the idea that the aesthetic prefigures the political, I seek to foreground precisely those formal and sensory features that are generally bypassed by both social scientists and political commentators when they discuss such videos as evidence of social and political phenomena. If Rancière is right, it is precisely these aesthetic features that we need to attend to, if we are to understand the kind of politics that videos such as this one may anticipate or invoke.

The first part of my essay, then, constructs this video practice in terms of a “collective” subject – the people, or more precisely, the Arab peoples, who have “occupied” the virtual public space of YouTube in a way that can be seen as analogous to the way in which they have repeatedly occupied physical public spaces over the last three years. The second part, on the other hand, explores the work of an anonymous, but incontrovertibly singular (and almost certainly male) cameraperson, in order to bring out what is unique and irreducibly complex about the specific forms of subjectivity that one particular vernacular video can construct.

Before proceeding with my main arguments, however, it is first necessary to clarify a little further some of the presuppositions I am making about the nature of
revolutionary processes, including their mediation through film and video, on the one hand, and about the limitations and potentials of different ways of analyzing and writing about them, on the other.

Methodological Prologue: The People as Performance

Judith Butler has argued that “the people” referred to in the talismanic anaphora of the Arab revolutions, “The people want…” (Ash-shaʻb yurīd), should not be understood as a singular, pre-existing and substantial, essence, however “progressively” defined, but rather as a performative, plural, conflictual, and self-constituting event. The political meaning of the “people” who are invoked in such moments is not given in advance, but exists only as the projected outcome of the process which such a declaration initiates, without any guarantee of being able to see it through (Butler 2013). And her interpretation has been confirmed by close observers of these events themselves:

As revolutionaries have testified [...] it was the collective act of stating that the people wanted something that created the sense there was a social actor by that name. For many Egyptian activists, it was this locutionary event that proved there was an Egyptian people capable of revolutionary action in the first place (Colla 2012).

Indeed, following Hannah Arendt, Butler sees the inaugural moment of this performative event as not even linguistic, but physical. The coming together of bodies, whether in a single time and place, or distributed and yet connected, not only makes this collective self-enunciation possible, but in some sense, already is the claim that, simply through their physical presence or attention to one another, “the people” may be said to have come into existence (Butler 2011, 2013).
So “the people” of the Arab revolutions, as I use the term in this essay, is a performance. And the videos which they produce and post online are part of that performance – part of that process of constituting themselves as a collective subject, and negotiating exactly what such a form of subjectivity may be and can do. Since the sense of “the people” is therefore always dependent on the specific moments of its production in public space, and not vice versa, the people is never a substance that might be captured in a static definition: it is at most an ongoing process, and at least, a series of irruptive interventions, whose apparent isolation from one another is perhaps one of the things that it is most difficult, and most necessary, for political theory, and political activists, to think through.

If the people is a performance, and a process, then it follows that some of the problems alluded to above in my introduction may be less intractable than they at first seemed. For the performative changes the nature of the relationship, not only between the individual and the collective, but also between each event and the larger political phenomena in which it seeks, and sometimes finds, its meaning. In that case, there is no “Arab revolution(s)”, singular or plural (no “Egyptian revolution”, no Tunisian, no Bahraini...), and no corpus, real or imagined, of “the Arab revolution videos”. There is only ever an accumulation of particular paths through experience, and through the traces of experience performed that are video, some of which may intersect with our own paths, but which can never be totalized arithmetically, statistically, or otherwise, to produce a single, coherent, and objectively knowable world, because the worlds that they invoke, and help to make, can never exactly coincide, even if in places they may touch or even overlap.

In bringing together in this article a theoretical discussion of vernacular video in general, with my attempts at interpreting one particular video, I am therefore proposing that the particular should be read simply as a case study whose specific features, once explicated, may validate the more general claims that precede it. Rather, following Gregson (2011), I am as much interested in how the experience of the specific and the particular exceed and overflow any conceptual limits within which we may try to enclose them, and how the kind of thinking which they provoke cannot be separated out from specific textures of embodied, sensory experience, without being caricatured and betrayed.

It is for this reason that my “reading” of the Libyan video is less a reading than a writing. Borrowing deliberately from literary and poetic techniques, I try to do justice to what there is in this video that cannot be separated out for capture in concepts, as well as to what can. Through ekphrasis, and in particular by dramatizing the different subjective positions to be found both within the video (cameraperson, martyr, crowd...) and outside (viewers, both real and hypothetical, singular and plural), I try to give a sense of the complexity of the way it figures and refigures the relationship of the individual to the collective, without implying that
this complex choreography can be reduced to something as blunt and immobile as a “theory” of the revolutionary subject.

As long as the revolution is in progress, there can be no “theory” of the revolution. But as long as the revolution is in progress, there will and indeed must be theorizing going on. This concrete, situated theorizing privileges the possible over the actual, the embodied over the abstract, and the particular over the general. For that reason, the video discussed in the second part of this essay should be viewed neither as a “sample” that is conveniently representative of some larger body of work, nor as so irremediably unique that it can have nothing useful to say about the larger course of these events and their mediation. Rather, I offer both the video, and my textual re-enactment of it, as (in John Law’s sense) an allegory: that is, an aesthetic relationship, indissolubly abstract and sensory, which condenses in a single complex figure both something that is conceptually significant, and all those aspects of our experience of it which explicitly and persistently resist conceptualization (Law 2004: 96-113).

My argument, therefore, embraces theory, rather than rejecting it. But it embraces it as just one more kind of practice – as a particular mode of performance, rather than an Archimedean point from which performances and practices can be assembled, compared and judged. Even my discussion of Illich on the vernacular, by extending his concept far beyond its original field of application, seeks not simply to recognize a state of affairs, but to enact an ontological politics (Mol 1999). And behind that ontological politics, there is, of course, a politics tout court.

In the final paragraphs of this essay, then, instead of trying to tie my arguments up in neatly conclusive theoretical bundles, I return instead to the question of practice, broadly conceived, and try to make explicit the kind of politics which I see these videos as proposing (in general), and enacting (in the particular cases of their own times and places). More specifically, I argue that, in the wake of these revolutions, video making can only be approached, beyond both personal creative pursuit and collective political strategy, as a radically egalitarian commitment to the poetic possibilities of the present.

**Defining the Vernacular: Ivan Illich Looks at YouTube**

The term “vernacular video” is commonly used to refer to the proliferation of user-generated content provoked by video-sharing services such as YouTube. In academic circles, this term is generally treated as straightforwardly descriptive, and largely synonymous with “non-professional” or “non-commercial”. This “de-politicized” vocabulary both reflects, and obscures, the atypical nature of the early years of online video, which were dominated by North American and (to a lesser extent) European productions. Thus, by the force of historical circumstance and
ethnocentric happenstance, the idea of “vernacular video” has come in practice to be heavily weighted towards the domestic and the personal.2

In the first part of this article, I want to develop a concept of the vernacular which is explicitly political, rather than descriptive, and which might provide a better basis for exploring the plurality of grassroots media practices emerging on today’s decentered Internet, without eliding the constraints and imbalances of power within which they have to operate. To do this, I turn for guidance to the work of Ivan Illich.

In the early 1980s, Illich published two books in which he developed a theory of “vernacular values”. (A third book to be entitled, precisely, Vernacular Values was planned and announced, but never appeared: Illich 1982: xi). In the first of these, Shadow Work (Illich 1981), Illich identified vernacular practices as those activities that help make any given community autonomous from both the market and the State – activities which enhance subsistence, and reduce dependency.

This positive definition subsumes the negative definitions cited above (“non-professional”, “non-commercial”), but it also goes well beyond them. The term “subsistence” in particular is intended by Illich in a strong sense, which implies not only an autonomous relation to the means of material survival, but also a complex dialogue between the individual and the collective. As he wrote in Gender in 1982, a “subsistence ethics”, which he saw as closely related to E.P. Thompson's “moral economy”, “affirms the right of every villager, of every member of the crowd, to make survival the supreme rule of common behaviour, not the isolated right of an individual. Both terms bespeak an attitude, an orientation, that protects the weakest from ruin” (Illich 1982: 111; cf. Thompson 1963). The right that is affirmed, it should be noted, is not the right of the group, as if it preexisted any individual action or decision: it is the right of the individual to limit his or her own rights and desires in favor of those of others, and in particular, of those who are most in need of such a gesture. This gesture, then, mirrors that described by Butler, who draws attention to the right of the individual to participate freely in enacting the people, rather than to simply be “enacted” as one of them, with or without her or his consent.

Seen in this way, to say that vernacular practices are subsistence-oriented, is to say that they are inherently ethical and political in ways that are incompatible with an atomistic and possessive vision of social rationality. Indeed, it is the viewpoint which such vernacular values provide which enables Illich to go on and distinguish a type of practice which is patently non-professional and non-commercial, but which is also anti-vernacular, because it aggravates rather than diminishes our dependency on commodities and services. This is the “shadow work” of the title of his 1981 book, which consists of all those unpaid activities that are needed to make commodities bought on the market genuinely useful to and usable by the household (Illich 1981: 99-116; Illich 1982: 45-60). The category of shadow work allows Illich to identify much of what lies apparently outside the bureaucratic and
commercial institutions of the modern State as being in fact deeply conditioned by those institutions. Many of the personal and individualistic Euro-American uses of online video which common academic usage would describe as “vernacular” should plausibly be classified as shadow work, in Illich’s terms, precisely because they make little or no contribution to strengthening those forms of collective reciprocity on which autonomy and subsistence depend. “Broadcasting yourself” is not, or at least not necessarily, a way of acknowledging the needs of others, or of putting the group before the individual.

Illich’s account of the vernacular is complex and far from systematic. For my present purposes I simply wish to point out three other characteristics of vernacular values as he describes them which specifically resonate with the argument I am making here. For Illich, the vernacular is intrinsically performative; it is essentially rooted in the primacy of bodily gesture and action; and it therefore cannot be understood through abstract conceptual analysis, but can only be approached through poetry and metaphor.

Where classical Western science posits a space that is universal, homogenous, isotropic, abstract, definite, and inert, the space of the vernacular is always particular, heterogeneous, asymmetrical, embodied, ambiguous, and alive (Illich 1982: 105-118). Indeed, there is for Illich no vernacular space that exists independently of the particular gestures and actions that shape it. Vernacular values are not given in advance, but are constantly and continuously being enacted, and this enactment is itself always a physical gesture. As a result, vernacular space is not some abstract Cartesian desert in which we find ourselves abandoned; it is “engendered by the bodies of its inhabitants”, and exists only as “the environmental trace of their vernacular living” (Illich 1982: 121).

As with Butler’s assembled bodies, so for Illich the performance here is physical before it is verbal. Seeking to explain why, as Robert Hertz had proposed (Hertz 1909), the vernacular realm is inherently ambiguous and asymmetrical, Illich proposes that it is because it remains rooted in what Piaget termed the infra-logical register of human experience. Vernacular life has not suffered those processes of abstraction and reduction that are needed to render it amenable to economic exploitation and bureaucratic management (while making it more or less unlivable for people in the process). Vernacular practices rather emanate from the deepest layer of our embodied, gestural experience, and it is this fact that determines their intrinsically dual character (Illich 1982: 127). That is why their complementarity is a “fuzzy, partly incongruous complementarity that can be understood only by means of metaphors” (Illich 1982: 75-76, emphasis in original). Vernacular practices do not try to deny these infra-logical registers of experience, as do Western scientific and sociological thought, by relegating them to the realm of the “private” and the “subjective”: rather, they seek to keep them close, and to reaffirm their centrality in the life of the community, by reenacting them daily. They do this not only through separate specialized activities such as poetry, song
and ritual, but by embedding even the simplest of everyday actions in larger symbolic frameworks, through which origins are recapitulated, and collective decisions reaffirmed.

To approach vernacular experience without betraying it will therefore require forms of research that do not seek to disembed actions and intentions from the infra-logical and the bodily, but that instead embrace their mutual inextricability, even if this means accepting that reality is inherently enigmatic and ambiguous, irreducible to any single universal frame of reference. Travelling by a somewhat different route, Illich thus reaches a conclusion that resonates with those of Moll, Law and Gregson. The kind of research that the human sciences need if they are to do justice to the vernacular domain will of course be “disciplined, critical, well-documented, and public”, but it will also have to eschew scientific reductionism and the pursuit of conceptual clarity at all costs, and instead explicitly embrace “analogy, metaphor and poetry” (Illich 1982: 62; cf. 129). For only poetry can show us ways to hold together the incompatible yet complementary dimensions which just are the nature of vernacular experience.

If we take the idea of “subsistence” in a narrowly materialist sense, rather than in terms of the constantly reiterated decision of individuals to put collective survival before their own personal interests, then to speak of online video as a vernacular practice may seem like an abuse of Illich’s categories. After all, this media’s dependency on commercial infrastructure, institutional regulation, and professional expertise is both obvious and potentially overwhelming (O’Dwyer & Doyle 2012). Illich’s own attitude to information technology was complex, and sometimes contradictory, and changed dramatically over time, as the focus of his attention shifted from the practical impact of “disabling institutions” to what, following Marshall McLuhan, he termed their “symbolic fallout”. While in his later work he frankly expressed his hostility to the “dimensionless cybernetic space” (Cayley 1992: 123) created by the computer and its screens, and the threat this transformation posed to the textual cultures of meditative reading and contemplative seeing which he so valued, the pages in Deschooling Society on how computer-assisted “learning webs” could help free people of their dependency on educational institutions have often been read as prefiguring the more positive, decentralized aspects of the Internet (Illich 1971: 72-104; Levi 2012: 348-349; Winslow 2013).³

Yet despite the apparent pessimism with which he came to view the age of electronic communication, Illich always remained alive to the ways in which people “creatively misuse” the new tools through which government and industry attempt to enroll citizens and consumers as collaborators in their own exploitation (Cayley 1992: 117). Nowhere is this more true than in his essay on the invention of the concept of “mother tongue” as a tool of bureaucratic power in the late fifteenth century (Illich 1981: 27–51). Looking more closely at Illich’s writing on vernacular language can help us see how his concept of the vernacular might
plausibly be extended to include even such highly-capitalized activities as the production and circulation of online video.

While the printing press would eventually come to serve as an instrument for the centralization and homogenization of both language and thought, in the first fifty years following the invention of movable type it was just as often used for the exactly opposite purpose – to propagate a myriad non-standardized vernacular languages, through the dissemination of texts whose content was often politically subversive into the bargain. It was in the face of this tidal wave of creative misuse that the Castillian grammarian Elio Antonio de Nebrija proposed in 1492 that Queen Isabella should sponsor his project to replace this unruly and uncontrollable diversity with a single, artificially standardized Spanish language. This was a language which at the time no one spoke, and which Nebrija set out to invent, single-handed. Like Latin or Greek, it could only be learned from professionals. The decision to call it a “mother tongue” was an indication, not that it might actually be learned at some mother’s knee (which was in fact the last place one was likely to hear it at that time), but rather that it was to play a key role in the State’s attempts to replace the Church as the central “maternal” institution in the lives of the people (Illich 1981: 44-46).

According to Illich, Nebrija’s explicit aim was not to facilitate communication among Isabella’s subjects, but rather to make it easier for the authorities to monitor such communication, and terminate it whenever it showed signs of getting out of hand. His main argument against the vernacular forms of Spanish was that they made it impossible for bureaucrats to eavesdrop on what people in distant parts of the empire – which was just then about to commence its rapid expansion into the Americas – were saying (or rather, writing and reading) to each other, and so root out sedition before it could establish itself. After some persuading, Isabella finally agreed to this plan.

Thanks to Nebrija and others like him, print would thus come to serve the purposes of institutional control and bureaucratic censorship, not only in Spain but throughout the literate world. But Illich shows that it was initially a threateningly anarchic grassroots technology, whose power as a multiplier of vernacular discourses represented a directly political challenge to the authority of the emerging State.4

Illich’s analysis of this proliferation of untutored discourses in the second half of the fifteenth century offers a lens through which we can better understand the political significance of the explosion of vernacular video across the Arab world over the last few years. What we are witnessing is, in these terms, another Gutenberg event: the unpredictable collision, under the conditions of a repressive political environment, between a cheap and accessible technology that can be used to amplify and disseminate the people’s self-produced images and sounds without prior institutional censorship or professional formatting, and societies in which older forms of vernacular culture (including non-standardized vernacular lan-
guages – in Arabic, al-
lugh(h) al-amiyya) continue to shape many aspects of daily life, and thus play an important role in defining the people’s sense of their own identity, and of their difference from those who would govern them.5

These videos are vernacular, then, not simply because they are non-professional and non-commercial. They are vernacular because they belong to the multiple series of gestures and actions through which individuals gather, both online and offline, to enact the people as the possible subject of another history. In doing so, they reaffirm the “subsistence ethic” as Illich describes it, and reinvent it for the age of online video. For those who make these videos, their own individuality is not denied, but rather is most fully realized by the act of self-limitation through which they give way to the collective. This ethic may be easily overlooked, because far from being dramatized, it is most often simply taken for granted. But it is woven through everything else which these videos do, and it is evident in two of the most obvious features that tie them to older forms of vernacular art in other media: that they are almost always anonymous, and that they are offered not as personal contributions, but as common property.6

It is in this explicitly political sense, then, that I want to propose that the videos from the Arab revolutions should be called vernacular. They are the first attempt by a critical mass of non-professional filmmakers to extend an informal, home-made, and largely improvised practice out beyond the realms of private or domestic life, and to use it to give an account of the public and political realms – an account which one senses is intended not only to be competent by its own, vernacular standards, but also more pertinent, and more comprehensive, than any of the accounts attempted by the professional audiovisual cultures that preceded it. And in doing so, they do not simply supplant this institutional discourse, they also undermine the very division between “public” and “private” space upon which the current distribution of power in our societies depends (Butler 2011; cf. Illich 1983).

These videos, then, are not just amateur, spontaneous and “home-made”. They speak from outside the enclosed domain of the dominant media institutions. They enact dissent in their idiosyncratic grammars, as well as in their subject matters. They speak a language that is learned from one’s peers, on the street, or in the home, not one that requires paid instruction or seeks institutional validation. And their basic gesture is not “linguistic”, but physical: not the image as representation, but the unauthorized and transgressive presence of the body that films in a public place, recording and participating in a collective event, against the will of the state. In their insistent iteration of this act of co-presence through which the people enunciates itself, and of which each single video is the trace, they constitute perhaps the first step towards the invention of Internet video per se as a genuinely vernacular practice.

In doing so, these videos do not just make use of the existing repertoire of YouTube’s functions to broadcast the Arab revolutions. They are also a revolution
in the way YouTube itself is conceived and used. By unsettled the opposition between public and private, objective and subjective, collective and individual, they bring about an irrevocable change in the potential of the online database, because that database is not just an infrastructure or an algorithm, but is inextricably enmeshed with practices, experiences and desires without which it cannot make sense, and which exist only offline – not only in our heads and hearts, but in the simplest, least explicable of our bodily gestures, too.

These videos, then, are not home videos. Indeed, one of the striking things to me is how little domestic and interior spaces figure in them, and how rigorously they exclude anything that we might consider private, intimate or personal. In particular, they are notable for the near total absence of the archetypal online video form of the Euro-American internet, the vlog or video blog, in which a single person speaks directly to the camera in a domestic setting, such as a bedroom or home office, and where the sense of intimacy is generally enhanced by the implication that they are alone as they record their message. One Euro-American survey suggests that vlogs were, at least until recently, the single most widely watched genre of user-generated online video content, accounting for some 40% of the “most popular” online videos as measured by multiple criteria (Burgess & Green 2009: 43). The existence of a small number of high-profile vlogs from these revolutions, and most notably those made by Asmaa Mahfouz during the early days of the Egyptian revolution, should not be allowed to obscure the fact that this format accounts for only a vanishingly tiny fraction of the material posted.

The exception that proves the rule. Vlog by Asmaa Mahfouz, Cairo, 18 January 2011. (Still from video uploaded by Iyad El-Baghdadi, subtitles by Peter Snowdon.)
These videos are not documentary films either, because most of them contain no narrative (Le Grice 2001: 166-67). They cannot be defined as citizen journalism, as they have no rhetoric of description or explanation; nor are they merely or mainly forensic video, of the kind which has become an increasingly important part of human rights activism worldwide. While they sometimes adopt some of the forms of journalism (such as the vox pop interview), and while they sometimes purport to prove that something terrible happened (though the element of proof rarely goes beyond mere verbal assertion, whether by voiceover or by written text), these videos are essentially uncategorisable. They are a new genre, or genres, replete with new forms, or old forms adapted to entirely new purposes.

The political revolution in the function of YouTube is thus accompanied by an aesthetic revolution in the kinds of experience people might look for when watching videos online. As such, these videos constitute, in the terms of Jacques Rancière, a redistribution of the sensible: they prefigure the political revolution that is to come, by challenging the aesthetic limitations which popular culture, the mass media, and intellectual condescension, have sought to place on the forms of experience the people are supposed to be able to imagine, enact and enjoy (Rancière 1983/2007: vi).

What we have here then is a body of work that is accumulating from the bottom up, generating its own norms, habits and customs as it goes, and which makes a claim – individually and collectively – to speak, beyond any distinction between the private and the public, for society once again imagined as a vernacular domain, where every action is intrinsically political, because it is involved in the shaping of shared meanings. Through these videos, individuals explore, negotiate and express their relationship to the collective, and in doing so, they remake that collectivity, and reaffirm or redefine its values, its practices, and its symbols.

Of course, however numerically overwhelming these videos may seem as they unfurl day-by-day on to our screens, they in fact contain only a tiny, and quite possibly non-representative subset of all the experiences, relations and practices that these revolutions have put into play. Not everybody filmed. Those who did film were not evenly distributed in space or time, by gender, age cohort, or social class. When they filmed, they did so selectively. And of what was filmed, only a very small percentage was uploaded. The rest is still on the memory cards in people’s camera phones, or on their hard drives. What we can see of these revolutions on YouTube is only the tip of the iceberg, and it may not be a very good guide to the shape of the main mass of these events, which remains stubbornly outside the lines of our digital sight.

But it is possible, also, that precisely because the revolutions as they are figured on YouTube are not “representative” of the mainstream revolutionary experience, they may also include, and in some cases even provoke or create, experiences, relations and practices which are more radical, more subversive, and more productive of alternative futures, than those which the historical record may later
be inclined to define as the “core” of these events. If Kropotkin was right to claim that revolutions themselves are always made by a minority of society, so some of the most significant meanings of these revolutions may also be found in experiences and figures which, from the point of view of the majority of those who took part in them, were marginal, atypical, or directly incompatible with what they, or we, may want the sense of those revolutions to have been (Kropotkine 1909/2011: 249).

**Souq Al-Jumaa, 25 February 2011:**
**Towards a Political Aesthetics of the Libyan Uprising**

So I find myself, some three years after these events began, still looking at these videos with more questions in my mind than answers. What kinds of revolution do these videos imagine or invoke? And what kinds of revolution do they refuse? What sorts of action do they call for, and to what types of outcome do they seek to bar the path? What do they understand of the experiences that befall those who film, and what in those experiences remains opaque, obscure, recalcitrant to interpretation and appropriation? Above all, how do they succeed (or fail) in mediating between the recalcitrant singularity of their own point of view, and the performance of new forms of vernacular collectivity that is sometimes their explicit subject, and always their unspoken horizon?

To begin to sketch an answer to some of these questions, I’d like to look closely at one particular film, shot by an anonymous cameraman in Souk Al-Jumaa, a working-class neighborhood of Tripoli, and uploaded to YouTube on 27 February 2011.

The Libyan uprising broke out in Benghazi on 15 February 2011, and the Day of Rage on 17 February saw protests spread to many other cities, including the capital, Tripoli. On Friday 25 February – the day on which this video would appear to have been made – several thousand protesters gathered after Friday prayers in the district of Tajura to the east of the capital, from where they set off to march towards the town center. As they passed through the Souk Al-Jumaa neighborhood later that afternoon, they were ambushed by state security forces, including snipers posted on the roofs of surrounding buildings. The result was a massacre. Different estimates put the death toll for the afternoon at between 10 and 25, with many more seriously wounded.

The march from Tajura followed a week of constant clashes during which the security forces had tried and failed to establish control over the neighborhood, and its brutal repression marked, perhaps, the end of residents’ initial hopes that they might see Gaddafi depart as quickly as Ben Ali and Mubarak before him. By 1 March, most of the people of Tripoli had abandoned overt public protest, and were looking for other ways to continue the struggle. (The city was not finally
liberated until six months later, in a major military operation organized by the National Transitional Council, that ran from 19 to 28 August.)\textsuperscript{11}

One of those who died during the march on 25 February was a fifty-year old man, named Ali Mohammed Talha. His name does not figure in any of the journalistic accounts of this day that appeared in the international or local media at the time, and I have not been able to find out any more about him.\textsuperscript{12} This video records the moments immediately before and after his martyrdom.

Looking for Ali Talha
(Still from video uploaded by 17thFebRevolution.)
To view the video with English subtitles, go to [http://vimeo.com/49182496](http://vimeo.com/49182496)

The “information content” of this video is, in many ways, very low. It adds little to the little we already know from written reports, either about Ali Talha’s death, or about what the other protesters around him, including the cameraman, were doing, saying, or thinking on that afternoon. But if offers us something inestimable, which few written accounts could rival, and none could replace. In the most simple terms, we might say that it gives us a sense of “what it was like to be there” in that particular place, at that particular time, and in this particular position. But what lies behind this apparently transparent (and, in some ways, problematic) claim? How exactly do these images and sounds shape the experience of the viewer in order to produce this effect? And how do the forms they take affect us,\textsuperscript{13} not just intellectually, but also physically and emotionally?
The sea is only a suspicion
(Still from video uploaded by 17thFebRevolution)

A man is advancing through space. He is among other men, though the space between them is not clearly defined, and the crowd seems too strung out, too fragmented to really count as “a crowd”. On the soundtrack, there is a lot of noise, of a kind we may recognize (or not) as the sound of wind buffeting the camera’s microphone. We may get the sense that we are near the sea. There is a large space that seems to open up on the horizon, far ahead of us and to the left, which seems to hold the future towards which we are heading – promise or disaster. Yet while the bodies move that way, the camera almost ignores this space, and seems intent instead on pointing off towards the right, and down towards the ground, when it’s not tilting off wildly up into the sky, dodging and jerking across the multiple layers of off-white cloud.

The sea is only a suspicion. Yet the men who have gathered here continue to advance and fall back in waves, and these human waves form a larger rhythm, which surrounds and absorbs the faster rhythm of the camera’s tilting up and down. It is as if the group is testing some invisible boundary, trying to push it forward, incrementally, or at least to hold the line. At the same time, the way the camera is held creates a long diagonal that emphasizes the inherently unstable geometry of the space, which is further pulled apart by the asymmetries of the faulty stereo sound.
The crowd surges forward twice, and twice they fall back. During the second, more chaotic retreat, there is a strange hiatus: the camera, as if drugged or stunned, in any case in need of relief, suddenly tilts up and then stops moving for several seconds, and the sky, plus a shard of ochre building, finds itself caught within the frame. Just at that moment the sound of gunshots intensifies, and then suddenly, with a single cry, the crowd rushes forwards again. And a few seconds later we realize that although we are moving, we are not going anywhere – the barrier that stands between us and the sea, between us and the future, has not been demolished, will not be overrun.

True, we keep surging forwards, even stronger than before, but others are already trying to work their way back. We are going to meet someone who is returning to us. Returning to us dead. As a martyr. When the camera almost collides with his bloodied head, we run alongside him for a while, then let him go on, and instead the camera reverses course one last time to follow the trail of blood that he has left behind him, as if retracing the steps he could no longer take. We follow this trace as if it could lead us somewhere, as if it might prove something. As if. And as we advance, the shadow of the filmmaker falls across that trail, as if to cross it out. Or to imprint himself upon it. Or it on him.

It's very hard to do justice to this video, and the above re-description barely scratches the surface of what I find so extraordinary about it. So let me try and say something a little more analytical.
We follow this trace as if it could lead us somewhere
(Still from video uploaded by 17thFebRevolution)

This video figures a moment from the heart of this revolution, and any revolution, and one which is central to the vernacular moral economy of the people: the moment when the decision that it is better to die fighting for what you believe in than to continue to live without honor has to be cashed in. And it shows us that moment from a point of view that is, for me, revelatory, and which is also hard to define, but which I think can best be described as being, simply, the point of view of the camera.

It’s a fact about cameraphones – and one which is easily verified, for instance by watching how the many people who can be seen filming in so many of these videos, go about filming, physically – that whereas with most earlier cameras, the “natural” way to handle the machine was to hold the viewfinder to your eye, the natural way to use a cameraphone, and indeed most cameras with small digital screens, is to hold them at arm’s length.

The camera is not an extension of your eye, it’s an extension of your arm. It’s not a lens through which to see, it’s a tool with which to act upon the world (Figuurt 2009; Campanelli 2013). Of course, sometimes you look through it, or more strictly speaking, at it. But much of the time, you don’t. You hold it overhead to see over the crowd around you. You put it up to a hole in the wall while you remain crouched down, for fear of getting shot. Or you clasp it in your hand, while you grip a stone in the other, as you run for your life. This video falls mainly, but not entirely, into the latter category.
Nothing like what a human eye would have seen
(Still from video uploaded by 17thFebRevolution.)

So the video doesn’t show us anything like what a human being would have seen if they were in that crowd. No human eye moves up and down in this crazy delirious way relative to your center of gravity while you run. And few human brains lack the neural processing ability to iron out the constant jitter and judder from which they do suffer when moving around quickly, even when their eyes remain more or less in a single horizontal plane.

Nothing remarkable about that, you might say. Anyone could make a film like this. Maybe. Maybe that’s the point. And then again…

There are two things which I find striking about this video. First, that anyone should have made it in the first place. By which I mean, that they should have thought it important enough to film in a situation where they are risking their life, where acute attention to what is going on around them is crucial to their personal survival, and where the existence of the film they might make is unlikely to have any direct material influence on the outcome of the day’s action. But also, I mean, that they should have decided to start filming at this precise moment which, as we experience it in the film – but who knows how it was in reality? – is not the moment when something happens, but the moment when one begins to think that something might be about to happen. And it turns out, they were right.

The second thing which I find amazing is that, having filmed it, they decide to put the video on the Internet in its entirety. Unedited. You have to watch it for more than four minutes, you have to sit through what might seem (if this was a Hollywood action movie) an eternity of bad camera work, barely audible dialogue, and disjointed slivers of unintelligible action, before this apparent chaos coalesces into an event. And yet, by June 2013, the original upload of this video had been viewed just under 8000 times, and there are also several clones of it
around which I have not been monitoring. So I’m obviously not the only person who seems to find it compelling. But why is it so compelling?

I would suggest that this video owes its force precisely to those formal and sensory extremes which it essays, and which constitute a large part of its unlikeliness, its strangeness. The gestural camera style creates an intense sense of the bodily inscription of the filmer in this space, even as it dissolves both space and time into a kind of distended plasticity, far removed from our sense of the everyday norms of experience. The soundtrack, with its alternation of intense wind noise, holes of near silence, distant voices, and gunshots that register like whip-lash, further adds to this sense of being at the same time intensely present, and somehow absent, elsewhere, not directly concerned by what may be going on. And while the sound connects us directly to what is happening off screen, the image denies us access to it until what seems like the last possible moment. We never see the soldiers who fire on Ali Talha, though we hear the shots, and possibly – probably – we hear the shot that kills him.

![Still from video uploaded by 17thFebRevolution](image)

The result of the whole is dream-like. We spend five minutes on the verge of an irrevocable, tragic event, and yet we experience those five minutes as a space of paradoxical, unstable freedom, in which the tension and threat of the situation is not denied, but is somehow abstracted to the point where it becomes almost unrecognizable. And it is this abstraction, and our collaboration in it – the pleasure we take in the figures which the camera produces, or in the epiphanic moment when the sky appears above this street in Souk Al-Jumaa, on one particular afternoon in February 2011, rather as it appeared to Prince Andrei in War and Peace after he was shot at the Battle of Austerlitz, in the moments just before he loses
consciousness\textsuperscript{16} – it is this complete dissociation from the ultimate reality of what conventional narratives would tell us was ‘the event’, and the sense of access to another reality which that inexorably produces, which makes the abrupt return of reality in the form of death that much more shocking. A reality which is no sooner exposed, than it too is recycled into an abstract form, namely, the line of blood that Ali Talha’s dead body has left behind it on the ground, leading to his crumpled, useless jacket.

\textit{The abrupt return of reality}
(Still from video uploaded by 17thFebRevolution)

Not many of the videos from the Arab revolutions achieve this level of dialogical interplay between form and content, sound and image, abstraction and brute fact. Not many of them go beyond the external recording of trance-like states, to embody them so directly in this way. But many of them do achieve a remarkable convergence between unexpected formal procedures and the complexity of shared collective truth. And many of them go well beyond the simple recording or replication of revolutionary figures already existing in the environment, and invent their own figures, which are not reducible to slogans, demands, or recognizable, goal-directed actions, but which are perhaps more closely comparable to the songs, poetry and paintings which overflow every time a space is liberated, and people are able to occupy it for what people were made for: celebration.

This video from Tripoli disables and defeats many of the things we might know, or think we know, not only about the ‘potential’ and the ‘limitations’ of ‘amateur’ video, but also about the place of subjectivity in the revolution, and about the relationship of the individual to the collective in such moments. It develops its own concrete sensory discourse on these subjects, in terms which are irreducible to any merely discursive language. It uses the camera to mediate be-
tween the individual, the group, and the elements (sky, sea, wind, and sun), and in doing so, it produces a form of subjectivity which is irreducible to either the individual, the collectivity, the impersonality of the natural world, or the somewhat different impersonality of the digital camera, but which is also unimaginable without the co-presence of all four of them.

It places the individual within a group which is never represented as a group, which is always either too dispersed, or too compact, too close or too far away. The group exists for the filmer not as a structured aggregation of individuals, but as a quasi-natural phenomenon, dictating his own wavelike movements back and forward, as it responds intuitively to that other unseen figure, the enemy.

And likewise, the camera oscillates back and forward between the ultra-mobile ultra-subjectivity of the human body, and the moments of static or deliberate framing – the sky above, the line of blood on the ground which can be followed methodically to its beginning or its end. Although I know, or suspect, that one of these shots was intentional, and the other not at all, I cannot help seeing them as somehow equivalent, as balanced against one another, the two moments of relative stability in a radically unstable world.

What both these moments share is, of course, a certain dissolution of the self. By filming his shadow as it falls across the trail of blood he follows, the filmmaker projects himself inside the frame, but he projects himself not as a character in some 19th-century novel – a person with a unique physiognomy, a particular temperament, a distinctive wardrobe, and a mailing address – but as an anonymous silhouette, the space where a person could be. This shadow doubles the ecstatic openness to life suggested by the shot of the clouds against the blue sky, embodying an act of acknowledgement, even consent, to the fact of death as unavoidable. The shadow signs the video, but it signs it not on behalf of the individual qua individual, but on behalf of the community. To belong to that community, to gather with it physically in the street, to proclaim its existence, is to accept the possibility of one’s own death, and to assert the value of that possibility. In this moment, the unique and the common reveal their interdependence. It is in order to protect the possibility of a unique life for all, even the weakest, that “the people” are called to exist.

The originality of this video, then, is located in its very refusal of individual authorship, and of all the forms of authority that would traditionally go along with that. In the vernacular realm, it is the shading out of the possessive self, the placing in common of what is most unique and fragile in each of us, that makes the invention of new forms and new experiences possible.

In its representation of the revolution as a state that couples political clarity with perceptual chaos, living machines with dead bodies, invisible enemies with indifferent clouds, this brief anonymous video, for me, goes further than 99 per cent of what the cinema and television have produced in the last 100-odd years in expressing the lived complexities of the revolutionary present. And in doing so, it
effects a redistribution of the sensible whose significance and impact reach far beyond the confines of Libya, or even of the Arab world. It participates not only in the invention of a new, collective audio-visual language, a vernacular which exists to embody and project the desires and values of the people on their own terms, but also in the reassertion of the vernacular itself as a realm whose aesthetic and intellectual complexity is both independent of, and equal if not superior to, that of any institutionally-recognized artistic practice, however radical or “experimental”.

In Lieu of a Conclusion: Revolution and the Poetic Imperative

In this essay I have argued that the online videos produced by the Arab revolutions testify, if not to the revolutionary nature of these events, then at least to the kinds of capacity for radical change that are implicit in them. I see this capacity for real-world, offline change as inherent in the formal and sensory “originality” of an online video such as that of Ali Talha’s death in Souk El-Jomaa – in the ways in which it proposes non-standardized, extra-conceptual ways of “thinking” the relationship of individual to collective, of future to present, and of process to event. And I have proposed that we can therefore see such videos as examples of the “redistribution of the sensible” that Jacques Rancière has defined as one of the central ways in which political change can be initiated, beyond the categories of existing discourse, not from the top down, but from the bottom up.

I have argued that this capacity for change already changes the way in which we should see YouTube, decentering the Euro-American bias of both usage and critique during the first five years of the site’s existence. Dissolving the dichotomy between “public” and “private” space which has structured most previous discussions of online video, these videos occupy YouTube in order to reinvent it as a genuinely vernacular space – one which is above all subject to and answerable to the people and their ways of knowing and acting. If we want to treat these videos from the Arab revolutions as “vernacular video”, then we need a stronger sense of the word “vernacular” than that which has been prevalent heretofore. I suggest that we can find just such a sense in the work of Ivan Illich, despite Illich’s well-known aversion to many aspects of electronic culture. And I propose that placing Illich in dialogue with Judith Butler can bring out a performative dimension in Illich’s own work that is too easily overlooked, and which can help ensure its continued political and theoretical relevance.

I have also proposed that in moving between one particular case and one particular concept, the challenge is not to define and justify the “representative” nature of the video discussed, but to find ways of writing which can precisely avoid any such reduction of the specific to the general, and instead reinstate something of the textural density and figural recalcitrance of the particular which the social and human sciences eliminate at their peril. In responding to this need for the per-
sistence of the irreducibly concrete at the heart of all our thinking and doing, I suggest, following Law and Gregson, that such singular cases as this video might best be written and read as allegory, rather than as example. For allegory not only enables a consciously performative approach to critical method; it also respects the non-inductive logic of events such as revolutions, which are themselves inherently performative, and thus not answerable to any pre-defined conceptual framework.

I believe that this approach not only makes theoretical sense, but is also coherent with the politics implicit in the kind of radical grassroots movements and processes we have seen emerging in recent years. Indeed, it is hard to see how any analysis which treats particular events, including audiovisual events, as valuable because they are “representative”, could be useful for elaborating a theory of non-representational politics of the kind such uprisings and occupations (including, but not limited to, the Arab revolutions) may be seen to call for (Tormey 2005, 2012).

Of course, in the absence of such a theory, many people have questioned whether we should call the Arab revolutions, “revolutions” at all. The Syrian poet Adonis has suggested that they cannot be revolutions since they have not led to a complete change of the political, economic and social system (Adonis 2011). The sociologist Mohammed Bamyeh describes them as anarchist in their methods, and liberal in their intentions, which may seem like a contradiction in terms (Bamyeh 2011). Back in the 1960s, Jacques Ellul proposed nominalism as the best way out of such a dilemma: if people call it a revolution, then that’s how they experience it, and who are we to differ? (Ellul 1969/2008)

But maybe we don’t have to make any such concessions. Maybe embracing these revolutions as revolutions is in itself a performative and prefigurative act – one that could help bring about not just a certain kind of theory, but also a certain kind of society, and a certain kind of artistic participation in that society’s making. If the best criterion we have for recognizing a revolution is that moment in which everyday life can no longer be distinguished from poetry, then I’d like to think that this video from Libya, and others like it, show us the revolution in its essential action – that of inventing new ways of being and experiencing by which whatever comes after will be judged in the memory of those who were then alive.

As Louise Michel put it, speaking of the Paris Commune: “Just as drama was no longer to be found in the theatre, because it was unfolding in the street as the crowd wrote its own legends, so poetry now belonged to everyone” (Michel 1886: 347, my translation).

Since the Arab revolutions, the moving image too belongs to everyone. It’s up to us – not to filmmakers, but to all of us – to make the films that will keep that true.
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Notes

1 In its simplest empirical sense, “these videos” refers to all videos made and uploaded by non-institutional/non-professional actors from the six Arab countries that have experienced revolutionary processes since late 2010 (Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen, and Bahrain), and which either directly or indirectly reference some aspect of struggle against the regime in place. However, it would be more in keeping with the argument made below (“Methodological Prologue”) to see “these” videos as a repertoire that is being enacted as much as analyzed by this essay. As hinted by the deictic, in so far as this repertoire does not simply vanish into the oceanic database that is YouTube by trying to identify with it as a totality, it must itself be a performance of that database - and only one among many that are possible.

2 For an analysis of YouTube as an almost exclusively personal (and Euro-American) domain, see Strangelove (2010). In her PhD thesis on vernacular creativity and new media, Jean Burgess relates the vernacular to the public sphere, but confines the term to a descriptive role, in line with her post-Habermassian conception of “participation” and “inclusion” as the maximalist goal of a reformist-progressive politics (Burgess 2007; cf. Burgess & Green 2009: 25–26). Tom Sherman has written perceptively about the coming vernacular age of video and the depreservation required of the artist who wants to find an adequate response to it (Sherman 2008). But while he avoids the trap of automatically ranking the vernacular on the side of the private and the personal, his claim that vernacular video is essentially part of a larger culture of “messaging”, and thus fated to ever more abbreviated forms, “excessive” use of digital effects, and an “anaesthetic” aesthetic, is seriously challenged, if not definitively refuted, by the kind of videos discussed in this article. For an example of how the term is used descriptively to refer to online videos produced by recent social movements, including the Arab uprisings, see Gregory and Losh (2012).

3 Illich was not a systematic thinker, and he was certainly not systematic in his approach to living. Just as the critic of modern transportation systems was a frequent flyer, and even chose to buy a (cheap) car when teaching at Penn State in the 1980s, he also came to use a computer to finalise his texts – but only after having first written them out by hand (using a felt tip pen – “a much newer invention […] so soft that you can even write on a moving Mexican bus with it”: Cayley 1992: 249). Practical familiarity with the concrete object was, for Illich, potentially an antidote to some of the worst aspects of its symbolic fallout. A comprehensive assessment of Illich’s contribution to a critical media ecology, in all its contradictions and complexities, remains to be written. One starting point would be Kahn and Kellner (2007).

4 “It is estimated that before 1500, more than seventeen hundred presses in almost three hundred European towns had produced one or more books. Almost forty thousand editions were published during the fifteenth century, comprising something between fifteen and twenty million copies. About one third of these were published in the various vernacular languages of
Europe. This portion of printed books is the source of Nebrija’s concern. To appreciate more
fully his worry about the freedom to read, one must remember that reading in his time was
not silent. [...] Habitual reading in a loud voice produces social effects. [...] Reading aloud
was common in Europe before Nebrija’s time. Print multiplied and spread opportunities for

On the role of vernacular forms of knowledge and expression, including āmiyya, in the Egyp-
tian revolution, see El-Desouky (2011).

The point that these videos are uploaded as common property, in a moral if not a legal sense,
was made by Rabih Mroué during his 24 January 2014 performance of The Pixelated Revo-
lution at the Frascati Theater, Amsterdam (but does not figure in the earlier published version
of the text). While Mroué's exploration of the Syrian videos which record (or seem to record)
the death of the cameraperson often leads him to formulations which are quite close to mine,
the conclusions he draws from them serve a quite different purpose (Mroué 2013).

See http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SgjIgMdsEuk for the first, and most widely circulated
of these videos. On the Asmaa Mahfouz phenomenon, see Wall and El-Zahed (2011).

On prefiguration as, itself, a principal mode of revolutionary action, with specific reference to
Tahrir Square, see Van de Sande (2013). On the relation between politics as prefiguration and
politics as performance, see Klimke & Scharloth (2009).

The Italian filmmaker Stefano Savona has speculated that maybe 90 per cent of the camera-
phone videos made during the 18 days of the Egyptian revolution were never uploaded to
YouTube, but remain on people’s flash cards or hard drives. The figure is an anecdotal esti-
mate, but probably points us in the right direction (Savona et al 2012).

“The protest in Souq Al Jumma - Tripoli, حربة الیوم - تيروپلي، uploaded 27.02.11 by

The best English-language source for the Tripoli protests of February 2011 is the diary of
Sandra James, a British woman who had lived in Libya for over 20 years, and whose Libyan
husband and two eldest sons took part in (and survived) the 25 February march (James 2012).
I have also consulted the information and videos assembled by the New York Times's blog,
“The Lede” in the immediate aftermath of the event (Mather and Mackey 2011), and by John
Liebhardt at Global Voices Online (Liebhardt 2011).

The date and place of the death of Ali Mohamed Talha, along with his full name and age, are
grateful to Amira El-Noshokaty for cross-checking the Arabic-language sources for me.

In what follows, I frequently adopt the first person plural, “we”, as a rhetorical strategy.
Sometimes I use it to refer to the audience of the video, sometimes to refer to the group of
men we see assembled in it. In both cases, I am not prejudging the reactions of others, which I
can never know, nor am I trying to impose (or disavow) my own. Rather, my intention is to
make explicit the way in which the political takes place between people (Butler 2011). The
political implies a transition from the singular to the plural, from an “I” to a “we”, that is al-
ways a risk, a gamble, and whose results are never given in advance. So, when I saw “we” as
the audience, I am inviting my readers to experiment with identifying with my reactions, ra-
ther than to dismiss them as simply “my” individual subjective response. And when I say
“we” as if I/we had actually been present on that day in February 2011, I am inviting the
reader to join with me in experimenting with identifying with what might or might not be the
reactions and emotions of the people figured in the video. I do so, not with the intention of
producing a consensus, but in order to open a debate about the possibility of responding to
such a flux of images and sounds, not just as an individual, but also as a collective.

All the accounts I have consulted place the massacre of 25 February on Aradah Road, near to
the Al-Hany crossroads -- that is, several kilometers from the sea front. If it really is the sea
we can see in this video, then it must have been filmed on one of the arteries running through
the neighbourhood perpendicular to the general east-west direction of the march, connecting Aradah Road with the coast.

Overall, the video can be divided into seven distinct movements (four ‘forwards’ and three ‘backwards’): 0.00-2.19: first advance; 2.19–2.41: first retreat and regroup; 2.41-3.08: second advance; 3.08-3.35: second retreat and regroup; 3.35-4.12: third advance (to recover Ali Talha’s body); 4.12-4.37: third retreat (with Ali Talha's body); 4.37-5.15: the cameraman alone moves forward against the flow of the people immediately around him, retracing the trail of blood the martyr’s passage has left on the ground.

“Above him there was now only the sky – the lofty sky, not clear yet still immeasurably lofty, with grey clouds creeping softly across it. ‘How quiet, peaceful, and solemn! Quite different from when I was running,’ thought Prince Andrei. ‘Quite different from us running and shouting and fighting. Not at all like the gunner and the Frenchman dragging the mop from one another with frightened, frantic faces. How differently do these clouds float across that lofty, limitless sky! How was it I did not see that sky before?’” (Tolstoy 1896/1982: 326).

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Abstract
This article focuses on the identity work that takes place on the biggest Polish Internet forum for infertile people (www.nasz-bocian.pl). It is an example of a wider trend of “digital groupings created by and for those who struggle with the physical and emotional burden of a disease or disability, and through blogs, chats and forums contact others who have similar experiences, while staying anonymous. Participating in on-line discussions often leads to various forms of social engagement, both on-line and off-line. The sick, their family members, partners and friends cooperate in order to change the public discourse, as well as the regulation and financing of research and the treatment of certain diseases. Emergence and proliferation of such digital groupings raise questions such as: what ails these communities? How the collective identity is constructed on-line? This article examines “boundary work, which is a specific element of collective identity construction processes. The analysis concerns how the borders are established between the different sub-groups within the digital community, and how this process involves producing novel forms of identity based on a fragmented “socially legitimized childlessness. It focuses on a sub-forum “Conscious Childlessness and is based on qualitative analysis of the posts placed there. This sub-forum was established by users who do not necessarily share the dominant collective identity around which the social mobilization on infertility in Poland coalesces. They refuse to see themselves as sick people, or as patients, attempting to construct a new collective identity based on the idea of choice and the pursuit of happiness.

Keywords: infertility, identity, boundary work, on-line activism, assisted reproductive technologies
Introduction

“You will become a mother, you will cuddle your own children. We have dreamed of your children” – that is how, according to one Internet forum user, other infertile people reacted when she stated that she wants to end an unsuccessful infertility treatment. This happened on “Our Stork”, the biggest Polish Internet forum for people with infertility (www.nasz-bocian.pl). The user whose nickname is “bloo” is not only a member, but a moderator. She stresses that she posted the above quote to show that the boundary between support and pressure is sometimes trespassed by the members of the virtual community; that the encouragement of others to keep up the fight when in vitro fertilization (IVF) fails may easily turn into coercion.

“bloo” concludes her post by saying that receiving such reactions did not change her own decision, but that such responses may deepen the sense of guilt and shame felt by others. Because of this, she initiated the Our Stork sub-forum “Conscious Childlessness”, where the negative aspects of being a member of virtual community of the infertile can be discussed.

This sub-forum has become a space for women who identify themselves as infertile, but who do not share the dominant collective identity around which the social mobilization on infertility coalesces. They do not necessarily see themselves as sick people, or as patients. Rather, they define themselves as women who happen to be infertile but who are able to make conscious decisions concerning their engagement with reproductive technologies. Thus, they challenge the official types of identity promulgated by the Our Stork group, attempting to construct a new one based on the idea of choice and the pursuit of happiness. This article focuses on the identity work that takes place on Our Stork’s “Conscious Childlessness” Internet forum, and examines the strategies used for establishing boundaries between different groups of infertile people when their life trajectories, emotional responses and needs differ.

Activism Around Infertility and Access to IVF

The Polish Our Stork forum is an example of a wider trend of “digital groupings” created by and for those who struggle with the physical and emotional burden of a disease or disability (Rose & Novas 2005). Through blogs, chats and forums, the sick and their partners or friends can contact others who have similar experiences. New communication technologies allow people from all over the world to discuss what they live through, to express their hopes and fears, and to share information, while staying anonymous. Furthermore, participating in on-line discussions often leads to additional forms of social engagement, both on-line and off-line. People cooperate in order to change the public discourse, as well as the regulation and

This trend also applies to people suffering from infertility, even though it is not always possible to discern whether the problems with conceiving a child are health-related or stem from other environmental or social factors. Today, there are many organizations focusing on infertility and assisted reproductive technologies (ART), most of which originated on the Internet. Examples include the Çider Association in Turkey, which has been studied by Polat (2012), and the Association for Medical Treatment of Infertility and Supporting Adoptions Our Stork (Nasz Bocian), whose members have created and managed the forum discussed here. The situation of the infertile is special because people, especially women, who do not have children are often subject to social stigmatization, no matter what their state of health is. This stems from the fact that motherhood is seen as a key to women’s “normal” social identity, and so being childless is regarded with disdain and/or pity. The Internet is often the only place where childless and infertile women can discuss their feelings and experiences freely (Allison 2011).

This may be still more the case in the Polish context due to the hegemonic discourses on femininity as based on motherhood (Hryciuk & Korolczuk 2013). Moreover, while in Poland the childless are often stigmatized and considered egoistic, the people who use assisted reproduction are regarded with still greater suspicion. They are condemned by representatives of the Catholic Church and by conservative politicians, both of whom accuse such persons of defying God’s laws and thus of immorality and indecency (Radkowska-Walkowicz 2012; Korolczuk 2013). In fact, the Church’s opposition to IVF influences both discourses and practices. Consequently, assisted reproductive technologies, such as IVF, are not regulated by the state, and Poland did not ratify the Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine of 1997, despite the fact that ART have been offered in Polish hospitals and private clinics since the late 1980s and today there are over 40 clinics where such procedures are performed. The situation has improved while this text was written: on the 1st of June 2013, the Ministry of Health introduced a three-year plan for state-funded IVF treatments, which will partially cover the costs of procedures, if not hormonal treatment and diagnostics, for a total of 15,000 heterosexual couples. However biotechnologies in general remain unregulated.

The example of “bloo”, cited above, shows that while there are advantages attached to being a member of a virtual community of people grappling with infertility, there are also challenges. These concern issues such as the construction of a shared identity and the definition of a common goal. Infertile people in Poland have to cope not only with the social consequences of infertility, such as exclusion, feelings of inadequacy and reproductive failure, but also with negative opinions on ART disseminated in the media and public sphere (Korolczuk 2013). This requires constructing a new type of embodied identity based on a desire to be-
come a biological parent, which gives the infertile the status of a patient and a citizen. The problem is that some members of the community may experience the identity of a parent in the role of patient as oppressive. This happens, for example, when, as in the case of “bloo”, IVF fails.

British sociologist Karen Throsby (2006), who examined the experiences of IVF failure, points out the fact that infertile people whom ART did not help find themselves ambiguously located between often contradictory norms of gender, technology and the reproductive body: they have a strong desire to be biological parents, but are no longer actively pursuing that desire, and they have technologised the “natural” reproductive process but without a subsequent baby to counterbalance anxieties about technological corruption of the natural order. (83)

Throsby stresses that the failure to achieve the desired result – the baby – does not mean that people’s bodies and identities remain unaltered. My study examines the ways in which this ambiguous location is expressed on the Internet forum which is dedicated to people who are using or have used ART. I am interested in how website users who have undergone ART but decided to stop the treatments, define their position vis-à-vis those who refuse to “give up”. The latter, openly or implicitly, brand the former as losers if not traitors; yet they all remain a part of a larger Internet community of the infertile. Moreover, there are people like “bloo”, who stay active on the forum, although they no longer pursue the goal of becoming a parent. How is the boundary between these two groups drawn? How is the boundary-drawing process facilitated by the medium?

In this article I examine “boundary work” (Hunt & Bedford 2004: 442), which is a specific element of collective identity construction processes. My analysis concerns how the borders are established between the different sub-groups within the digital community, and how this process involves producing novel forms of identity based on a fragmented "socially legitimised childlessness" (Throsby 2006).

**Methodology and Ethics**

The analysis presented here is based on the outcomes of a research project, which examined the institutional, legal and discursive framework concerning infertility and assisted reproductive technologies (ARTs) in contemporary Poland. It involved qualitative analysis of the posts which are placed on the internet forum www.nasz-bocian.pl, which is the biggest Polish virtual community concerned with infertility and ART. As of March 2013 there were 6,548,993 entries, organized around almost 50,000 threads, and 76,838 registered users. The main themes include: “Ask the expert” (with threads such as: Infertility, Men’s infertility, Miscarriages, Infertility for beginners), “Infertility, let’s share information” (e.g. How to get treatment, Where to get treatment, The sperm etc.), “Adoption, let’s share information” (e.g. Places and procedures, Dilemmas, My road to adop-
tion), “Foster families”, “I need to talk about it” (Space for some psychotherapy, Good and bad news, Our dearest) and “Technical and organizational stuff”, and finally, the focus of the present study, the “Conscious childlessness” sub-forum. I have analyzed the posts on the “Conscious childlessness” sub-forum, looking for specific key-words on the whole forum. Critical discourse analysis has been an important inspiration for the present study, as I attempt to re-constructing the ways “infertility” and “childlessness” are framed in these on-line discussions, and how internal hierarchies are (re)produced through discourse (Fairclough 1995; van Dijk 1997). Data gathered in the semi-structured interviews conducted in 2013 with key activists of Our Stork Association living in Warsaw has been used as an additional source of information.

The analysis of Internet forums raises some important ethical questions, especially concerning privacy and informed consent. The forum of Our Stork is open to the general public, which means that all posts are available to all Internet users, without registering. Those who register providing a nick name and an e-mail address get access to more functionalities, e.g. they can publish posts, establish new threads etc. There is no verification process during registration.

Also, the number of people using the community is large – there are thousands of users and posts. Thus, I regard the forum as public and decided that informed consent for my passive analysis of the postings was not needed. However, the researcher is obliged to make sure not to put the informants in a situation where they might be at risk of psychological harm, which is especially important concerning issues related to health and sexuality. Thus, I informed the activists from Our Stork of my project, its goals and of how the outcomes will be used, and invited them to an open seminar where I presented the preliminary outcomes of my analysis. I am very grateful for their comments and generosity, and hope that my work will be helpful in their struggle towards social change.

Boundary Work and Social Activism in Virtual Space

The Internet forum, which is the focus of my analysis, is linked to the Association Our Stork (Nasz Bocian), the most vocal social actor fighting on behalf of the infertile in Poland. This is a politically engaged lobbyist group, which supports people, collaborates with doctors, educates the public, engages in cooperation on the international and local level and fights for regulations that would mandate safe, state co-financed treatment. The Internet forum to which the Association is linked, on the other hand, offers a space for interaction and emotional support. At times, the Internet forum users also engage in social activism, mostly in reaction to potential threats, such as aggressive and demeaning utterances concerning infertile people publicized in the media, or in order to support new laws regulating ARTs. On such occasions they alert the media, write open letters to newspapers, sign petitions to politicians and representatives of the Church, or express their
opinions on the social media. In a few instances small groups also took to the streets.

In some respects the Association functions as a typical Social Movement Organization (SMO), while the users of the Internet forum mobilize only occasionally, and some – perhaps even most – do not engage in social activism. Nevertheless, they influence public discourse and the political sphere not only via direct actions, but also through the production of knowledge and promulgation of novel interpretations of infertility, ART and human reproduction. Thus, I interpret the engagement of the active members of Our Stork forum as a case of on-line social activism, and take my theoretical starting point in collective identity theory (Polletta & Jasper 2001) as well as and the body of work done on social activism related to health (Brown & Zavestowski 2005; Rose & Novas 2005; Polat 2012).

I focus specifically on boundary work, which is usually interpreted as the marking of social territory by stressing differences between those who belong to a specific group or a movement and those who do not (Hunt & Benford 2004: 442). The goal of such work is to strengthen a sense of togetherness, solidarity and commitment, by producing both a collective “us” and a collective “them” through a variety of practices and activities. Hunt and Benford point to the fact that boundary work occurs also within a movement, for example when the most engaged members of a specific SMO attempt to mark boundaries between themselves, and more casual activists. Analyses of animal rights activism demonstrate how this dynamic works in a specific context. Here, the demarcation lines can be drawn between activists who are vegan and those who are vegetarians (Jagger 1992 in: Hunt & Benford 2004: 444, Jacobsson 2013). Following less strict rules concerning one’s diet is interpreted as a sign that a person lacks commitment, that she is not truly engaged. According to Jacobsson (2013), the division between those who promote veganism and those who stick with vegetarianism forms a major source of division within the animal rights movement in Poland, and causes its “bifurcation into the two strands of animal welfare and animal rights proper” (30).

The analysis of the Our Stork forum suggests that establishing borders between the groups within a larger community may also serve other goals. It may, for example, enable people to challenge the official identity of the group from within and to manage the problem of divergent goals, without the necessity to leave the group altogether. In sub-groups people can voice desires, emotions and interests which are not shared by the majority, while remaining connected to a bigger community.

In this specific case, the social terrain where boundary work takes place is the Internet. The Internet has proved to be “a congenial host territory” for people who want to share knowledge and information, exchange their feelings, and campaign for their rights (Rose & Novas 2005: 449). Thus, it is often perceived as an instrument which not only facilitates communication and reduces the costs of coop-
eration, but also promotes collective identity and creates new communities (Norris 2004; Garret 2006: 204). Such a vision has significant social currency. Other scholars, however, point to the fact that the loose networks created on the web are often temporary, and easy to opt out of. Thus, they cannot generate the commitment, persistence, and solidarity that characterizes successful social movements (Garret 2006). Technologies such as the Internet enable communication or recruitment but do not necessarily lead to mobilization, or as Wall (2007) argues, they may facilitate specific organizational activities, but have less impact on the symbolic aspects of action.

Recent works on the relation between new communication technologies and contentious activities demonstrate that the influence of new technologies depends on a variety of interrelated factors, for example the nature of the existing social movement organization (Diani 2000; Garrett 2006). Bennett and Segerberg (2012: 756) distinguish between formal political organizations and groups, which follow the logic of collective action, and which are based on high levels of organizational resources and the formation of collective identities; and digital media networks that follow a different logic – the logic of connective action – based on personalized social networking among followers. Bennett and Segerberg define three modes of technologically enhanced activism: self-organizing networks and organizationally enabled networks that follow the logic of connective action, and organizationally brokered networks that follow the rules of collective action.

What makes this distinction interesting for the present analysis is that it addresses the problem of collective identity. Bennett and Segerberg agree that new types of Internet-based mobilizations do not require the strong, fixed types of identification, which according to many scholars, including Snow were traditionally employed to “activate adherents, transform bystanders into supporters, exact concessions from targets, and demobilize antagonists” (2008: 385). Today, the activists prefer “using resources to deploy social technologies enabling loose public networks to form around personalized action themes” (Bennett & Segerberg 2012: 757). These new networks embrace a rather eclectic sense of identity, which enables cooperation between different groups and organizations and makes digitally mediated collective action formations more flexible “in tracking moving political targets and bridging different issues” (ibid: 742).

This article focuses on this type of “connective” and “eclectic” approach of social movement identity. The case of Our Stork differs from those analyzed by Bennett and Segerberg, but the perspective they propose, which links the use of ICTs to the specific type of identity work employed by a group, may be helpful in understanding the dynamic of the identity construction process within a heterogeneous on-line community of the people travelling down the road called “infertility”.6
Together, Yet Apart – The Case of the “Conscious Childlessness” Sub-Forum

In this article, I focus on Our Stork’s “Conscious childlessness” sub-forum, which is one of the newest on the portal, established in 2011. Today, it has close to 600 entries in three different active threads, which had, in turn, over 6500 views. The users consist of people (mostly women) who have not managed to have a biological child through ART, and have considered stopping or did end the treatments, but nonetheless remain active members of the portal. How do they relate to the rest of the community; how do they re-negotiate their identity?

Scholars of social movements observe that the identity that a group projects publicly is sometimes not the same as that which its members experience, and that some members challenge the collective identity imposed on them (Polletta & Jasper 2001: 285). This is the case of “Conscious childlessness” sub-forum members. They challenge the collective identity promulgated by the activists from Our Stork. As I have argued elsewhere, the official collective identity – as formulated in official statements, press interviews, open letters and on the Internet site itself – is that of patients-citizens protesting the state’s violation of their right to medical treatment (Korolczuk forthcoming). They accuse the state of insufficient support and lack of regulations, and very actively encourage each other’s quest for effective treatment. In the process, infertility is constructed discursively as a disease, a biological fact, and/or a difficult emotional experience, embedded in a specific social context. Analogously to other patient organizations (Polat 2012), people active in the association Our Stork and connecting through the Internet bond by sharing the emotional, intellectual and physical experience of grappling with infertility. It is a negative experience, but also something to fight, to overcome.

Hence, the underlying assumption is that all members share a common goal, an overriding desire: to have a biological child (Franklin 1997; Allison 2011). This is exactly the assumption that the users who established “Conscious Childlessness” sub-forum challenge.

Analysis of the posts on this sub-forum demonstrates that while support from other members is often badly needed, other members’ strong emphasis put on perseverance and commitment can be perceived as oppressive. Hence, some women who decided to end unsuccessful infertility treatments established a space for members of Our Stork community, who seek escape from the portal’s culture of “fighting for a child”. They carved out space for their own experiences and needs, at the same time attempting to challenge the dominant collective identity of the infertile as patients-citizens, driven by the desire to have a biological child.

As explained by the moderators who created the sub-forum, it was launched in reaction to constant pressure to reproduce exerted not only by the “outside world”, e.g. family members or friends, but also by other Our Stork members. One of the moderators – the same “bloo” cited above – claims that at one point she realized...
that the emphasis on having biological children at all costs was becoming simply unbearable:

It scares me that so much energy goes into constant stressing SUPPORT, which we have to show each other constantly, in the name of patients’ solidarity. We have no right to say “no, we will go no further” and “yes, this is the end of the fight for a child”. If someone stops fighting it is interpreted as “stopping others”. If someone doesn’t have the strength anymore, it is interpreted as “going astray”. If someone says “I don’t have energy for more”, “it’s over” [...] others claim that you just need some time before another attempt. [...] The boundary between support and pressure is very often trespassed. (bloo, capitalization in the original)7

Most of the women who posted their opinions on the new sub-forum shared the perception that the users of Our Stork portal tend to pressure others to continue the fight for conception, regardless of the personal situation, health condition and emotional needs of the addressee. Assistance and encouragement thus easily turn into coercion, and those who want to stop treatments for reasons other than financial difficulties can feel bullied and/or marginalized. Their decisions are interpreted as undermining the struggle and commitment of others. They are sometimes accused of being lazy, of being neither truly committed nor serious (see also Korolczuk forthcoming). Such views are confirmed by the posts on other threads, such as “Infertility, let’s share information” or “I need to talk about it”. Moreover, the language used on the main forum is full of militaristic comparisons and phrases. The expression “to fight for a child” is often used on the forum, as many infertile persons perceive their experiences as a battle or a war against the limitations of their bodies and/or modern technology (see Radkowska-Walkowicz 2013).

The question of when to stop trying to become a parent through reproductive technologies is problematic, as there are no clear, objectively identifiable boundaries. Throsby (2006) points out that one of the most fundamental problems for those undergoing treatment is “that while a given amount of treatment may, in retrospect, become constituted as definitive, what actually constitutes the end of treatment is never clear” (85). Moreover, the engagement in assisted reproduction generates a post-IVF body. In the case of failure, it requires further the construction of a new (or yet another) form of socially legitimized infertility. The process of making sense of IVF failure, and constructing such novel forms of identification is often long and inconclusive (Throsby 2004, 2006).

These factors strengthen the pressure to continue fertilization treatments until the desired goal – pregnancy and the birth of a child – is reached. This is exemplified by the post of one of the moderators who had decided to stop seeking medical help, and adopted a child. Her initial happiness and confidence were overlaid with doubts after visiting Our Stork forum and reading posts by people, who encouraged others to fight against all odds:

I came back on the forum in February, after years of absence. And I started to have doubts [...] I have read all those posts encouraging others to fight and I began think-
ing that I was LAZY, and that’s why I let it go so easily! I started to think of IVF [...] I started to pester my husband, fight with him, tell him how egoistic he was, at times I was full of hatred. (Bobetka, capitalization in original)

As several scholars have pointed out, constant encouragement from others during IVF treatment can make it even more difficult to fight the social stigma attached to being infertile. Such support is based, after all, on the idea that everyone can have a child; that it is just a matter of commitment and will. The pressure is especially effective in the case of women, for the effort and commitment put into trying is interpreted as the litmus test of their engagement in (potential) motherhood (e.g. Inhorn & van Balen 2002; Throsby 2006). But when technology turns out to be ineffective, the process undermines the women’s struggle for emotional stability and happiness. Thus, it is not a coincidence that most users on “Conscious Childlessness” sub-forum are women, and that they are interested in redefining the meaning of infertility.

The posts of people who support the seemingly endless “fight for a child” reinforce the sense of those who quit as being “losers”; only this time not only in the eyes of society, but in the eyes of other infertile people, the very people who are supposed to provide them with a sense of acceptance and understanding. This makes this group “homeless”, in more ways than one, as they find understanding neither among their family, neighbors and co-workers, nor among other infertile people. The post by “mija77” expresses the feelings of guilt and remorse that such a situation evokes:

On one of my favorite threads I saw a title once “You are a winner, if you fight.”
That really made me feel as a loser 😞, because I stopped “fighting”. (mija 77, “misspelling” and emotive in original)

Several women active in the “Conscious childlessness” sub-forum openly argue that the continual emphasis on not giving up “the fight” and on trying more advanced medical procedures, in fact serves the people who write the posts rather than their addressees. As a person with the nickname “Agaaaa” puts it, “all this ‘you should fight this battle’ serves the person who writes this, as she wants to feel that what she does is right”.

The case of “Conscious Childlessness” demonstrates that when sharing the desire and the intention to have biological children becomes normalized within the community, it becomes a very powerful tool for disciplining those who want to renegotiate their engagement with technology. The resulting sense of being under constant pressure puts in question the sense of solidarity and cohesion within the group. In the case of Our Stork, this conflict has been resolved by a resource perhaps unique to the Internet: the creation of a semi-separate space where users can be free from peer pressure, where they can challenge the dominant collective identity, and yet can remain a part of the collective, active, so to speak, on shared virtual domain.
The sub-forum examined in the article became a safe space where people who choose not to pursue medical treatment and/or adoption can experience comfort and safety within the community of the infertile, and yet be free from the judgmental remarks of fellow Our Stork members. Sub-forum moderator “yasuko” makes it clear, indeed, that “this is the place where [infertile] people who decide to be childless should be protected from being persuaded to try adoption or another IVF cycle.” Importantly, some of the people who opt out from treatment apparently do not want to opt out of the community. Rather, they want to re-negotiate the terms of belonging. As one woman (“lenox”, who initiated one of the threads on “Conscious childlessness”) puts it, “I want others to respect my decision, my arguments and I want others to admit that my way may also be good, that I can be happy with what I have.” “lenox” wants to be recognized as a legitimate member of the community. Her desire is shared by others who emphasize that they also identify themselves as the infertile, but still want their individual decisions to stop pursuing treatment to be recognized as valid and legitimate. They argue for this not only on an individual but also on a collective level.

According to “yasuko”, such a strategy would ensure wider membership, as well as strengthen in-group solidarity and engagement. “This is why we have this sub-forum, so that the girls [sic!] would not escape, nor disappear from Our Stork, so that they have their own space.”

Notably, while this on-line space is presented as safely free from intervention, it is also under strict supervision. The interactions are controlled by the moderators, some of whom were once engaged in the association but are no longer able or willing to undertake any responsibilities off-line. They have established rather strict rules for the forum users, removing posts which they consider repetitive and/or irrelevant to the thread’s main theme.

General organizational rules are rather strict on what can and cannot be said in specific threads, and it is stressed several times in the Regulations that the users need to be very specific and stick to one issue or theme, posting their opinions in threads devoted to particular issues (e.g. infertility treatments, adoption, men’s infertility or pregnancy after infertility treatments). Already in the second point of the Regulations, the administrator warns the users to “Think of what theme you are going to develop and find the thread that fits best. Any threads that do not fit the main theme will be closed and removed by the moderators.” (sylwia30)

The activists whom I interviewed claim that the moderators of “Conscious childlessness” are correspondingly strict, actively counteracting any attempts at introducing topics which they consider either oppressive or irrelevant. This is confirmed by the warnings posted on the forum. Users are often warned that their freedom to discuss specific topics is limited: “Any posts that include suggestions concerning adoption will be removed” (yasuko). The boundaries of the alternative space are thus patrolled by moderators who act as the gate keepers. These interactions take place in a controlled environment, where power and decision-making
processes are not fully transparent. The gate keepers manage the flow of information by deciding on what is important and what is not, and thus play a key role in the process of negotiating collective identity within the digital community. One of the activists whom I interviewed claimed that such sub-forums become “voluntary ghettos”, where people isolate themselves from the world, seeking instead the company of a selected group of those who have the most comparable experiences and most similar views (see also Allison 2011). Thus, participation in the sub-forum may also be interpreted as a process which undermines solidarity within the larger group, and leads to fragmentation of the movement.

**Boundary Work – From Infertility to Conscious Childlessness**

The sub-forum, thus defined and policed, establishes its own discursive field. The question of what it is exactly that “ails” the infertile is the common topic of discussions here. Most posts concern the definition of infertility and childlessness, the questions of who can belong to the newly created group and what differentiates this group from the rest of the Our Stork community. Instead of stressing infertility as a bodily condition or painful experience (Inhorn & van Balen 2002), the women who initiated the sub-forum propose the counter-notion of “conscious childlessness”. This concept encompasses not only their experience of not being able to have biological offspring, but also their agency in making conscious decisions about infertility treatment and ultimately, their own life. By introducing this notion they implicitly renounce the language of desperation and the hope for a miracle which are often described as characteristic for women undergoing infertility treatment (Franklin 1997: 202; Inhorn & van Balen 2002). They no longer concentrate on their desire for a technological miracle, rather, they stress their agency even when technology fails.

This re-definition of the collective identity of the infertile poses significant challenges. Some Our Stork users doubt whether they can belong to the “Conscious Childlessness” group at all, for they perceive their situation as something beyond their own control, and/or are not able to come to terms with IVF failure:

> Is conscious childlessness the situation when life made that decision, not me? I wanted and still want to have children, but can’t have them, and I don’t want another IVF attempt. I just don’t believe it would work. And adoption? Maybe, I think yes, but my husband doesn’t want that. [...] Is this “conscious childlessness”?? (mija77)

Another example of the challenges involved in the re-negotiation of the meaning of infertility / childlessness is the discussion initiated by user “EWA1794”. This user states “I’ve been living with the awareness that I am childless. Now I have an adopted son.” (EWA1794). Such posts are, in fact, emphatically not welcomed on the sub-forum, and the moderator reacted immediately:

> We are focusing on childlessness, which was consciously chosen as a way to escape the viscous circle of infertility. This is childlessness, which is based on coming to
terms with our fate, childlessness which does not hurt and does not cause this sad face, which you placed in your post😊 (yasuko)

In her post, “yasuko” objects to the idea that being infertile involves a failure of agency. She counters with the vision of conscious childlessness as a decision, an identity which offers “a way out” of the vicious circle of guilt and anger.

The affirmation of certain emotional attitudes towards one’s condition – most particularly, acknowledgment of the members’ inability to be happy as infertile persons – constitutes an important part of the larger Our Stork community’s identity work. This identity work confirms “infertility” as a core, and sorrowful, element of one’s perception of the self. Such an assumption is challenged by “Conscious Childlessness” initiators, who stress the difference between being “happy despite of one’s childlessness” and being “happy as a person who is – among other characteristics – also infertile and childless”. Users, such as “yasuko”, stress people’s agency, the desire to have children need not be a determining, essential, or even enduring aspect of one’s identity:

Me and my husband made the decision to end treatment and stop trying to have a child 12 years ago. We are happy not “despite of,” we are just normally happy. I didn’t have a child before, I didn’t try to have one and I was happy, why should I stop being happy when my attempts failed? (yasuko)

She and other users insist on interpreting infertility as one of life’s many experiences, not necessarily the constitutive one. This opens up a different temporal perspective. Most importantly, it challenges the collective identity endorsed by Our Stork, that of people who are allies because of their status as patients, bonded by their common hope for successful treatment.

This analysis of the discussion on “Conscious Childlessness” provokes a question: why do some people stay active on the Our Stork portal when they no longer identify themselves as patients and reject the culture of “fighting for a child”? “yasuko”, for instance, has stopped treatments long ago, yet she remains involved, and helps manage the forum. Others, such as “bloo”, left the forum after adopting a child, but came back after several years and have remained active members ever since. We return here, in fact, to Throsby’s conceptualization of the post-IVF experiences as an ambiguous location between “often contradictory norms of gender, technology and the reproductive body” (Throsby 2006: 83). Those who, however unsuccessfully, attempted pregnancy through IVF treatment have “technologized” the reproductive process, and thus placed themselves outside the "biological" mainstream; in Poland, indeed, this has involved withstanding a public polemic about being egoistic and godless. And yet, as Throsby puts it, these people have no baby with which to “counterbalance anxieties about the technological corruption of the natural order” (Throsby 2006: 83). The failure of IVF requires a fundamental reinterpretation of one’s goals and desires – yet again.

It is a process based on experiences and emotions related to “grappling with” or “fighting” infertility, but in which the meaning and emotional significance of
these experiences are redefined. As a result, although the inability to have biological children is no longer the center of one’s self-identification, one is different nonetheless. He or she becomes someone who has undergone unsuccessful IVF treatment.

This process of choosing to end attempts to get a child also requires a shift in collective identity. Many Our Stork members who decided to stop treatments understand and have shared the experience and desires of other infertile persons, and can, to some extent, still identify with them. This produces a deep emotional commitment, a sense of solidarity – the affective bonds which motivate long-term participation (Polletta & Jasper 2001). At the same time, ending the treatment endangers the collective sense of solidarity, challenging the conviction that infertile share the same goals and fight for common interests. Such decisions symbolically undermine the efforts of others who keep investing their emotions, health and money in “the fight for a child”. Thus, the terms of belonging have to be re-negotiated. Arguably, the engagement of people such as “yasuko” and others attests to the power of collective identity. Even when challenged and re-defined, it remains an important basis for personal engagement.

Conclusions

The case of the “Conscious Childlessness” sub-forum confirms the view that the identity a group projects publicly is not necessarily the same one its members experience (Polletta & Jasper 2001). Some members of Our Stork resisted the idea that what bonds people experiencing infertility is, first and foremost, their status as patients and the desire to become a biological parent. They started to contest the organizationally generated action frames and proposed a different way of framing infertility, coining the notion of “conscious childlessness”. The article has discussed how borders are established between different sub-groups within the digital community, and how this process involves producing novel form of identity, based on what Throsby (2006) interprets as “socially legitimized childlessness”. Throsby points out that the amount of energy, time and effort invested in the fight for a child is supposed to legitimize technological interventions, as in the context of IVF reproductive belonging is rewritten [...] as defined not by actual reproduction, but by the desire and the intention to reproduce; it is having tried [...] that produces the socially-legitimized post-IVF body (85)

“Having tried” and having invested a lot in the process of becoming a parent is something that unites the group. The analysis of the Our Stork sub-forum suggests, however, that in the context of social activism people may want to distance themselves from “the desire and the intention to reproduce” imposed upon them by others, and seek a new form of socially legitimized childlessness. “Conscious Childlessness” becomes an identity which is related to the experience of strug-
gling with infertility, but which involves a re-definition of the emotional, cognitive and temporal aspects of this process – from the past to the present, from desperation to hope, from being focused on infertility to concentrating on other aspects of one’s life.

This analysis demonstrates that boundary work serves different goals than what is often assumed in social movement literature. It not only allows for separating “us” from “them”, and for strengthening the engagement of a core group of most committed activists, but also helps to bridge the differences in emotions and self-identification, and to keep people involved when interests and needs diverge. I found this was accomplished through a process that involved (1) identifying the elements of the dominant identity that did not fit the experiences and needs of some members of the group, (2) strategic deployment of emotions aroused by being oppressed and excluded by the group, (3) constructing an alternative collective identity, and (4) establishing a semi-separate space with well-guarded borders while remaining connected to the larger community via other threads and sub-forums. Thus, boundary work enables people to challenge the official identity that the group promulgates from within, without having to abjure the group altogether. In carefully gated sub-groups people can voice desires, emotions and interests which are not shared by the majority. This helps them to feel safe and accepted, among “others who are like me”. At the same time, the fact that this takes place in a relatively isolated space within, and not outside the community, allows them to remain a part of a larger group – the infertile. This provides room for communication and negotiation, and, moreover, enhances their ability to influence the public discourse on infertility.

The technology used, the Internet, arguably has been key to this process. The “Conscious Childlessness” sub-forum is a relatively isolated, autonomous space, yet at the same time connected to other sub-forums and the on-line community of the infertile as a whole. The technology which allows the creation of such “safe havens” enables group members to cope with differences in goals and interests by offering different levels of proximity and communication. The medium provides people the opportunity to act on the fragmented nature of human identity.

These findings dovetail with Bennett and Segerberg’s (2012) suggestion that the ways in which social movements construct and promulgate collective identity changes with technological development. In some respects the Our Stork forum fits the second model, which they termed “organizationally enabled networks”, because the organization provides a social technology outlay and a loose coordination of actions. At the same time, the communication content on-line centers on personal expressions rather than organizationally generated action frames, and most members of the collectivity shun involvement in Our Stork’s parallel formal organization, which is characteristic of self-organizing networks. The sub-forum’s heavy-handed moderation, in turn, is characteristic of organizationally brokered networks, as opposed to networks based on a logic of connective action. This
shows that tools and modes of action which we associate with specific organizational types, e.g. the high level of control associated with hierarchical organizations, may also be used by groups which are structured differently, or by individuals who are not necessarily recognized as leaders. This hybridity suggests that certain conceptual tools, e.g. the differentiation between social movement lay members and social-movement organization (SMO), may not be as useful in the case of on-line activism.

This insight raises further questions, in turn, concerning the mechanisms of control which influence the process of establishing the personal action frames, and consequently, an eclectic type of collective identity. The fact that these frames are produced by lay members, not the representatives of an organization, does not mean that all have access to creating the content. In the case of Our Stork, which in many respects functions similar to the self-organizing networks that follow the logic of connective action, the communication content centers on personal action frames which are primarily ramified by the moderators. This confirms the fact that if we wish to understand the interplay between technology and collective action, we should move from a generalized discussion of how the Internet influences social movements to the specificities of different processes and types of interaction on Internet sites.

The question as to the probable success of a minority’s attempts to challenge the dominant collective identity of a larger community is an open one. But even if such attempts fail, boundary work within the movement has positive outcomes. Our Stork forum users can be interpreted as using a strategy which enables those who feel that their self-identification and interests cannot be accommodated within the dominant group identity to remain engaged. The notion of “conscious childlessness” facilitates alliances between different groups, for it encompasses various categories of people, e.g. those who are infertile and are undergoing treatment (or not); those who had to stop treatment but did not give up hope; and those who refuse to engage in assisted technology even though they did not manage to become parents. Also it highlights people’s agency and ability to make sense of difficult experiences, which may be an incentive to mobilize. Nevertheless, the challenge of mobilizing in the Polish cultural and political context, where women’s reproductive choices are severely limited and reproductive rights are marginalized in public discourse, remains enormous.

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Notes
1 A comprehensive list of such groups and networks can be found at the Internet site of Infertility Network UK: http://www.infertilitynetworkuk.com/?id=502
2 The main criteria concern age and medical records stating that IVF is recommended by doctors. See also http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/10/22/us-poland-fertility-idUSBRE89L1BJ20121022
3 The project entitled ‘We are not second-rate quality citizens’. Negotiating biological citizenship in social mobilizations around infertility issues and access to in vitro in Poland has been funded by the Foundation for Baltic and East European Studies 1555/42/2011. This article has been read and commented upon by people I would like to thank for their comments and suggestions. This includes Kerstin Jacobsson, anonymous reviewers, the members of the social movements seminar at University of Gothenburg (especially Abby Peterson), and last but not least, Madeleine Hurd who has been a dedicated editor of this special issue.
4 This text and my chapter “’Those who are almost full would never understand the hungry’. Negotiating collective identity in social activism around infertility in Poland” in The Identity Dilemma (eds A. McGarry and J. Jasper), should if possible be read in relation to each other. They cover some common ground concerning the construction of collective identity based on infertility but develop different aspects of this process. While in the latter I analyze social activism concerning infertility and assisted reproductive technologies in relation to social, cultural and political context of contemporary Poland, in the present article I focus specifically on boundary work employed by the people who did not manage to become biological parents via ART, but who are still engaged in the on-line community of the infertile.
5 The association has been established in 2002. Today it has around 60 members, but only a few are active on a daily basis.
6 Our Stork is a small-scale national mobilization, which does not address highly contentious political issues such as globalization or environmental effects of economic development. Another difference concerns the fact that Bennett and Segerberg (2012) analyze the cases, where activists used many different ICTs, e.g. Twitter, Facebook or mailing lists, while in the present text I focus mostly on just one communication platform – the Internet forum, which places specific limitations on the types of actions that can be undertaken via technology. However, the association has also a Facebook profile and this digital technology works differently than the forum - it is more interactive, engages people more and thus is a much better platform for promulgating political views and potentially contentious opinions.
7 All the quotes from Internet forum has been translated by the author.
8 The issue of adoption is also controversial, as many opponents of IVF claim that people who are infertile should adopt “poor, abandoned children” rather than attempt at having a biological offspring themselves, at the expense of fellow citizens. Sometimes, this is also a source of conflict for the users of Our Stork forum, as for some people who happen to have problems with fertility it is one of acceptable options, while others do not want to adopt a child, even if IVF fails. The representatives of the Association often stress that they represent also people
who adopted or want to adopt a child, and that ART are not the only way out from involuntary childlessness, but most their activities center around access to ART.

While in English there is a difference between being “childless” and “childfree”, no such distinction exists in Polish.

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Abstract
The goal of this article is to explore the website communication of urban activist gardeners by focusing on the concept of ritual as a heuristic category. In contrast to the majority of those doing research on ritual, I use a systems-theoretical approach in applying the concept of ritual to communication processes. I explore the role played by ritual in communication in order to answer questions such as, “What is specifically unique about the ritual mode of communicating?” and, following from this, “What function do these rituals serve in communication?” My subject, urban garden activism, is thus addressed from the perspective of media- and communication research.

First, I briefly describe urban activist gardening and how communication is usually structured on their websites. Second, I present an outline of some theories and concepts of communication and ritual within media studies, and give a brief account of the systems-theoretical approach that I use. Third, I define some areas of ritual – that is, ritualized patterns of communication found in the urban activist gardeners’ empirical material – so as to provide answers regarding the means and function of ritual in communication.

Keywords: Ritual, communication, systems theory, urban activist gardening
Urban Garden Activism

Oooh, that was so beautiiiiiiifuuul. We sowed peppers, cauliflower, broccoli, cabbage, kohlrabi, corn and celery. [...] Therefore 50 people came with planting bowls, soil donations & bottled water and became godparents for our seeds. Thanks to all for this!!!! (March, 6th 2012 www.opflanztis.wordpress.com/).

This quote is one of several entries on blogs and homepages which emphasize the great pleasure of doing collective gardening in urban areas. Urban activist gardening is practiced in almost all cities in the world, and can take many forms. In general, it involves the temporary transformation of vacant construction sites – such as wasteland, abandoned car parks and vacant rooftops – into urban farmland and green meeting places. In recent years, the guerilla garden movement has appeared as a kind of an ad hoc transformation of wasteland or neglected areas (McKay 2011: 157), which can involve cultivation of tree pits, or moss graffiti on rocks, logs, pots or statuary. It is a special form of activist gardening, namely “the illicit cultivation of someone else’s land” (Richard Reynolds, cit. in McKay 2011: 183). In contrast to community gardens, guerilla gardening takes the form of “the overnight transformation of a neglected patch, or the sprinkling of seeds on waste ground for a subsequent seasonal surprise, without permission” (McKay 2011: 184). Here, doing gardening without permission has its own attraction. It is the attraction of constantly available cracks, spaces and even wasteland that can be transformed into green oases.

This apparently singular movement of urban gardening has a long history. Its roots can be found in the allotment movement for the urban working class. It expresses a general “critique of private property interwoven with a statement of communal interest, mutual aid and cooperation” (McKay 2011: 155). The community garden movement began in the early 1970s in the USA, in cities such as New York. Gardening was done in vacant lots, or on land that was considered to be neglected or abandoned by its legal owners. In Germany, the engagement in urban alternative forms of farming is associated with the rise of the environmental movement in the eighties (Rosol 2006), when the first urban community gardens appeared. In Sweden, community gardening is relatively new, having its beginning in the early 21st century, when the discussion of climate change gained momentum (Larsson 2009: 13). Some of these gardening movements belong to the European network “Reclaim the Fields”, which was founded by young people in 2007 in connection with the anti-G8 mobilization in Rostock (Germany) in an effort to introduce new ways of farming (www.reclaimthefields.org).

The gardening movements are often driven by a group of activists and visionaries who share a passion for turning neglected spaces into vibrant gardens or green spaces, and who take direct action in order to transform land. These movements express the rise of eco-consciousness in urban areas, and express a desire for sociality in the neighborhood, as well as pleasure in doing physical work. Concurrently, the green space of the garden and the common act of gardening are
symbolic, and address “a multitude of contemporary questions such as access to, and ownership of, land, food production and consumption, biotechnology, the environment, sustainability, slowness and modernity, grassroots politics and empowerment” (McKay 2011: 192). They stand for an anti-capitalist orientation aimed at mobilizing alternatives and questioning consumer lifestyles in the industrial cities.

If the actions of transforming land were not communicated, we would know nothing about these movements. We might have noticed some transformed tree pits or vegetables planted in flower pots, but without therefore associating them with a global movement or placing them in a wider context. The theoretical approach of Niklas Luhmann effectively shows the importance of communication:

Fish may die or human beings; it may cause illness to swim in lakes and rivers; no more oil may come from the pumps; and average temperatures may rise or fall, but as long as this is not communicated it does not have any effect on society (Luhmann 2008: 41).

These remarks express the late-modern tenet that “communication became the basic concept for describing the most elementary units of social life” (Thomas 2006: 322), and that therefore human behavior and attitudes towards the natural world are mediated by communication (and not by action).

To reduce communication to action, as many scholars do (e.g. Habermas 1987), does not suffice to adequately describe a social phenomenon. Action, which is connected to an agent, can also take place when nobody is watching, or when there is nobody there to react to this action. Luhmann gives the example of brushing one’s teeth, which one does for oneself, knowing that it ought to be done. He concludes: “However, in principle, action can be conceived of as a solitary, individual operation that has no social resonance” (Luhmann 2013: 54). The concept of communication, however, is specifically tailored for sociality: At least one person has to react if we speak of communication as a social phenomenon (otherwise we are faced merely with information transmission). In this sense, I want to apply the concept of ritual to communication processes, rather than reduce it to action, since actions must be communicated if they are to become visible to society. In this sense, I also want to incorporate the concept of ritual in communication, and not reduce it to action. This may seem a bit unusual, as ritual traditionally is associated with action, but the approach has a tradition; it was developed already during the seventies by Roy Rappaport (e.g. 1971, see Thomas 2006: 327). In the following section I want to give a brief overview of how communication and ritual is discussed within media and communication research.

The Concept of Communication and Ritual

Within media and communication studies, the concept of ritual has widely been used to examine various forms of media production, texts and audiences. We may
begin with Carey’s model of communication as ritual from 1975 (Carey 1975; see Thomas 1998: 146ff). In his article “A cultural approach to communication”, he contrasts his view of communication as ritual with the common view of communication as transmission. Carey claims that the deeply rooted view of communication as transmission originated in religion, since the moral motives behind the age of exploration and discovery were actually religious – that is, to establish and extend the “Kingdom of God”. The same applies to communication technologies such as the telegraph, which was seen as an ideal device for spreading Christian messages (Carey 1975: 3). Consequently, he goes back to the roots of commonness and community, and offers a ritual definition of communication which “is linked to terms such as sharing, participation, association, fellowship, and the possession of a common faith” (Carey 1975: 6). Thereby, he indicates the social role of communication, in that messages can only fulfill their function when they communicate shared beliefs. This means that society becomes possible because of the reproduction of common symbolic forms of reality. According to Carey, communication serves the purpose of constructing and maintaining “an ordered meaningful cultural world which can serve as a control and container for human action” (Carey 1975: 6). He understands communication as a process of commonness, that is, of common beliefs, agreement and like-mindedness. However, he ignores processes of plurality, unfamiliarity, strangeness, otherness, etc. His harmonizing, normative view of communication becomes problematic when he claims that communication strengthens social bonds. There are many examples, in the past and present, of the opposite being the fact.

The Durkheimian view of rituals – that is, as holding together society – is still paradigmatic in media and communication research. A great deal of research is therefore focused on the impact of media rituals. Scholars such as Schudson (1986) are convinced that media serves a religious function in a secular society, since mass media has become the only social institution that strengthens the feeling of togetherness. However, Alexander (1981) notes that the impact of media rituals is less certain and determined than were religious rituals, and he therefore does not follow a naive Durkheimian application. However, Alexander notes that in contrast to the religious rites of pre-modern societies, the impact of media rituals is uncertain and undetermined. Alexander thus rejects a naive Durkheimian approach. According to Alexander, media rituals are a sort of horizon of understanding, to which the audience can relate (Thomas 1998: 169). Couldry (2003) also tries to avoid a Durkheimian reading, by focusing on transcendent values produced through media rituals. He defines media rituals as “formalized actions organized around key media-related categories and boundaries, whose performance frames, or suggests a connection with, wider media-related values” (Couldry 2003: 29). These rituals are formalized actions. They include the changed behavior shown by people who are being e.g. filmed or photographed, a change determined by the “ritual nature of the studio situation” (Couldry 2003: 126) – that
is, when media or media celebrities are present. Hence, his approach also deals with media’s impact on humans and society, but with special focus on media power. In his own words, he tries to shift “the emphasis in ritual analysis away from questions of meaning to questions of power”, that is, the media’s power to “influence the representation of social ‘reality’” (Couldry 2003: 12, 19). He assumes that there is a special media logic which changes action into ritualized behavior, and which is determined by the media. However, he mentions various forms of media behavior only casually. These find no place within his model, which is a weakness of his approach.

However, my approach is not to address the manner in which ritual interacts with the recipients, or how media, including the internet, interacts with the users according to ritualized forms of communication. Rather, I wish to examine how rituals are used in communication, specifically in websites, as a means of handling the complexity of communication.

The Systems-Theoretical Approach to Ritual in Communication

In order to make my point of departure clear, I must explain the systems-theoretical approach to communication. Luhmann’s conception of communication departs from the phenomenological tradition that emphasizes selectivity. Communication is the union of three selections: information, utterance and understanding (Luhmann 2013: 212ff). Information is – in line with its standard definition of Shannon & Weaver (1949) – a selection from a repertoire of possibilities. It is a selection meant to communicate this and not other information, in short: what the message is about. Utterance is the selection of a form of communication, or in other words: how the information is to be communicated. In face-to-face communication, you can whisper or shout information, in website communication you can choose the form of language, you can make your information visible with the aid of images, and you can add films etc. Understanding is simply about reaction, and the meaning that is generated: is the/a meaning selected, if yes which one?

Here, understanding is not a psychological concept. It is not concerned with understanding rightly or wrongly. It is not concerned with what a message, or the author behind the message, really means. Here, Luhmann also abandons the concept of doubling meaning intended by the sender. One is tempted to imagine that the information transferred is the same for both sender and receiver. However, it sometimes looks as if this identity is determined, rather, by the quality of the information. The systems-theoretical perspective states that meaning is only constituted in the communication process, not by the message as such. The identity of the information must also be thought of as something that can mean very different things to the sender and the receiver (Luhmann 1987: 193-4). It is only in the connecting communication that it becomes clear how the difference between information and utterance has been understood.
This communicative approach differs from the framing theories that have become popular within media research, especially in the fields of news media (Mc Quail 2005: 378) and social movement research (e.g. Johnston & Noakes 2000). Here, as well, the issue is information selection and forms of information expressions, as well as information effects. However, highlighting components can be added by considering the “bias” and “angle” of a message, especially when it aims at studying the effect of a communicative strategy (such as that of activist groups). According to the frequently quoted scholar Robert Entman,

[to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation (Entman 1993: 52).

Frames as schemas for interpretation add a special story line to information such as to “define problems”, to “diagnose causes”, “make moral judgments” and to “suggest remedies”. As such, they serve as guidelines for “receiver’s thinking” (Entman 1993: 52). According to Entman, it is about the power of a text: It is assumed that a certain frame, a highlighted piece of information, would cause a certain meaning according to the intention of a text.

Here, we can see the problem entailed in this approach: it overemphasizes the quality of a message, and does not consider the contingency and, hence, complexity of communication. From a phenomenological point of view, a highlighted piece of information has no power as such. The power and influence of a text is constructed in a dynamic communication process and therefore uncertain. In line with systems theories, frames such as rituals can only be understood as a horizon of understanding, and they serve the purpose of reducing uncertainty in communication processes, as explained below. In this sense, frames have a relational value: they serve to support meaning production (or not) on both sides (sender and receiver). They help make sense of events and to communicate them as a story line by highlighting something and darkening something else. In times of surplus of communication, e.g., offered via Internet, there is a risk of not reaching recipients. In order to gain attention, frames support organizing events and, hence, a schema for understanding.

However, frames do not guarantee success, success of communication here meaning that recipients take the communicated information as a premise for their own actions and meaning production (Luhmann 1987: 218). Given the separate-ness and individuality of human consciousness, that is, given the mutual opacity of human minds – it is by no means self-evident that one person understands what another person says – as mentioned above. Meaning can only be understood in a context, and context is what ones consciousness and perception contributes to the meaning produced (Luhmann 1987: 217).

As mentioned above, the success of communication is uncertain and the process of understanding, in particular, becomes highly indeterminate when a larger
group is addressed. Here, rituals, as frames, can fulfill an important function: According to Thomas (2006), risks are improbabilities of communication which can be changed into probabilities through the cultural form of “ritual, even though ritual is not the sole form” (Thomas 2006: 331).

According to Luhmann, rituals function as an internal communication schema (Luhmann 1987) within communication systems, and deploy the strategy of supporting coordinated understanding. They are structured in such a way that they appear to provide no major alternative when it comes to information, utterance and understanding; that is, they reduce the selection possibilities and therefore facilitate the process of recognition. It is scholarly common sense that rituals represent a code for a limited communication without an alternative (Luhmann 1987: 613). It means that a special kind of information and utterance are transmitted in order to enhance the recognizability of the posted information/image, and finally to gain attention from a desired group of people. In Thomas’ words, “Preformed and more-less fixed sequences of utterances eliminate the contingency of the selection in understanding […] No misunderstanding can disturb the proceedings” (Thomas 2006: 333). In order to reach the intended recipients, rituals are also used for attracting people by “drawing the people to the message” (Thomas 2006: 335) instead of merely offering messages.

Rituals, here, have the capacity of marking out a difference in communication by attraction. Reference to this notion can be found in Douglas’s early discussion of rituals that focus attention and hence direct perception (Douglas 1966). In line with this approach, rituals can be described as special, presupposed frames for managing attention, and also perception. This is different to the above-mentioned framing theories, as the uttered information says more about how the activist group wants to be recognized (and what they think will attract their audience) and less about how the messages are understood and how they influence others.

What is not ritualized communication in this sense? From the observational point of view, we cannot draw a distinction between ritual and everyday life as many scholars do (e.g. Couldry 2003). We must approach the question from the perspective of the complex process of communication. Communication is connected to expectations (e.g., what is and is not expected of a website communication) as well as selections made from a reservoir of information and utterance possibilities. These selections are made with the help of what can be described as a “synthesis of a plurality of possibilities” (Luhmann 1987: 405). They regulate communication or, in other words, to create a kind of expected order. Rituals, thus, greatly support “coordinated understandings” by bypassing reflexive communication (Thomas 2006: 333). Hence, ritual and non-ritual communication can be distinguished by their relative degrees of indeterminacy.

To summarize, how can we describe these forms of ritual in website communication? These forms of ritual are characterized by a prefigured stream of website entries, which are “more or less fixed” (Thomas 2006: 333), and are characterized
by their repetitive character. The website entries communicate transcendent values and metaphors. Rituals in communication can be applied to verbal entries as well as to images, as I will illustrate with examples below.

**Communicating Urban Gardening Concepts**

Communication can take many forms. It may take place as face-to-face communication, as a direct way of addressing people, but it can also be mediated, that is, disseminated through brochures, policy papers, posters, flyers etc., particularly through mass media (the topic of urban gardening has received some media attention), and on Internet homepages etc., which is my field of study. Websites can be characterized as self-descriptions which relate to multiple environments: metacomunicative utterances directed both toward their own group and toward the public. Through their various pages, websites structure communication, and hence offer a social dimension (links to other sides, discussion possibility), as well as a topical (treated themes) and time dimension (time line). In this article, the focus lies on the topical dimension, which shows the group’s constructions of reality.

The activist gardeners’ communications studied here include fifteen German and five Swedish activist gardening websites/blogs as well as five individual English-language guerilla gardening blogs. All are open to the public and updated fairly regularly. The entries analyzed were mainly posted between 2011 and 2012. We should distinguish between blogs and websites. Some websites have their own blogs, where in a diary form, with the latest entry being on top, gardening activities and connected events are communicated, and possibilities for comments are provided. All websites studied here have an “About us” page, some have an archive, a page with planting and harvest information, a calendar, and a special page for images, as well as links to other activist groups and information about gardening etc. Some websites offer debate forum, where connecting communication takes place. Access to these is often limited to subscribers.

Using the systems-theoretical approach to communication, I explore how activist gardeners communicate their messages on their websites. Which information (topics) and forms of utterances (entries) are selected? By looking at entries or comments that refer to earlier entries, I can see how the difference between information and utterance has been understood. The almost complete lack of comments on various entries has kept me from exploring the process of understanding. Instead, I focus on entries’ topics and forms – that is, how they are posted from the angle of ritual.

In order to understand the topical context, I briefly describe the groups’ points of departure as expressed in their “About us” pages. A comparison of a number of “About us” pages shows that the activist gardeners, to a large degree, have followed a communicative frame that we recognize from social movement research. There are certain recurring “master frames”. One begins with the postulation of a
problem, the “diagnostic framing” (Benford & Snow 2000: 615). For example, we are informed that urbanites face a wide range of ecological problems which challenge modern life. More concretely, the German non-profit organization “Nomadisch Grün” [Nomadic Green], which organizes the inner-city community garden “Prinzessinnengärten” [Princess garden] in Berlin, explains that these problems stem from modern society’s emphasis on consumption at the expense of nature (www.prinzessinnengarten.net). The Swedish network Mykorrhiza [Mycorrhiza] also highlights the ecological problems caused by the modern lifestyle and “unsustainable methods in farming” (www.mykorrhiza.se). Another group, the Stockholm based network “Tillväxt” [Growth] blames the politicians who do not react to these problems, and therefore, are a part of the problem:

The politicians have not understood that the cities of the future must produce more or less most of their own food, and not be dependent on oil, transport, meat from and land in other countries (www.tillväxt.org).

Some homepages highlight the social relevance of the problem in order to place the movement in a larger context and thus appeal to everyone: It is not only an issue for gardeners but also for the entire city. For example, we can read on the homepage of Prinzessinnengärten in Berlin: “The city of the future should be a climate-friendly, pleasant place to live, where every care is taken to conserve our natural resources” (www.prinzessinnengarten.net). The Swedish network Mykorrhiza goes further in its argumentation, by including the living conditions of all people in the world: “This contributes in turn to the destruction of the environment and suffering of people around the world” (www.mykorrhiza.se).

Finally, a solution is offered through an “action mobilization” frame (see Bender & Snow 2000: 615) which explains what can be done and why it is worthwhile to participate or to support the activists: It is about sustainable gardening and living in urban areas. For example, The German group Nomadisch Grün offers a site with the motto: “Eine andere Welt ist pflanzbar” [Another world is plantable]:

Prinzessinnengärten is a new urban place of learning. It is where locals can come together to experiment and discover more about organic food production, biodiversity and climate protection. The space will help them adapt to climate change and learn about healthy eating, sustainable living and a future-oriented urban lifestyle. With this project Nomadisch Grün intends to increase biological, social and cultural diversity in the neighborhood and pioneer a new way of living together in the city (www.prinzessinnengarten.net).

The motivational frame of the Swedish network Mykorrhiza is more hands-on, offering the following solution: “What is needed is more small-scale farmers, and our aim is to inspire and help those who want to run small-scale organic farms, live in a more self-sufficient way or grow crops in the city” (www.mykorrhiza.se). The same goes for the Stockholm-based group Tillväxt, according to which “There is only one [type of] sustainable growth, and it is organic, biological
growth.” In concrete terms, we can read: “We are planting edible plants in Stockholm” (www.tillväxt.org). In other words, we can take direct action to change our life style by cultivating our own food.

Looking at individual blogs, and exploring the reasons for activist gardening, we can find more personal motivations. Take the example of one guerilla gardener: He has neither garden nor allotment, but he loves gardening, so he does it on “neglected traffic islands and tree pits near me” (www.pimpyourpavement.wordpress.com). For him, these neglected places offer important possibilities for recreational gardening, and simultaneously they fulfill a political function. He concludes that “we can make a very tangible and welcoming contribution to improving our local environment, both ecologically and socially” (www.pimpyourpavement.wordpress.com).

The communication of these above-mentioned concepts, aided by a clearly defined frame of argumentation and often illustrated by photos, serves to define the identity of the group or the individual and thus attract the “right” people. That means that the text turns, primarily, to those who already share these ideas and are open these arguments. The self-descriptions on the “About us” pages are not, thus, meant to convince people hostile to gardening in urban areas. Nevertheless, they function as a kind of relation management in the communication process. For instance, they simplify the complex realities of food production, thus inviting communication and, eventually, guiding towards joint action.

These “About us” pages should, thus, probably be characterized as frames rather than ritual communication. They are strategic, insofar as they are meant to help one understand the websites’ topics of communication. They are not meant to draw people to the message. They are a customary way of presenting the group and its goals. In short, they are not ritual as such. However, within them, we can find patterns of communication which I want to mark as ritual.

The Form of Ritual

In the next section, I take a closer look at examples which I define as ritual in communication. These include preformed and fixed repeated pattern of entries on websites as well as the transcendent values communicated on websites.

Preformed and Fixed Patterns of Utterances

A repeatedly used pattern of urban garden activist communication is the past-and-present narrative. Where an action takes place, that is, a neglected area of a city is being transformed, images of “then and now” or “before and after” are often used in the communication. Utterances such as: “Previously, it was a dog toilet. Now it is a flourishing tree pit with sun flowers”, or, “previously it was wasteland and now a green oasis” are following a script that conforms to what Bird (1995: 27) describes as ritual action of successfully transforming and ordering nature. Those
statements are clear, and coordinated understanding can be expected. Often, the post has images illustrating and confirming this transformation, the functioning as physical evidence of the claims. It is almost impossible to misinterpret the message. Whether you like the transformation or not is another question. Retelling this over and over again is done more often on guerilla garden web sites than on websites involving community gardens, since guerilla gardeners deal with an over-night transformation of neglected areas, and retelling tends to reinforce a belief in the absolute necessity of change.

As an example, I want to further explore the website of the community garden in Berlin, Die Prinzessinnengärten. This garden, located in the city center of Berlin, is a mobile growing space, and the plants are in containers that can easily be wheeled around within and beyond the garden. The garden is also host to a series of activities. On their “About us” page, the activists narrate a transformation story in a condensed manner with the help of two photos:

Where there was, before, a wasteland or wilderness, we now see a well-arranged, civilized green oasis. It is a garden in the inner city, where a multitude of vegetables and fruits grow.

The application of semiotics, that is, the arrangement of signs, uses a “then and now” ritual. It follows its own logic in the activist gardeners’ communications. First, there is the logic of sequentaility. The signs follow the temporal order of ‘before it was this, after it is that’. Second, this sequentiality recurs regularly. It is a normal practice, a more or less stable sequence of utterances on various activist gardeners’ websites. Because this ritual uses the fixed arrangement of ‘then and now’, it is related to what Merchant (2004: 205)
terms the Recovery Narrative – that is, the account of efforts to create order out of a chaotic wild nature. It, therefore, unfolds its own dynamic, and, probably, efficacy.

This recurring website pattern shows, further, that activist gardeners’ actions are causally related to the specificity of the place: the place conditions (but does not determine) their actions in some manner. The “then and now” narrative follows a pattern of successful transformation of a given place in the face of harsh conditions. Nature is the main character in this ritual script. It vitalizes memory by linking the present to the past. It facilitates recognition and understanding in the communication processes, and therefore minimizes contingency – that is, uncertainty about how the message is or will be perceived. In the process, it may shape the public’s perception to some degree. It may also limit the public’s interpretative choices to either judging the transformation favorably or questioning whether it is worthwhile or desirable (for example from an ecological point of view). Rituals reduce the reservoir of interpretive alternatives. However, they cannot altogether eliminate the contingent character of communication.

In order to qualify as rituals, our descriptions of beautiful gardens must entail the expression of “something more”. Ritual reveals the group’s own visions and convictions: it expresses the group’s norms and facilitates further communication. The normative distinction between “what is” and “what could be” the case is activated. In other words, this narrative emphasizes how things ought to be: Tree pits ought to be used for flowers and not for dogs. Wasteland should be used for cultivation. Many features of environmental communication address the gap between the “indicative” and the “subjunctive” (cit. Turner in Szerszynski 2002: 56).

**Values: The Garden of Eden Trope**

In the following examples, I will focus on the figurative side of ritual in communication. In this context I will refer to a slideshow that appears every year on the homepage of Prinzessinnengärten in Berlin and which serves the purpose of documenting and summarizing garden life for the public. This slideshow functions as a means of visually taking part in the annual actions of the activist group. It serves to promote the cohesion of its own group, and to gain attention from the recipients, and eventually to recruit new participants.

What kind of reality is constructed in these images and which symbolic rituals are used to support understanding? This reality is based on some common principles that allow communication to connect with tropes that will be recognized by the recipients.

The slideshow “garden season 2011” ([www.flickr.com](http://www.flickr.com)) consists of 22 photos. Only four of these show garden produce and beautiful flowers; the majority portrays people working or socializing in the garden. The gardeners are the main characters, and the garden is a kind of *mise en scène*. The atmospheric fashioning of the scene is constructed through beautiful flowers, healthy edible plants, tomato
plants supported by a string construction, a bunch of fresh carrots. The gardeners are favorably portrayed, and make statements about how they interact with nature. The images of these gardeners show a new category of people, who invent new forms of gardening in the inner-city. They have access to nature and wildlife. Here, nature is not an exclusive property, opportunities for intimate experiences are around the corner. This experience contrasts with that of most citizens, who experience “nature as a great distance, if at all, from places next to the road marked with a sign showing the image of a camera” (Bergman 1996: 295-296).

The security of recognition is generated by the tropes “garden” and “gardening”. In Western Christian culture, the garden is rich in symbols and values, and has both a spiritual and a physical dimension. It refers to a discourse in which the garden is a vital symbol “of a moral society living in ‘natural’ social and environmental harmony” (Olwig 1995: 384). According to Merchant, the “Garden of Eden” trope is among the most powerful of Western narratives. “The recovery story begins with the fall from the garden into the desert”. The desert, here, is the city or the wasteland. This entailed the “loss of an original partnership with the land”. But the city garden moves us “upward to the re-creation of Eden” (Merchant 2004: 18). Nadel-Klein concludes that all modern gardeners are “engaged in recapturing Eden, if only in a limited way, and some more explicitly than others” (Nadel-Klein 2010: 167). Recovering nature and creating a kitchen garden are “experienced as antidotes to civilization”. In the case of the urban community garden, nature “becomes a retreat from capitalist production” (Merchant 2004: 119). Cultivation takes place in small containers; all is handmade. It represents a resistance to the industrial production of food. Images of crops and tasty dishes talk of a successful garden season. This implies a normative framework: gardening is predicated as “good” and rewarding.

The “Garden of Eden” trope tells us that we can regain Eden if we work for it (Merchant 2004: 39). This involves bodies. Gardeners’ bodies become a medium of communication. In ritual theory, the body is an indexical sign of performers’ relationship with the order they refer to, and, in this case with the order of seasonal performance. In other words, rituals of knowing, arising from gardening, give the security of expectations concerning what gardening is about. The bodies are in motion and repeat the act of creation: they are digging the soil, alone or together, they are holding a water hose in order to water seedlings, lending a helping hand to support tomato plants, and sitting down for dinner at a long table with peers. The slideshow constructs the bodily engagement of the participants as ritual events: the body is shown doing hard work, performing simple tasks, and finally relaxing and socializing. As is often the case, the most important function of this ritual is to express a corporate group feeling: The active individual is part of the community in body and spirit.

The garden and the gardening activity are also seen as reservoirs of ecological knowledge and social practice: the garden is a place of learning. Here knowledge
passes from one generation to another, from expert to a layman. Children and adults watch a bee colony, and learn about the social behavior of honey bees. Showing a seed-pod, an adult presumably explains germination to a group of children, who are listening and watching attentively. Such images exemplify the metaphor of “nature as mother and teacher” (Merchant 2004: 118). They show that meaning production processes are controlled by connecting to powerful narratives where nature is becoming more important as a knowledge base and also as a moral entity.

The garden is also associated the idea of personal expression (arranging plants, cooking meals) as well as practical experimentation, recreation and social life. The body can be an intimate companion of nature and of peers. The images of the body shown narrate a story of environmental and social harmony. There are alternatives: the story told could have been of exhausting work, bad weather, lack of crops, plant illnesses, vandalism etc. But it is not. A selection has taken place among information available for publication, and the visual “Recovering-of-the-Garden-of-Eden” trope has been chosen. This trope seems to work best for winning the approval and sympathy of both group members and public, and ultimate for getting support for future activities.

The slideshow from the previous year includes almost the same images. It displays a repetition of ritual performances, or, in other words, images of communicated ritualized action: digging, hacking, planting, watering, learning, harvesting, cooking, eating and socializing. Here, attraction and replicability are elementary mechanisms for the management of public attention: the performance of seasonal garden activities becomes a ritual that can be endlessly replicated, and therefore visualized during different seasons and in different places. Also the above-mentioned mobile cultivation makes it possible to replicate the social action in other places. In one case, all the containers were wheeled out to a theatre and placed there for some days, which received some attention, not least from the mass media.

Finally, the communication of the annual slideshows on the home page of the community garden Prinzessinnengärten makes use of ritual symbols that speak of “a perfect world” as a kind of emotional inspiration for a joyful future: people are not only in harmony with each other, but also with nature. The communication of harmony is not only visible in the slideshow but also at other entries such as the following: “Raus aus der Stube, rein in den Garten!” [Getting out into the garden!]
“Creating [flower]-beds, containing beds, pre-cultivating rhubarb, planting rhubarb, honey bees are flying, the smell of coffee, in short: Again, a perfect world at Moritzplatz in 2011”.

**Telling Emotions of Pleasure**

As mentioned above, rituals in communication are meant to attract people to the message and reduce the uncertainties of communication. Apart from, notification of the different group activities, we find information about farming, various expressions of feelings about gardening. The communication of feelings experienced in the garden, and while gardening, enforces the authenticity of the utterances. These messages offer an emotional insight into someone’s thought processes, and a deeper involvement in communication. Simultaneously, the expression of positive feelings experienced while engaging in communal gardening promotes bonding, as does the fact that peers’ activities are presented as being worthy of esteem. It enforces emotional ties within the group and strengthens the feeling of common goal. Within social movement studies it is common knowledge that strong emotions play a decisive role in attracting and mobilizing people. Negative emotions, in particular, play a prominent role in protest movements and are conceived as “powerful” (Jasper 1998: 414). Protest movements often express feelings of outrage or fear.

However, the feelings that the urban gardeners express on the web sites are almost uniformly positive. It is striking that emotions of pleasure and delight are selected: gardening is described as an object of keen interest, or in other words, of passion. Harsh weather conditions, unfavorable soil and unsuccessful sowing do not stand in the way of expressions of emotions of pleasure and enthusiasm. A few entries describe disappointments, but the final outcome of the activity would be satisfying. For example: A blog entry relates that most of the expensively purchased seed bombs had not sprouted, which “was very annoying”, but neverthe-
less, the deserted tree pits “could be brought to life” and “thanks” everyone. (28 March 2011, www.gartenmiliz.wordpress.com).

Almost all the stories told are success stories, and even if there are problems such as vandalism in a community garden, the entry ends on an optimistic note: “It is the way it is, and so you have to make the best of it” (12 April 2012, www.rosarose.twoday.net/). Nature teaches you to be patient – and a later entry claims that vandalism has decreased. The writer hopes for a change in behavior of those who cause destruction. Thus, the writer relies on the positive energy a community garden can spread in the neighborhood. Accordingly, vandalism, even though it is a negative event, is neutralized or even masked by the pleasure of describing other positive experiences. Negative feelings, such as anger or displeasure, that may dominate an entry, are generally sorted out within the examined website communication.

The entries on blogs and websites exhibit a joyful feeling of togetherness with peers and with nature, and also of satisfaction with one own efforts. Entries emotionally describe the difficulties and efforts entailed in turning wasteland into green areas, and waste into garden tools. One author praises the “permanently required creativity” and the “constant confidence in achieving the ultimate raised flower bed, this time”, though all the involved gardeners are laymen and have no experience with working in wood (30 May 2012, www.opflanztis.wordpress.com). But confidence in the possibility of reaching the goal is great, and the enthusiasm is palpable.

Most entries express a sense of being drawn together by a shared concern. By emphasizing people-to-people rather than people-to-nature relationships, they express an intense feeling of fellowship among those involved in the gardening, as some examples show:

It is always exciting, unbelievable, and encouraging how many wonderful people give their best to make our garden possible. (6 March 2012 http://opflanztis.wordpress.com/)

[…] On the same day I started to revive the completely overgrown old flower bed. When I had to leave after three hours of strenuous grubbing and digging, out of nowhere appeared an unknown female garden enthusiast and offered to expand the bed. Meanwhile, someone has planted the bed, too. I have no idea who that, again, was. But it’s fun that enthusiasts appear from somewhere and take care of the garden. (26 May 2012, www.rosarose.twoday.net/)

The joy and work enthusiasm that spread in the group make our farming project feel fantastically meaningful and important. (23 Sept. 2012 www.matparken.wordpress.com/)

Gardening is celebrated as a unifying and uplifting force. The gardeners are a part of a collectivity of enthusiasts who share an identity created by a common interest. These quoted emotions express a strong feeling of belonging to the group of garden enthusiasts, and intensify the cohesion of the group. This collectivity of
enthusiast comprises not only the group of activists but also those who appreciate guerilla gardening, as another entry relates:

During the 15 minutes we were actually in place, passers-by were constantly approaching us with kind words. It was a great action, thanks Wolfsburg! (4 April 2012, www.gartenstadt2punkt0.wordpress.com/2012/04/)

These entries communicate feelings of joyful togetherness and pleasure, of a positive attitude towards planting activities within the group and among outsiders. The aesthetic of a “we-ness” is present in all the websites and blogs examined here. However, feelings of well-being are not limited to relations within a group and to other people but are expressed at a purely individual level as well. Gardening makes you happy, and helps to fulfill yourself. A gardener expresses his excitement at beginning the garden season after a long winter, in capital letters:

“I AM SO EXCITED. I HAVE ‘EARTH WORMS’ IN THE BELLY. My first planting in the garden” (3 March 2012, www.opflanztis.wordpress.com/)

Gardening is seen as an activity that leads to self-fulfillment. It allows people to communicate their feeling, to be proud of themselves and of their efforts, and to show and communicate the results of these efforts to a public, as a guerilla gardener expresses:

For me, this day was certainly very fulfilling, because I finally realized how much the garden means to me, and that it simply is a part of me. Guerilla Gardening brings great fun and joy! I had almost forgotten it in the last year, since I barely did any guerilla gardening.

(29 Sept 2012 www.gartenstadt2punkt0.wordpress.com/2012/09/)

Feelings of being in a relationship with nature are expressed in descriptions of hard work (often in the form of pulling weeds) and simultaneously enjoying the results of one’s own efforts when looking at these transformed areas. Nice weather conditions are mentioned as something that makes work easier and turn hard work into pleasure, as another entry relates:

We have built a new compost – shady in the North under bushes. This was very necessary because even the old compost has to be sorted and turned. But on such a beautiful sunny day like yesterday, it was a pure pleasure

(3 Sept. 2012 www.keimzelle.blogsport.eu/).

Entries describing the opposite – harsh weather conditions that make gardening almost impossible – seem to be deleted in website communication. In order to transform abandoned land into flower beds, the gardener has to do a lot of physical work. This may even be experienced as useless work, since nature will take over after a while unless someone cares for these beds. But narratives about such hard labor are always presented in an upbeat manner, as this example shows:

Thank you for a wonderful day! We had to work hard with the flower bed, which was packed with couch grass. But we had a lot of fun, too! […] It will be amazing to see it grow! (www.tillvaxt.org/tillvaxt-2010/).
By illustrating the entry with a photo showing working children and adults who are trying to get rid of troublesome weeds, the feeling of having fun while doing this work is transmitted, even though it is laborious. The bodies are in motion rather than rest. A girl is laughing while handling a big pitchfork. The gardeners seem to know that they have to get rid of the weeds completely if the boxes are to be replanted. Here, again, the trope of the Recovery Narrative is evident. Nature or wilderness has to be transformed, be made to serve human interest. Couch grass is unwelcome, as any gardener knows.

“The same goes for the next example. Pulling out weeds, an activity that is here described as “grubbing” weeds because of the enormous root system (20 June 2011, www.rosarose.twoday.net/), fulfills expectations of what is expected from successful gardening; it also gives pleasure.

The effort is satisfying. The gardener enjoys the result, which she proudly shows to the photographer. The message is clear: gardening is fun.

“Thank you for such a wonderful day!” (http://www.tillvaxt.org/tillvaxt-2010/)
Conclusions: The Risk of Ritual

In media research the study of rituals has customarily focused on their impact. I, however, have chosen to focus on how rituals are used in communication, and what function they fulfill. In general, we may note that rituals serve the function of minimizing uncertainty in communication, that is, to increase recognition and, thereby, connecting communication according to the systems-theoretical approach. In the communication of activist gardeners, a successful ritual raises awareness and conveys to the recipients a new understanding of urban gardening. Activist gardening is mainly described as self-fulfilling and fun, and as being deeply culturally connected to our ideas of living in social and environmental harmony.

My aim was to show that the communication of the examined activists is deeply rooted in cultural language, and uses rituals. Their communication does not only reflect social activities in the garden. Rather, is “part of a communication process in which the culture addresses itself” (Thomas 2006: 325).

Inspired by Kreinath’s description of ritual performances (2006: 469-470), and applying them to the concept of communication, I can distinguish at least three features of rituals held in common by the websites I have analyses. These rituals show certain forms of

1. Replication: that is, ritual recurs in accordance with the seasons of gardening. Here, ritual symbols of recovery, harmony, togetherness, enthusiasm etc. configure the pattern of communication.

2. Referentiality: that is, ritual invokes the ideal of the permanent presence of a desired form of community and a new way of life. Entries are often based on concrete actions in the garden, which, when communicated, express the idea and desire of a new way of urban life.

3. Efficacy: that is, how the rituals of communication can be established, and how they transform relations in the communication process, e.g., joint action. Messages defined as rituals are clear: they reduce the uncertainty of communication. I did not especially look at this feature, but judging from the attention given urban gardening by mass media (articles in newspapers as well as reports in TV), it appears that connecting communication has taken place, and the public awareness of these actions has increased.

However, ritual can also create new uncertainties. Images that include rituals can create artificial worlds. “This is a world as it happens to be. In this situation, an observer is inclined mistakenly to see symbolic ‘maps’ as having become real ‘territories’” (Thomas 2006: 337). Those, for instance, who have the Garden of Eden trope in mind when visiting the real Prinzessinnengärten in Berlin for the first time, may experience disappointment. During the planting season, it may, for
example, look like a chaotic place full of diverse containers of various garden vegetables in more or less good condition.

The repetition of the fixed flow of ritual symbols of a perfect garden world of pleasure and social harmony can be experienced as boring, and eventually, “rituals become the victim of their own success” (Thomas 2006: 339). Sooner or later the participant may drop out of the communication process, or engage in other playful and entertaining forms of involvement.

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Thematic Section:
Changing Orders of Knowledge?
Encyclopedias in Transition

Edited by
Jutta Haider & Olof Sundin
Introduction
Changing Orders of Knowledge?
Encyclopaedias in Transition

By Jutta Haider & Olof Sundin

In the West encyclopaedias have long functioned as the standard for defining what can be considered public, established knowledge in a given time and culture. The modern encyclopaedia, with its roots in the enlightenment, has come to symbolise science and reason (Yeo 2001). The encyclopaedia stands for trustworthiness and stability, at the same time as it has actually always changed hand in hand with cultural and technical developments. Most recently, connected to digitisation, encyclopaedias’ production, consumption, use, distribution and significance, are changing profoundly, so profound in fact that our society’s view of what encyclopaedic knowledge is, who should produce and vet for its reliability and how it should be used seems to be changing in every way. Having said that, our understanding of Wikipedia benefits from seeing the historical context of encyclopaedism, which is clearly a continued influence even today (Reagle & Loveland 2013). And at the same time as some mourn the demise of encyclopaedias communicated in print, encyclopaedic knowledge is ubiquitous as never before. It is produced collectively by many people and is a vital part of the web. While understandably a lot has been said about Wikipedia and from almost every angle (e.g. Jullien 2012), other contemporary, most often online encyclopaedias, especially professional ones, have not received that much attention in research. Yet they are two sides of the same coin.

All this of course has to do with the enormous success of Wikipedia, which, according to Alexa.com, today holds a stable position amongst the six most popular websites in the world. Almost invariably it is a link to Wikipedia, which comes first in a search engine results page. It has even received one of popular culture’s most coveted stamps of approval and features in not one, but several episodes of ‘The Simpsons’ and obviously there is a Wikipedia entry recording this (Wikipedia 2014a). Wikipedia is a part of popular culture and fundamental to the information economy of today in a way – it seems safe to say – that no other encyclopaedia ever was fundamental to all parts of the society of its time. This new type of encyclopaedic knowledge is everywhere. Yet the ‘old’, the professional encyclopaedias are still there and they are far from obsolescent or unchanging. They are transforming themselves in the face of digitisation. Some give up, yet others continue either as general-purpose reference works or in niches and specialisations and even new ones are founded. They are present in schools, libraries and
universities and news media often draw on them in their research. They are diversifying in many exciting and dynamic ways. Some have turned from products into highly specialised information services, while others focus on cultural heritage issues and even new encyclopaedias are being established. It is this change, this dynamic new order of encyclopaedic knowledge at the intersection of \textit{Wikipedia} with other encyclopaedias and other knowledge systems that is the reason for this special issue.

\textbf{From Shelves to Boxes and Networks of Competition}

The traditional encyclopaedias of the past have been moved from the living room shelves to boxes in storage rooms or, if they were lucky, to summer cottages. In its early days the Internet made possible new ways for distributing encyclopaedic information while publishers continued with their economic model based on the premise that an encyclopaedia is an artefact, a product to be sold (cf. Clark 2001). CD-ROM encyclopaedias, such as the English-language encyclopaedias \textit{Compton}, \textit{Grolier} and \textit{Encarta}, demonstrated successfully the possibilities created by multimedia content and ease of digital distribution. Yet that was before \textit{Wikipedia}, before ‘free’ culture and, above all, before \textit{Google}. Since the huge success of \textit{Wikipedia}, to a degree in tandem with the \textit{Googlification} of the Internet, the once popular and authoritative professional encyclopaedias of the past have experienced difficulties, some more so than others. To mention a few telling examples: the famous German \textit{Brockhaus} announced its termination in 2013; the year before, in 2012, \textit{Encyclopaedia Britannica} announced that it will discontinue its print edition, the Swedish-language \textit{Nationalencyklopedin} has severely cut the number of staff in its editorial room and explores new ways to move forward, while the Norwegian-language \textit{Store Norske Leksikon} experiments with new forms for encyclopaedic production at the same time as it lobbies for state funding. At the same time, \textit{Google} has taken things even further with its \textit{Knowledge Graph}. Here \textit{Google} aggregates open data from other sites, such as \textit{Wikipedia}, in order to present encyclopaedia-type information on certain names, places and phenomena. Thereby, \textit{Google} does not just feed \textit{Wikipedia} with user traffic; it uses \textit{Wikipedia}’s data – and eventually other sources – to itself present compact encyclopaedia-type information on certain subjects. The future will show what this might mean for the development of \textit{Wikipedia} and online encyclopaedic information.

Once unquestioned pillars of formal public knowledge in society, encyclopaedias now not only face competition, they also have to relate to different sets of production modes favouring a new order of knowledge. This new order is shaped by search engines, social media and other fast moving, fast expanding enterprises of an ad-based, data-driven attention economy comfortably couched in contemporary consumer culture. Professional encyclopaedias have not only difficulties to
find a business model adjusted for the new economy on the web. They have also seen their epistemological foundation being challenged. For instance, in an – admittedly much criticised, but widely publicised – article in Nature from 2005 it was argued, based on a comparative study, that the qualitative differences between *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and *Wikipedia* were unsubstantial (Giles 2005). This was an earthquake in the domain of encyclopaedic knowledge production and it was felt far from the publishers’ editorial offices. The study went viral and it gave *Wikipedia* a stamp of approval making it into an epistemologically valid alternative to the professionally produced traditional encyclopaedias. *Wikipedia* was not only easier to access and free for users; it could now also compete with its content in the same league as traditional encyclopaedias. It was finally established as being worthy of trust – at least sufficiently so for most purposes.

If we turn to reference works and encyclopaedias for a definition of encyclopaedias this is what we get. The freely accessible online dictionary *Merriam-Webster* (n.d.), a sister to the famous *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, defines encyclopaedias as ‘[r]efERENCE WORK THAT CONTAINS INFORMATION ON ALL BRANCHES OF KNOWLEDGE OR THAT TREATS A PARTICULAR BRANCH OF KNOWLEDGE COMPREHENSIVELY’. Fairly identical, the English-language *Wikipedia* describes an encyclopaedia as ‘a type of reference work – a compendium holding a summary of information from either all branches of knowledge or a particular branch of knowledge’ (Wikipedia 2014b), while NE, the Swedish *Nationalencyklopedin*, talks of ‘a reference work, either in print or in digital form, with the ambition to summarise all there is to be known, either in general or in a certain area’ [translation from Swedish by the authors] (NE, n.d.).

Are such reference works valid today? What is their role in today’s information and media landscape characterised by instantaneous access and an abundance of information? How are they produced, communicated and used? How can we understand contemporary encyclopaedism through history? What is their role in scientific communication? How are they and their value imagined by its users? These are just some of the questions that the authors in this theme section address in their individual articles.

**The Articles**

For this theme section we invited submission reflecting on the encounter, productive or otherwise, between encyclopaedic knowledge formed by a plethora of traditions and the constantly changing material conditions for production, communication, use and circulation of knowledge. The response was extremely positive and we received a high number of exciting articles that represented both historical and contemporary studies. The historical perspectives relate their results to contemporary circumstances and the research on *Wikipedia* locates the participatory encyclopaedia either in a tradition of encyclopaedism or in larger cultural dis-
courses. The peer-reviewed articles can roughly be divided into three overarching
groups, although these overlap: Firstly, a number of articles engage with how un-
derstandings of what an encyclopaedia is and what it should do are culturally spe-
cific. Secondly, a group of articles situates today’s changes in how encyclopaedias
are produced, consumed and perceived in various historical contexts, including
previous media specific changes. Thirdly, the last group relates to *Wikipedia* as
today’s dominant encyclopaedia paradigm. One common theme throughout is
how encyclopaedias depend on the trust invested in them and how this ‘currency’
is also played out in the digital world, and has probably become even more im-
portant (Sundin & Haider 2013). This goes hand in hand with another common
thesis, namely the continued presence of Enlightenment ideals that also permeate
digital encyclopaedias (Haider & Sundin 2009). In addition, we have also re-
ceived a number of papers written from the perspective of practitioners and with
‘insider’ knowledge. Therefore we decided to give space to shorter non peer-
reviewed field reports that provide the theme section with an up-to-date under-
standing of encyclopaedism and encyclopaedias today by those who produce
them.

**Understandings**

Katharine Schopflin contributes with an investigation into how publishers, librari-
ans and users of encyclopaedias characterise encyclopaedias as well as into how
these characterisations are expressed in *Britannica Online, The Stanford Encyclo-
paedia of Philosophy* and *Wikipedia*. Based on an extensive interview study, she
shows in which ways ideas of what an encyclopaedia is, are to a high degree de-
veloped in relation to a print paradigm. This is despite the fact that today’s ency-
clopaedias, which people also regularly use, are predominantly digital and online.
In her article, Vanessa Aliniaina Rasoamampianina studies how and to what ex-
tent authority is attributed to contemporary encyclopaedias and she does that by
means of a meticulous analysis of book reviews of encyclopaedias. She draws
specifically on the theoretical concept of cognitive authority to show in which
ways encyclopaedias’ authority is always ambivalent, never stable and under con-
stant negotiation.

**Histories**

Seth Rudy puts the spotlight on utility, specifically on how ideas of encyclopaedic
utility change depending on the historical context. Rudy’s contribution provides a
historical account of *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, which is then related to contem-
porary online *Britannica*. He analyses a certain type of paratext, namely recom-

dendations of how the encyclopaedia should be used, that is how it should be
read, according to its publishers. Thereby Rudy demonstrates the subtle ways in
which enlightenment ideals continue to imbue todays’ *Encyclopaedia Britannica,*
despite media changes. Siv Frøydis Berg and Tore Rem scrutinize the relation between encyclopaedias seen as commercial commodities by investigating 20th-century Norwegian encyclopaedias. The authors show how ‘speed’ and ‘modernization’ were the most important constituents in the self-descriptions of the encyclopaedias. Berg and Rem conclude their article by presenting a contemporary Norwegian discussion about the funding of a professional encyclopaedia in relation to Wikipedia. With this discussion the authors argue that notions of ‘trust’ and ‘trustworthiness’ are at the core of digital encyclopaedias. Ulrike Spree’s contribution contains numerous relevant threads that tie today’s Wikipedia back to historical understandings of encyclopaedias. For instance, she shows how, despite fundamental changes, today’s user/producer engagement in Wikipedia has clear connections to how users engaged with print encyclopaedias in the 19th century and how their involvement was met by editors. She bases this on a comparison of published answers to letters that were addressed to the editor of a traditional German encyclopaedia in the 19th century with discussion pages on Wikipedia. Ulrike Spree also discusses how notions of neutrality that underlie encyclopaedic writing in 19th century Germany can be situated in the liberal political camp, which was considered a middle-ground capable of mediating between extreme position of the party political spectrum.

Wikipedia

Kim Osman provides an insightful analysis of how notions of Wikipedia as a free and non-commercial resource collide with today’s dominant discourse revolving around commercialism. This is also given a diachronic dimension by relating it to a change in values over time. Specifically, Osman studies the handling of three failed proposals to ban paid advocacy in Wikipedia. Finally, Simon Lindgren traces how Wikipedia content is employed in scholarly research. He innovatively combines discourse analysis with bibliometrics and shows an overall increase of the use of Wikipedia in the scholarly literature in the last decade, at the same time as reference to Wikipedia in this type of literature is not fully established as accepted practice, and often accompanied by apologetic statements, thus questioning the trust invested into Wikipedia.

Tales From the Field

The four ‘tales from the field’-articles provide valuable insights into the circumstances for encyclopaedic production today. Georg Kjøll and Anne Marit Godal describe how the Norwegian online encyclopaedia Store Norske Leksikon combines transparency as advocated by Wikipedia with a network of contributing paid and named contributors. Lennart Guldbrantsson discusses the challenge for the Swedish Wikipedia, as a crowd sourced project, to attract more women contributors. In an article on the Minnesota based, cultural heritage encyclopaedia MNo-
Molly Huber, just as Georg Kjøll and Anne Marit Godal, presents an example of a contemporary online encyclopaedia with a local focus that combines controlled editing with user input. Lastly, Michael Upshall attempts to take us beyond Wikipedia by introducing a model for encyclopaedic knowledge production based on linked-data and possibilities of the semantic web. Together, and in the light of the research articles, these tales from the field go to show that although Wikipedia is today’s undisputed point of reference when it comes to encyclopaedias – maybe even more so and on more levels than its grand predecessors ever were – there are many other ways of producing encyclopaedias online, of relating to relevance of knowledge and information and of creating trust.

All in all, this special issue represents authors based in seven countries and four continents, Europe, North America, Australia, and Africa. It also unites a number of different disciplines that are not usually seen together in the same publishing venue and that represent different traditions of doing research, asking questions and of writing. This diversity is a particular strength of this special issue. The reviewers came from equally many countries and also their disciplinary backgrounds are varying. They have contributed with their time, knowledge and expertise. Their inputs have been invaluable and we want to thank them for their efforts.

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What do we Think an Encyclopaedia is?

By Katharine Schopflin

Abstract
The death of the encyclopaedia is increasingly reported in connection with the abandonment of hard copy reference publishing, the dispersal of library reference collections and the preference for end-users to seek information from search engines and social media. Yet this particular form of the book evolved in a very specific way to meet the needs of knowledge-seekers, needs which persist and perhaps flourish in an age of information curiosity. This article uncovers what is meant by ‘encyclopaedia’ by those who produce and use them. Based on survey and interview research carried out with publishers, librarians and higher education students, it demonstrates that certain physical features and qualities are associated with the encyclopaedia and continue to be valued by them. Having identified these qualities, the article then explores whether they apply to three incidences of electronic encyclopaedias, Britannica Online, The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy and Wikipedia. Could it be that rather than falling into obsolescence, their valued qualities are being adopted by online forms of knowledge provision?

Keywords: Encyclopaedias, publishing, reference books, information-seeking behavior, book history
Why the Encyclopaedia?

When asked to picture an encyclopaedia, many will call up an image of a heavy, hardback book, to be consulted using its alphabetical headings, indexes and cross-references to locate trusted pieces of knowledge. It is associated irrevocably with a mode of information-seeking which has been replaced by the use of the public web, or at the very least, powerfully-indexed online databases. According to Sundin & Haider (2013) ‘We are now in the middle of a transition period and the way in which encyclopaedic knowledge, as a form of public knowledge, is communicated is changing profoundly’. The second decade of the 21st century might, therefore, be an interesting time to address the question of how those most intimately associated with encyclopaedias express that it functions. This article1 uses approaches drawn from the discipline of book history, to explore what the participants in the lifecycle of the contemporary encyclopaedia think an encyclopaedia should look like and the abstract qualities displayed by a good example. Publishers use the word encyclopaedia in their titles, librarians purchase them and consumers consult them with certain expectations of what they will find. The research on which this article is based consulted all three groups to see how they expressed what they thought an encyclopaedia was.

As outlined below, those interviewed were allowed to use their own words to describe the encyclopaedia and the approach of the research was exploratory and qualitative. Nevertheless, for the sake of clarity, an a priori definition will be useful to establish what kind of books this article is concerned with. For the purposes of this article, the encyclopaedia is a published reference book offering access to discursive factual information divided into entries and arranged systematically or alphabetically. It aims for a comprehensive coverage of a topic, or range of topics. Encyclopaedia contents are divided up into entries, but there is depth in the contents. They are more likely to be written in sentences than other forms of reference book and to be about the headword at the top of the entry. They might be considered the least referencey of reference books, containing the largest chunks of text and least reliance on page layout. This is contestable, indeed, is contradicted in places by the opinions of the participants in the research, but establishes a starting point for investigation.

Within the discipline of Book History, encyclopaedias have held a marginal place. A field that has at its centre questions about ‘the reception, the composition, the material existence, and the cultural production of what is called the book’ (Howsam 2006: 46) has tended to neglect those books designed for consultation rather than end-to-end reading. Far more interesting are celebrated works of fact or fiction, or, conversely, popular works with a domestic identity, objects of contemplation whose marks of ownership gives us clues to the cultural lives of their readers (Blair 2010: 230). Encyclopaedias have been the subject of study either as
the means of exploring a specific historical cultural milieu, for example the
French enlightenment (Darnton 1979) or early modern Europe (Yeo 2001), or as
one of a series of methods of information storage whose identity as books is of
small concern (Stockwell 2000; Wright 2007).

Yet encyclopaedias are an intriguing part of the life story of the book simply
because of that which makes them distinct from other forms of published books.
First, far more than fiction or monographs, they are identified by their format and
physical appearance as much as by their content. They are immediately recognisable
because of how they look: Instead of continuous pages of text, readers can
expect to find individual articles or entries arranged under title headings. Prominent
use of typographical features such as paragraphs and white space, bold and
italic fonts and running heads mean that that they appear physically distinct from
monographs. Secondly, encyclopaedia readers engage with them in a different
way from books designed to be read from beginning to end. Unlike them, they are
identified by their use rather than intention and a particular type of reader-
behaviour, consultation, is associated with them (Attwooll 1986; Stevens 1987).
Although scholars do use monographs and their indexes to refer to individual
pieces of knowledge, encyclopaedias are specifically designed to meet this usage
by facilitating access to their knowledge in the way they are arranged. Their function – by intention if not reception – is largely one of information rather than entre-
tainment. This does not make them unique, but it means they lack a characteristic
associated with such prominent forms of the book as the novel.

Encyclopaedias are also different from other reference books, such as diction-
aries, gazetteers or recipe books. Encyclopaedias reveal far more about the society
that produces them than forms such as the lexical dictionary, because their entries
tend to be longer than those of dictionaries, use sentences, be discursive and to
discuss rather than simply define their headword. Encyclopaedia entries are often
articles covering many pages, aiming to encompass the breadth of an entire topic.
This can make them controversial: Over the centuries, arguments about what an
cyclopaedia should contain, who should compile it and how it should be ar-
ranged have reflected attitudes towards authorship and authority, the accessibility
of knowledge and the possibility of capturing and recording all that is believed to
be true and accurate. In some cases their influence has been huge: ‘Grand projects
like the Encyclopaedia Britannica, The Encyclopédie and The Oxford English
Dictionary have all had tremendous social and cultural effects, acting as guardians
of accuracy, setters of standards, summarizers of important and intellectual mate-
rial’ (Finkelstein & McCleery 2005: 4) (while this quotation includes a lexical
dictionary, the OED is exceptional in terms of the amount of historical, one might
almost suggest encyclopaedic, information it includes). It might be suggested that
ubiquity of Google and Wikipedia mean they offer the same kind of influence as
information resources today. In other contexts encyclopaedias are familiar domes-
tic objects residing on the bookshelves of a family home. The authority conveyed
by handsomely-bound volumes sitting on a domestic bookshelf, intended to offer access to factual information over the course of a lifetime, is also part of the encyclopaedia’s story.

In either case, encyclopaedias have had an important role to play in the way people, and in particular, those who are not experts in any field, have chosen to acquire knowledge over the past three centuries. As Haider and Sundin (2010) suggest the ‘encyclopaedic project’ to share accepted public knowledge with a wider audience than the educational elite that gained currency in the early 20th century, persists in the way that contemporary information-seekers seek to satisfy their curiosity, today using online sources including the open web. As the role of Book History is to explore the relationship between the book and its creators and readers, this article aims to investigate how those who participate in the encyclopaedia’s production, communication and reception relate to it.

The research used in this article was largely based on user-responses to the hard copy encyclopaedia. This was because the intention of the research was to find a definition for a form of the book, which began its life in hard copy. The cultural notion of the encyclopaedia, when the term became first associated with the book form, was as an object, something printed, editorially mediated and held between covers. Nevertheless, the publishers, librarians and end-users interviewed are likely to have used electronic encyclopaedias, indeed may at this time exclusively use encyclopaedias online rather than in print. This does not negate the purpose of the research, which was to form a definition of what abstract and physical characteristics the encyclopaedia holds, according to its creators and users. But it is worth noting that the research may carry a disconnect between the encyclopaedias published, purchased and referred to on the one hand, and the popular idea of what one should be. This is reflective of a moment in Book History where certain types of book, of which the encyclopaedia is one, exist fully-formed as physical entities but are emerging in digital form as well. In many cases, they have ceased to exist in printed format.

The following sections outline the theoretical basis for the enquiry in the field of book history and the methodology used to carry out the research.

The Encyclopaedia and Book History

The focus of the field of Book History is the material form of the book. Donald F. McKenzie, a pioneer in Anglo-American book studies, redefined the field (then called bibliography) as studying ‘texts as recorded forms, and the processes of their transmission, including their production and reception’ (McKenzie 1985: 4). The work of the great book historians has helped to elucidate how the circumstances under which books have been produced, the intellectual context of their writing and their audience have influenced the form they have taken. An investigation into the material form and functional attributes of the encyclopaedia would
seem to be ideally placed within book history. Yet its focus has thus far mostly been individual titles, series or the works of specific authors. Unlike other forms of cultural analysis (such as Art History and Literary Criticism), the methodological tools of the discipline have rarely been used to establish the identity of a book genre or format. It is rare for a book historian to ask ‘what type of book is an encyclopaedia? What form does it take?’ The research behind this article aims to redress this balance.

Book History, a relatively new academic discipline drawn from history, bibliography, library and information studies, sociology and cultural and communications studies, is associated with no single methodology. Indeed, according to Finkelstein and McLeery ‘Competing methodologies are a feature of modern book history’ (2005: 12). Quantitative and qualitative analyses of sources such as print runs, employment records, bibliographies, libraries and booksellers’ inventories was a common approach of the Histoire du Livre scholars of the 1980s and their followers (Darnton 1990: 162), revealing much about the selling, buying and reading habits of particular communities. As this approach came from the field of history, it has been most commonly used to investigate the publishing or reading habits of a specific place and time, rather than a type of book.

Analysing the text, or the object, has been another approach. McKenzie drew his research approaches from traditional analytical bibliography, studying books for the signs of textual intervention that were part of the book’s transformation from an authorial text to the object that the reader encountered. His revolutionary approach was to assert that authorial intention ‘must always be understood against a background of human conventions, expectations, practices and procedures’ (1985: 91). The text cannot be seen as emerging untainted from the author’s individual genius. Rather, the author and printer combine to produce a text, which will fulfil the expectations of the consumer. Similarly, Gérard Genette’s identification of paratexts, such mediating devices as title pages and book jackets, as ‘zones of transaction’ between the author (or publisher) and the reader (Genette 1997: 2) has been an influential way of considering the book as a physical object. Such features are the means by which a book is packaged to convey its content in a particular way to a reader. However, Genette chooses to use his method on celebrated works of French literature and the approach has not been applied to identify the zones of transaction across a category of book.

Sociological and ethnographic research is also part of Book History, particularly answering questions about reading habits. Reader-response criticism was adopted from cultural theory by scholars such as Janice Radway, who interviewed the readers of romance novels as a means of considering this form of publication (Radway 1984). A range of qualitative and quantitative approaches using surveys and interviews have answered questions about the role that certain books play in the lives of their readers. Here, as was the case with Radway’s research, the focus has sometimes been specific genres, but this is usually within fiction.
The research for this article aimed to gather opinion on the nature of the encyclopaedia from those involved in producing, communicating and consuming it, providing an illustration of what an encyclopaedia is considered to be by those who are most familiar with it. To some extent, it followed Radway in identifying a group of users of a particular type of genre fiction and recording their reactions. As with her research, the present author aimed to examine how sets of conventions associated with a particular type of book were perceived by its users. However, the key elements of narrative, plot and characters are not part of the encyclopaedia, meaning that a genre studies approach would not have been appropriate. Nor do users of reference works have the same kind of emotional relationship with them as those of forms of fiction. As Blair (2010: 230) points out, encyclopaedias are often owned by institutions rather than by individuals, providing few clues to their place in their readers’ lives (although there is of course, a long history of encyclopaedias sold to families, often paid for by instalments – see Einbinder (1964) for a critical account of this). In many cases, encyclopaedias are purchased by librarians, who use them for research themselves, as well as recommending their use to readers. It seemed unlikely that many users, could a suitable sample be found, would be able to produce a detailed articulate response on the encyclopaedia, as Radway’s reader-group had been able to. An ethnographic approach examining encyclopaedia users’ response to the form was therefore rejected in favour of using surveys and brief interviews with a small number of questions, albeit ones encouraging free expression and without pre-determined choices. Moreover, it was felt that in the world of the encyclopaedia, the end-user’s opinion alone was insufficient. This study therefore sought representatives from all parts of the encyclopaedia’s life-cycle.

In order to identify the key participants in the life of the encyclopaedia, Robert Darnton’s ‘Communication circuit of the book’ outlined in his article ‘What is the history of books’ (Darnton 1982), was used as a framework. His circuit identifies the people or industry functions, which contribute to the book production and consumption process including authors, publishers, printers and readers. He depicts external factors (‘intellectual influences’ ‘economic and social conjuncture’ and ‘political and legal sanctions’) affecting all part of the cycle. Although some areas are kept broad (‘Readers’ includes ‘purchasers’, ‘borrowers’, ‘clubs’ and ‘libraries’) the diagram is necessarily based on Darnton’s own time and place of interest, that is, the French enlightenment. Darnton’s circuit produced a critical response from Thomas Adams and Nicolas Barker (1993) who countered with their ‘bio-bibliographic model’. Where Darnton highlighted the roles of a book’s producers and consumers, Adams and Barker pinpointed stages of the life of the book itself: publication, manufacture, distribution, reception and survival. As such, their circuit is more universal, but in some ways less descriptive. The model the author produced for the contemporary encyclopaedia (Figure 1) brings in elements from both approaches, highlighting both actors and processes. This was
used as a basis for identifying the key participants in the encyclopaedia’s lifecycle, and therefore, the sample for interviews and surveys.

Figure 1: The Encyclopaedia Communications Circuit

**Data Collection**

The data for this article was collected from the three main participant groups in the encyclopaedia’s communications circuit: publishers, librarians and readers (perhaps more accurately called users, given the manner in which encyclopaedia contents are commonly accessed). A mixture of interviewing and surveys was carried out for a number of reasons, some of them practical. While it was possible to interview the publishers group, a survey was the only method to reach the much-larger number in the reader group in the time available. In all three cases, subjects were asked generally about their experience in connection with reference books, then specifically encyclopaedias, in order to focus their minds on the subject of the survey. They were then asked to describe in their own words what they considered, in turn, the physical features and functional values (or attributes), they would expect from an encyclopaedia.

Although initial questions differed between the three groups, because of the differing background knowledge on encyclopaedias they held, all three were...
asked the same three open questions, whether interviewed in person, by email or by online survey, as follows:

- What physical characteristics make up an encyclopaedia to you?
- Can you think of any physical features which *must* be present for it to be an encyclopaedia?
- Can you tell me what abstract qualities characterise a successful example of an encyclopaedia?

Opening questions for the publishers and librarians were about their experiences with encyclopaedias, how they currently or previously had worked with them in their professional lives. Publisher interviews were carried out in person, by telephone or by email and all subjects were asked to read and amend the record of the interview to ensure it was representative of their opinions. Where a questionnaire was emailed, follow-up questions were used and the participants were able to check their answers, as with the interviews that took place in person. The aim was to gather an accurate impression of their beliefs about encyclopaedias, even if they changed their mind between the original interview and subsequent reading, and even if this actually gathered what they felt they ought to have said, rather than their first impressions. Like the publishers, the librarians who responded all had a high degree of awareness of the role of the encyclopaedia and were thus able to describe clearly their expectations. The questions put to them regarding their opinions of encyclopaedias (but not their experience) were identical to those put to publishers. Most completed questionnaires by email, but two were interviewed in person. Again, they were all allowed to correct the record of the interview.

The encyclopaedia readers were surveyed online. Initial questions were introduced, not to gather data, but to prepare the subject for the questions that followed. For example, they were initially asked about the types of reference books that they used or owned. This data was not used, but was aimed to help them identify in their minds what they understood a reference work to be. They were also asked what they considered to be the distinction between a dictionary and an encyclopaedia. This gained interesting results, which were not analysed, but aimed to help the subjects consider what makes reference books distinct from each other.

Every statement of opinion from each interview record or survey result was extracted and tabulated. Statements that seemed to have similar meanings were grouped together and labelled. Figure 2, below illustrates one example of how the free-text statements from across the three sets of participants were grouped under a single heading inductively selected by the author. This type of content analysis is inherently problematic. It is impossible to ascertain whether one individual’s answer describes the same thing as another’s and both are filtered through the analysts’ subjectivity. Even where subjects used identical vocabulary, there was no guarantee that two people meant the same thing when they use the same word.
Moreover, while the users were all based in English-speaking countries, English may not have been the first language of some of them. In fact, quasi-synonymous concepts were grouped together because the underlying encyclopaedic characteristic was interpreted as being essentially the same. The results are a compromise between the ethnographic approach, where every result is considered uniquely valuable, and the universalist, which aims to create a consensus across the answers. Each participant’s answer has an ethnographic value, both for the individual and the group they represented, but commonalities were sought between the answers to provide an overall picture of the encyclopaedia according to its communications circuit participants.

Research Sample
Finding a representative sample of interviewees who can be relied upon to provide honest answers to questions asked is a key challenge and was the motivation for identifying the encyclopaedia communications circuit as a guide. The stages of the communications circuit merge and blend into one another and participants take up multiple roles, or switch between them. However, for the sake of clarity, three types of participants were identified: publishers (which includes writers and researchers who participate in the creation of the book), librarians and users, all of whom needed to have an intimate relationship with encyclopaedias as part of their roles. Publishers, which included commissioning, consultant and contributing editors, were found through word of mouth and by making direct approaches. This group represents a small community and this was the best method to track down those with direct experience of encyclopaedias. Librarians were approached using email discussion lists and the online social network Twitter. This gave potential access to a large number of potential professionals although a comparatively small number agreed to complete the survey. No printers, developers or booksellers who identified themselves in relation to the encyclopaedia could be found.

The selection limited the possible number in each groups likely to be able to provide responses. The numbers found for each group varied: 12 responses (out of 20 approached) in the publisher category’, 13 (out of 24 who began the survey) librarians and 85 users. The comparatively small number of publishing industry professionals, drawn from both UK and US publishing companies, was nevertheless a large proportion of those working within the reference publishing industries of those countries as a whole. The much larger number of end-users interviewed indicated the larger community from which they came. The librarians, all working in the UK, were a small but vocal sample of the community who engage with encyclopaedias as part of their work. More would have been preferable, but were unobtainable in the time available. This was mitigated by the fact that, in the cases of both the librarians and publishers, a good spread across different functions (editing, marketing, acquisition, research) was achieved. The publishers were in
many cases freelance, but those who were employed had been so in six different publishing companies. The librarians were all employed in different institutions.

Encyclopaedia readers presented a challenge for the sample: to find respondents who considered themselves encyclopaedia users and were capable of articulating their thoughts about them. While the survey would ideally have had responses from users from a range of backgrounds, including non-academic users, it was anticipated that the higher education community would contain a higher number of encyclopaedia users who identified themselves as such. In addition, it would have been extremely difficult to ensure that any selection of ‘ordinary members of the public’ was random within the scale of the study. Instead, the reader sample was taken from a distinct group, postgraduate Students from two UK multi-disciplinary universities, contacted via their postgraduate school / deanery. It is recognised that they could only be representative of their own grouping, not of the user category as a whole, but postgraduate students are more likely than undergraduates or those not in higher education to have used reference works and formed an understanding of what an encyclopaedia is. To an extent, all three sets of answers represented the opinion of an ‘elite’, in this case, those most identified with the encyclopaedia as creators, communicators and users.

Results

Respondents were asked both what they thought the most important abstract quality or value in an encyclopaedia was (here called ‘function’, to distinguish it from a physical characteristic) and what physical features they would expect to find in them. The three groups spontaneously named many of the same things, although the language varied within and across the groups. The chart below (Figure 2) illustrates this by showing the spontaneous answers individuals gave, subsequently categorised under the heading ‘Authority’. Clearly this categorisation is challengeable, but indicates that even described differently, the different groups shared some of the same concerns:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Publishers</th>
<th>End-users</th>
<th>Librarians</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Authority</td>
<td>Authoritative</td>
<td>It should be trustworthy written by experts in their fields.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authority</td>
<td>Reliable</td>
<td>Who is the publisher / editor? What is their track record?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authority</td>
<td>Trustworthy source</td>
<td>Authoritative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authority</td>
<td>Trustworthy</td>
<td>Reliable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authoritative</td>
<td>Truthfulness</td>
<td>Authority – it’s important to look at the editorial board and their affiliations (and also to check their work elsewhere).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual respectibility of its provenance, as indicated by the eminence or qualifications of its writers</td>
<td>Truthfulness</td>
<td>Authority – without this there is no point to having it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authoritative</td>
<td>Reliable</td>
<td>Reliable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authority – made evident both by the contributor list and the publisher’s own track record and reputation. Authority, indicated by the brand rather than the author. Provide the user with confidence in its contents</td>
<td>Written by an authority</td>
<td>Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trustworthiness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authority</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2: Example of answers given grouped together under the category ‘Authority’
This figure illustrates the process taken to categorise the statements made by the respondents and interviewees. Some of the distinctions between the way the function is described can be ascribed to the different ways they encountered the question: a face-to-face or telephone interview is likelier to engender a wordier response than an online survey which the anonymous participant may like to complete as quickly as possible. Under those circumstances, it is interesting to note how far the three groups were in agreement both in their choice of function and the way they chose to describe it.

![Figure 3: Functional attributes mentioned by participants, shown by numbers of mention and by percentage](image)

Figure 3 was produced by categorising and counting the statements participants made in answer to the questions about an encyclopaedia’s functional attributes, then placing each attribute in order of number of mentions. A ‘mention’ was identified as any descriptive term noted by any respondent in answer to the questions asked, so that if their answers included more than one functional attribute, these were counted separately. See Figure 2, above, for how descriptive terms and statements were tabulated before being counted.

A number of functions were valued prominently by all three groups: Authority, accuracy, ease of reading, structure / accessibility and comprehensivity were the most common. This seems consistent with other sources, for example, guides designed to help librarians select reference books for their collection. Louis Shores’ influential publication *Basic Reference Books* (Shores 1939) or the contemporary Cassell and Hiremath’s *Reference and Information Services in the 21st Century* (Cassell and Hiremath 2009), most commonly advise librarians to evaluate each title for authority, accessibility, clarity of purpose, good physical format, currency, style, originality, suitability for audience, accuracy and bias.² The same functions, authority, accessibility, accuracy and quality of publication recur to define
what an encyclopaedia should be valued for. This indicates that the notion of what a good encyclopaedia embodies is culturally shared among encyclopaedia users and creators.

Yet there are interesting differences both within and across the three groups. Readers were more likely than the other two groups to include as functions things which might be considered to be physical features, for example, ‘cross-referencing’ and ‘indexing’, an indication that the distinction between physical and abstract features is less important to them. They were also the only group to identify ‘brevity’ or ‘conciseness’ as a desirable attribute, perhaps reflecting a concern to conserve the time they spend seeking information, something not always recognised by the publishers who produce their reading material. It is notable that another item mentioned only twice by end-users and not at all by other users is ‘neutrality’ or ‘lack of bias’. Given the high position of ‘authority’ and ‘accuracy’, the ability to trust the work is clearly a concern for all three groups, but it did not occur to any publishers or librarians to specify objectivity as desirable. Users were also alone in identifying ‘range’ as desirable function, using such phrases as ‘Unlimited topics’, ‘All-encompassing knowledge’, ‘Varied information’ and ‘Broad range of coverage’. It may be that those with a professional identification with encyclopaedias, the publishers and librarians, took this quality (and others) for granted. Range, the notion that an encyclopaedia should embrace a variety of topics, or a single topic with a breadth of scope, is for some the very definition of the term ‘encyclopaedia’.

The librarians also placed more emphasis on certain aspects of an encyclopaedia than other groups in their answers. A number of respondents were concerned with how the encyclopaedia matched the needs of its audience. Responses included phrases such as ‘Content should be pitched at different levels i.e. brief and simple overview for beginners and longer, more in depth articles for researchers’ and ‘Foremost, I think an encyclopedia needs to be informative to the level it is aimed at, relevant’. These indicate the role librarians take as the intermediaries between the information source (the encyclopaedia) and the user (which, for an academic library, would be students). It was, however, also mentioned by two of the publishers, using the phrases ‘Usefulness to the user’ and ‘The most effective reference publications are those that understand the needs of their target audience’. Of course it is a concern of the user too, but was perhaps reflected in some of the other responses, such as ‘ease of use’, or the equal number of users who responded that they expected ‘brevity’ or ‘succinctness’ as well as ‘depth of information’ or ‘detailed information’. In all cases, the suggestion is that the encyclopaedia should cover its topic in a way that is just right for its audience. This is perhaps the defining feature of the encyclopaedia, sitting between the monograph, which may have too much detail, and the dictionary, which may not have enough.

When it came to the physical features expected in an encyclopaedia, there was a far wider range of answers within and across the three groups and a long tail of
characteristics mentioned only once or twice. Figure 4, below, shows all the items mentioned across the three groups.

![Figure 4: the most common physical features expected in an encyclopaedia](image)

Figure 4 was produced by categorising and counting the statements participants made about an encyclopaedia’s physical features, then placing them in order of most mentions. As with Figure 3, each descriptive statement or term was counted separately, even where respondents gave more than one answer to the question.

Across the three groups, the items most expected in an encyclopaedia are an index, arrangement into entries, citations, cross-references, contents page and alphabetical order. Also scoring highly is that it should be a hardback book of considerable size and weight. The higher-scoring features largely fall into two groups: those which help the user locate the information within the book, and those concerned with the encyclopaedia as a physical object. The fact that participants from all three groups mention features like index, entry arrangement, structured organisation and alphabetical order, indicates the strong identification of an encyclopaedia as a non-sequentially-accessed book, dependent on its structure to be useful. Meanwhile, the high score of hardback binding and large weight and size show that it is expected to be a substantial object. The physicality of the object is emphasised by some of the features that appear in the long tail such as cloth placemarker, thumbmarks and good quality or (conversely) thin paper. For these partic-
ipants, the encyclopaedia has a distinct physical identity separate from its informational content.

Some of the differences between the groups’ choice of features relate to their articulacy on the subject: publishing professionals have a clearer notion of the parts which comprise a book and a more technical vocabulary than users, although interestingly, in places they identified the same feature in different words. For example, what one publisher described as ‘an ‘onion skin’ approach to article layout, where a summary precedes more detailed sections, is very similar to what a reader called ‘synopses for each section’. Even the differences between some of the tail of responses in fact show a similar approach: for example, the users’ ‘anything to make things clear’ (summarised above as ‘clarifying features’) is an indication of wanting to find what they are looking for without difficulty. This relates strongly to the publishers’ concerns around good structure and access, described in such ways as ‘Digestible access’, ‘Organisation enabling information to be accessed non-sequentially’ and ‘Systematic organisation’. The ‘lots of text’, mentioned by one librarian and one user is consistent with the more-frequently mentioned ‘compendiousness’ and ‘in-depth coverage’. Allowing for interpretation of the different language, there is a surprising consistency of opinion as to what physical form an encyclopaedia should take.

All three groups considered it important as to whether an encyclopaedia should be subject specific or cover a range of topics, that is, whether it should be, for example, ‘an encyclopaedia of children’s literature’ or a general encyclopaedia attempting to cover all subjects. Both features are associated with encyclopaedias, but subject specificity was mentioned more often, by both users and librarians. Similarly, some of the answers regarding the length of an entry show a divergence of opinion. Reflecting the contradictory responses whereby end-users wished for the functional attributes of ‘brevity’ as well as ‘detailed information’, five end-users mentioned ‘brief’ or ‘summarised’ entries as features they would expect and a number of librarians and publishers expected ‘in depth’ (or ‘essay style’) entries. Such contradictions have historically concerned writers about encyclopaedias. In the same edition of *American Behavioral Scientist*, encyclopaedist Charles Van Doren described encyclopaedias as having a ‘a tradition of dedication to truth and completeness’ (Van Doren 1962), while cultural historian Jacques Barzun warned encyclopaedia compilers only to cover the ideas which ‘have engaged the protracted attention of mankind’ (Barzun 1962). In a sense this paradox embodies the central contradiction at the heart of the encyclopaedia: to be comprehensive, but only to select what is useful and trustworthy.

Even allowing for the differences in languages and priorities, the results indicate a shared understanding of what an encyclopaedia is among those who create, purchase and consult it. Among the three groups, there was substantial agreement that a good encyclopaedia might be expected to hold the following characteristics:

- be a substantial physical object
• contain information organised into entries
• contain articles in alphabetical order
• organised in such a way that items of information are easy to find
• treat topics in some depth
• be accurate
• be authoritative
• be well-written
• be comprehensive
• presented in a manner appropriate for its audience.

Although many of these features might be found in other types of book, aggregated they represent a very distinct type of book, recognisable across the contemporary encyclopaedia communications circuit. This is intriguing, particularly when certain physical features may seem old-fashioned when most publishers’ encyclopaedia profits are now made online (Bookseller 2011). All three groups have a clear idea what an encyclopaedia should be like and how it should function, and there is a certain amount of consensus across all three groups. Their vision of the encyclopaedia is not a revolutionary one, but it demonstrates that a culturally shared notion of the encyclopaedia exists among its creators, communicators and users. At a time when, as Sundin and Haider (2013) put it, ‘the use of encyclopaedic knowledge has become different, always available and in constant competition with other sources’, in this study, all parts of the encyclopaedia’s communications circuit still identify it as a distinct form of the book.

**Encyclopaedias in the Digital Age**

Yet, the existence of the encyclopaedia online cannot be ignored. Without prompting, some respondents suggested features only to be found in an online encyclopaedia, such as ‘a decent search feature’ and ‘graphic enhancements’ (publishers) and ‘Attractive online display without too many flashing distractions’ (librarians), not to mention the two end-users who responded that an encyclopaedia should be online (one using words not repeatable in this article). As mentioned previously, the participants are perhaps more likely to have used online encyclopaedias than hard copy even while they identify physical features, such as hardback binding and cloth placemarkers which would only be found in a physical object.

Evidence suggests that opportunities to use hard copy encyclopaedias are becoming rarer. Libraries have increasingly directed their scarce resources away from hard-copy encyclopaedias, towards online products, searchable and available 24-hours a day without the need for staff (Bradford 2005; Heintzelman, Moore & Ward 2008; O’Gorman & Trott 2009). Publishers increasingly release their titles
in online form only (Bond 2008; Jones 2008) and the decline in print sales in the late 2000s was noted by one publisher as ‘dizzying’ (Danford 2009). Social media presents challenges too. When the answers to questions can be crowdsourced through blogs or social media sites such as Twitter and Facebook, the question arises as to why anyone would need reference source mediated by the publication process. Featherstone and Venn (2006) suggest that social media sees itself as offering an opportunity for ‘de-authorization of the cult of experts’, in particular Wikipedia, which since 2001 has offered encyclopaedia-style articles, written by voluntary contributors and editable by almost anyone, for free via the web (Wikipedia 2013a).

According to Haider and Sundin (2010) ‘One could be tempted to think that the encyclopaedic notion would go out of fashion when (Web) search engines create instant access to most digital content.’ Yet the desire to find trustworthy information on a topic gathered together under a specific article heading has persisted and continues to be catered for. A quick glance at three examples, Britannica Online which remains, more or less, an editorially mediated publication online, The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (SEP), which is looser in publication structure, has no hard copy roots, but is written by experts and Wikipedia, show that they imitate hard copy encyclopaedias: they divide their contents into articles, use both bold and sub-headings, employ summary sections or synopses, include bibliographies and citations, offer alphabetical access, indexes and cross-references. This is consistent with Bolter and Grusin’s concept of ‘remediation’ (2000) whereby new media formats ape older formats in the course of refashioning them. Of course online encyclopaedias do not have hard copy bindings or cloth placemarkers, but the pages still look like encyclopaedia pages. Many of these features might be considered redundant when the contents are accessible through a free-text search, but readers still want to find information under discrete article headings, to find further sources of reading, via citations and references, and to draw relationships between the topics they cover using cross-references. Moreover, all three describe themselves as ‘encyclop(a)edias’, suggesting that they desire the associations connected with the term.

Abstract notions of accuracy and authority also persist into digital forms. The background material on each site (particularly copious on Wikipedia) promotes the contents of each online encyclopaedia. Britannica, for example, announces ‘In a world where questionable information is rampant, we provide products that inspire confidence, with content people can trust’ (Britannica 2013), illustrating the point that ‘Old trustworthiness – tied up in tradition, expertise and local relevance – gains new currency in networked settings’ (Sundin & Haider 2013). SEP says ‘From its inception, the SEP was designed so that each entry is maintained and kept up to date by an expert or group of experts in the field.’ (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy 2013). While Wikipedia emphasises that ‘People of all ages, cultures and backgrounds can add or edit article prose, references, images and
other media’ they also add that content needs to be ‘verifiable against a published reliable source’ and that older articles, which have seen additions from ‘experienced editors’ are more reliable than newer ones (Wikipedia 2013a). There is an immense amount of background material on Wikipedia explaining and justifying their publishing model as a good method of producing accurate encyclopaedia entries (far more so than in Britannica, where the publication’s 300-year history and well-known name might be assumed to speak for itself). Their argument is not that accuracy and authority are not important in an encyclopaedia, but that they can be provided by an alternative publishing model. Even the much-quoted Nature Magazine comparison between Wikipedia and Encyclopaedia Britannica (Giles 2006) was essentially a competition to prove the accuracy of one source over the other.

There are valued notions associated with the encyclopaedia that Wikipedia does not embrace. Unlike Britannica and SEP, there is no editorial masterplan dictating how it should be structured and the scope it should embrace. This has attracted criticism, suggesting that its coverage is skewed towards certain types of topic ‘where there is a wide distributed knowledge base and a large a pool of people with time on their hands to contribute’ (Publishers Weekly 2009). One of Wikipedia’s own boasts is that it embraces a wider range of topics than those constrained by editorial or academic needs, and there is no limit to its potential length or the number of topics it can embrace. Indeed, the ‘What Wikipedia is not’ page states ‘there is no practical limit to the number of topics Wikipedia can cover’ (Wikipedia 2013b). The process of continuous, collaborative revision might, over time, mean that the encyclopaedia as a whole, or any topic or single article could grow infinitely over time as more people contribute. This contradicts the possibly defining function of the encyclopaedia, to cover a subject in depth, but with concision and at the appropriate level for a specific audience. Yet there is more editorial intervention in Wikipedia’s structure than might be thought. A Quality Assessment team assigns a classification tag to each article which might suggest it is, for example a ‘stub’ or a ‘featured article’ (Wikipedia 2013c) while the ‘Categorization’ guidelines, among many other suggestions of how volunteers should approach writing an article, (Wikipedia 2013d) are copious.

Concluding Remarks

This article illustrates the features expected in an encyclopaedia by those who produce, communicate and use them at a time when this form of the book is increasingly coming to exist in online form only. The participants in the research identify qualities and attributes which can be seen or are boasted of in prominent digital encyclopaedias, suggesting that the online information offering draws much from the hard copy world which preceded it.
While it appears, from these observations, that publishers aim to meet user expectations of an online encyclopaedia by echoing or emphasising some of the physical and abstract features of the hard copy form of the book, there is further research to be done in this area. In a world where highly sophisticated approaches to web design and usability exist, it would be interesting to explore the decisions made by publishers in creating online encyclopaedia environments. Does their design reflect in any way the iconic physical item? Similarly, while there is very little research into user-behaviour in relation to hard copy encyclopaedias (Bradford 2005 is a rare exception), user-studies could be carried out, or metrics examined, to explore how their online equivalents are used. And it would be interesting to explore whether design and use of encyclopaedias differed from any other online reference sources. These questions, however, were beyond the scope of the research used in this article.

The generic features of the encyclopaedia remain recognisable to those most clearly connected to its production and consumption. The clarity of its identity seems only to be confirmed by the fact that many remain in digital forms. Exploring how far the characteristics of different types of books persist and alter in the online world has much to tell us about publishing, communication and reading. The suggestion that book types can be more than objects, can transcend the physical and persist into the digital world adds an intriguing frisson to our understanding of book forms’ relationships to their users. It suggests that users continue to bring expectations developed in the physical world to the way they interact with their digital proxies. For many interviewed as part of the research for this article, the concepts of creating, organising and finding encyclopaedic knowledge developed with the hard copy book. However, digital natives were also among those interviewed, and they still recognise the encyclopaedia as a distinct book form. How this might develop in the future remains to be seen and there is no doubt that information seeking and provision is in a state of flux. However, the appetite for authoritative and accurate content organised into easy-to-navigate articles appears not to have diminished, and it continues to be provided for online.

Katharine Schopflin recently successfully defended her PhD thesis at University College London’s Department of Information Studies. Her topic was the nature of the encyclopaedia as a form of the book, exploring both the qualities associated with a successful example of the encyclopaedia and the physical features characteristic and unique to it. She is additionally a library professional practitioner, currently working as a knowledge manager for a membership organisation in London. She has published numerous articles in the information press and is the author of *A Handbook for Media Librarians* and the upcoming *A Handbook for Corporate Information Professionals* both published by Facet Publishing. E-mail: katharine.schopflin@gmail.com.
Notes

1 The research for this article was originally carried out as part of a PhD project which considered a broader spectra of questions.

2 An analysis of 11 such guides appeared in the PhD thesis from which the other research in this chapter was taken.

References


Knowledge and the Systematic Reader: The Past and Present of Encyclopedic Learning

By Seth Rudy

Abstract

Though digital media have unquestionably affected the features and functions of modern encyclopedias, such works also continue to be shaped by factors thoroughly conventional by the end of the historical Enlightenment. As William Smellie, editor of the first Encyclopædia Britannica (1768-71) wrote, “utility ought to be the principal intention of every publication. Wherever this intention does not plainly appear, neither the books nor their authors have the smallest claim to the approbation of mankind.” The “instructional designers” and “user-experience specialists” of the online Britannica are the inheritors of all those authors and editors who before and after Smellie’s time devised different plans and methods intended to maximize the utility of their works. The definition of utility and with it the nature of encyclopedic knowledge continues to change both because of and despite technological difference; if digitization has in some ways advanced the ideals of Enlightenment encyclopedias, then it has in other ways allowed for the re-inscription of certain flaws and limitations that encyclopedias like the Britannica were specifically designed to overcome. By examining not only what one might read in the encyclopedia but also the ways in which one might read it, this article demonstrates the extent to which the notion of encyclopedic utility depends on historical context.

Keywords: Systematic reading, encyclopedism, encyclopedias, Encyclopædia Britannica, Enlightenment, knowledge production, history of reading
Introduction

Since its inception in 1768, the owners of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* have included printers and engravers, bookbinders, bankers, publishers, philanthropists, and one former United States senator. Its chief editors have been, among other things, apothecaries, clergymen, geologists, journalists, academics, and philosophers. Conceived by Colin Macfarquhar and Andrew Bell as a national intellectual monument and answer to the French *Encyclopédie*, the first printed editions were sold out of Macfarquhar’s offices on Nicolson Street in the Old Town of Edinburgh. Now, the international headquarters occupy a large, redbrick building in downtown Chicago, and the company prints no new editions at all.

These headquarters and their virtual counterpart at Britannica.com appropriately reflect a history of generic, ideological, and technological change. The shelves along the lobby’s north wall contain a selection of print products including a limited edition of the fifteenth and final 32-volume set as well as a replica of the three-volume first edition completed in 1771. The two literally bookend the working *Britannica*’s historical materiality; the gilt edges of the former and faux-foxing of the latter equally mark them as nostalgia or “prestige” purchases divorced from modern encyclopedic knowledge production. The sets also sit side-by-side in a section of the *Britannica* online store dedicated to books, atlases, and almanacs. Clicking to “learn more” about the limited edition, however, leads only to a 404 error (Educational Learning Books 2013). The past is present, but the link is broken.

At the same time, the quotations from notable *Britannica* authors and editors adorning the lobby’s south wall promote a sense of institutional continuity. The opening words of William Smellie’s preface to the first edition, placed towards the top left, articulate a philosophy that to this day remains central to the encyclopedic project. “Utility,” according to Smellie, “ought to be the principal intention of every publication” (Smellie 1771: v). The company may have moved beyond print to become a “pioneer in digital education,” but they still claim to create their new knowledge products as they have “for many years…by collaborating with experts, scholars, educators, instructional designers, and user-experience specialists; by subjecting their work to rigorous editorial review; and by combining it all into learning products that are useful, reliable, and enjoyable” (Britannica Today 2013). This description would not have been out of place in Smellie’s time. The final phrase recalls Horace’s oft-stated belief that literature must be *dulce et utile*, and just as it did in the first *Britannica*, usefulness has pride of place.

Though digital media have certainly affected its features and functions, then, the contemporary encyclopedia also continues to be shaped by factors conventional by the end of the historical Enlightenment. The “instructional designers” and “user-experience specialists” of the online *Britannica* are the inheritors of all those authors and editors who for centuries devised different plans and methods.
intended to maximize the utility of their works. As Jutta Haider and Olof Sundin observe, “a line can be drawn through the centuries from various earlier manifestations of the Enlightenment ideal up to today’s online encyclopaedias,” but “on the other hand, there is the position of these sites existing within the networked space of the Internet” (Haider and Sundin 2010). The definition of utility and with it the nature of encyclopedic knowledge continues to change both because of and despite that technological difference. If digitization has in some ways advanced the ideals of Enlightenment encyclopedias, then it has in other ways allowed for the re-inscription of certain flaws and limitations that encyclopedias like the *Britannica* were specifically designed to overcome. By examining not only what one might read in the encyclopedia but also the ways in which one might read it, this article will demonstrate the extent to which the notion of encyclopedic utility depends on historical context.

**Forms and Functions**

The transition from the seventeenth to the early eighteenth century marked the beginning of a long-standing shift in the ambitions and design of the encyclopedic project. “Before and during the seventeenth century,” Richard Yeo writes, “the original Greek concept of encyclopedia was available, though it had become highly unstable, oscillating between the ideas of fundamental training and near universal knowledge” (Yeo 2007: 49). The distance between the two ideas left ample room in the literary marketplace for works that despite vastly different features and functions equally trafficked in encyclopedic knowledge. Relatively inexpensive vernacular guidebooks supposedly complete in a few hundred (or fewer) pages in quarto often made similar promises about providing access to the round of education as did much larger Latin works composed of multiple folios.1 The differences of presumed educational attainment, price, and marketability as well as organization, breadth, and depth that ran across the spectrum of such works represent a relatively stable set of generic threads that encyclopedists have spent generations periodically unraveling and then winding back together.

Issues of scope and arrangement have played a particularly large part in shaping encyclopedic texts. Print technology created numerous opportunities for generic growth and variation as the limitations of materiality sometimes set the encyclopedic project at odds with itself. Encyclopedias, as Jeff Loveland observes, generally grew in length from 1690 to 1840 as “conceptions of [them] as repositories of indefinite extent became more widespread” and nationalistic associations made size a sign of prestige (Loveland 2012: 233-34). Interminably long production times, necessarily high prices, and the possibility of overwhelming rather than enlightening readers, however, could impede the efficient dissemination of knowledge. Encyclopedists, therefore, often had as much reason to contract their works as expand them, and the same year in which the proprietors of the *Britanni-
ca embarked upon their largest encyclopedia to date (the eighteen-volume third edition, produced from 1788-1796) also saw the publication of the three-volume *New Royal Encyclopædia* – in essence a plagiarized *Britannica* that improbably claimed on the title page of its second edition to comprehend “all the material information that is contained in Chambers’ *Cyclopædia*, the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, and the French *Encyclopédie*” (Hall 1791).

Brevity, though, could also diminish utility. John Barrow’s *A New and Universal Dictionary of Arts and Sciences* (1751), for example, claimed to comprehend all the parts of all the branches of knowledge in the space of a single volume. The 576 folio pages of his dictionary predictably left out a great deal of valuable information – so much so that the supplement published by the proprietors three years later outdistanced the original by nearly 200 pages. This “supplement” expanded some entries, updated others, and introduced entirely new ones initially omitted. Together, the two volumes supposedly created one complete work, but the single encyclopedia now came with a burdensome double-alphabet; readers had to move back and forth between duplicate entries in each volume whenever cued by a “dict.” annexed to articles in the supplement. The still small space of even two large volumes, moreover, continued to demand an exclusionary hierarchy. “As it has been our principal view to render this work useful to the reader,” Barrow explains, “those branches of learning, which are of more immediate use in life, are more largely treated of than those of mere curiosity.” With space at a premium, Barrow gave priority to the mechanical arts (Barrow 1754: 13).

The *New Royal Encyclopædia* likewise sacrificed content and functionality, but it did so in different ways. Though copied largely verbatim from the second *Britannica*, the *New Royal*’s system of acoustics is only half as long; it excludes, among other details, a conjecture regarding the tones produced by the bass-strings of a harpsichord as well as what the *Britannica* identified as “curious” descriptions of Joseph Priestley’s experiments “concerning the tone of electrical discharges” (“Acoustics” 1778: 1.61). Nor are its systems and treatises the only truncated elements: though several “detached” parts of knowledge not included in the *Britannica* have been added, more have been excised. The second edition of the *New Royal* does not even retain all of the entries provided in the first. Gone, for example, are the “abacay,” a Philippine parrot; the “abacot,” an ancient English royal cap of state; and “abadir,” a Carthaginian title for first-order gods and the name given to the stone swallowed by Cronus in place of Zeus. A further nine entries between “abaddon” and “abarticulation” vanish between the first and second editions without explanation; presumably they and many others fell by the wayside in order to make room for materials deemed more important. The editors also greatly reduced the number of paragraph breaks and the amount of whitespace throughout the whole, and while these measures too may have helped to control overall length, the many unbroken blocks of text both strain the eye and obscure organizational logic. Minimized margins, furthermore, leave no room for
the headings, minor illustrations, and plate references of the original treatises. To those who spent more time looking for information than learning it because of these space-saving and therefore cost-cutting measures, the shorter, more affordable work may actually have been the less useful.

At least, though, members of the middling classes could hope to overcome the minimum bar of entry. At four guineas, Yeo notes, Chambers’ *Cyclopædia* (1728) would have cost the average family about a month’s income, and the £12 asked for the first full *Britannica* forty years later made it a luxury item as well (Yeo 2001: 50-51). At roughly £3, the *New Royal* was still not inexpensive, but compared to a price of £19 for the second *Britannica* it was something of a bargain. The editors of the *New Royal* quite sensibly put its relative affordability – “near ten guineas cheaper” than the cheapest of its competitors – at the top of a list enumerating its particular advantages. In their cost, style, and content, then, the major encyclopedias of the Enlightenment might have targeted the higher strata of society, but some saw potential value (and profit) in extending a more limited brand of encyclopedic learning to those of lesser means.

The promise of broader appeal featured regularly in eighteenth-century title pages and prefaces and remained an important part of an alternative encyclopedic tradition in the nineteenth century. Barrow, for his part, claimed to render all the arts and sciences “easy and familiar to the meanest capacities,” and not long after, Benjamin Martin began issuing numbers of his *General Magazine of Arts and Sciences* (1755-1765), by which he hoped to make his subscribers proficient in all the useful arts and sciences at the rate of sixpence for one half-sheet upon a science per month (Martin 1755: 1.iv-vi). Though Martin’s particular plan was not widely imitated, publishers on occasion continued to look to the periodical as a means by which knowledge of the arts and sciences could be circulated widely and inexpensively. Even as Victorian encyclopedists and dictionary-makers developed “more scientific and rigorous practices,” titles such as the *British Penny Magazine* (1826-1845) sought “to provide moral, cheap and, crucially, useful literature through ‘the imparting useful information to all classes of the community’” (Weller 2008: 201). Aimed largely at the working classes, the illustrated magazine cost a penny per number and came with footnotes and cross-references that “created an encyclopaedic feel” and encouraged subscribers to bind each year’s issues together and keep them as single reference works. Meanwhile, the 127 parts of the seventh *Britannica* issued monthly over roughly the same period (1827-1842) cost six shillings apiece for a combined total of just over £38.

All of these tensions persist within and across digital domains. Though far less than the $1400 formerly asked for the printed edition, the $69.95 annual membership fee for individual access to *Britannica Online* still costs $69.95 more than access to *Wikipedia* – or, to give it its full name, *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia*. Both organizations (as well as independent observers) have contested the extent to which price does or does not bear on quality. Both also serve, or seek to
serve, a wider readership than did the flagship encyclopedias of the Enlightenment. *Britannica* continues to market different versions of its encyclopedias to different age groups: the premium site is aimed at educated adults while other online editions address the needs of children, secondary, and post-secondary students. Though the English *Wikipedia* acknowledges the variation of its audience and divides readers into three grades (general, knowledgeable, and expert), it does not maintain multiple versions of its own content; indeed, the style guidelines suggest that articles “should be understandable to the widest possible audience. For most articles, this means understandable to a general audience.” In the case of particularly technical content, the guidelines further encourage authors to “write one level down”—that is, they should “consider the typical level where the topic is studied (for example, high school, college, or graduate school) and write the article for readers who are at the previous level” (Wikipedia contributors 2013). No single encyclopedia, in short, can be all things to all readers; authors, editors, and institutions still operate within certain conceptual and practical constraints that drove the development and generic variation of encyclopedias in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Ironically, the *absence* of some of those constraints has also given new life to old arguments about encyclopedic utility. Physical size—once a major consideration for encyclopedists—no longer matters. This frees online encyclopedias to do, comprehend, or in other ways be more than could their printed predecessors, but it also results in a high potential for mission creep. The editors of *Wikipedia* have therefore defined and now attempt to maintain somewhat stricter generic boundaries than did many of their Enlightenment counterparts. “*Wikipedia* is not a paper encyclopedia,” begins the first section of an article dedicated to explaining what *Wikipedia* is not. “There is no practical limit to the number of topics *Wikipedia* can cover or the total amount of content. However, there is an important distinction between what *can* be done, and what should be done” (Wikipedia contributors 2014). Ten entries under the subheading of “encyclopedic content” on the same page list some eighteen genres and functions from which the project seeks to distinguish itself; of these, nearly half were once either fully integrated parts of the genre or experimental features introduced and abandoned over the course of its development in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Original research appeared in later editions of the *Britannica*; Diderot and D’Alembert used the *Encyclopédie* to advance controversial political, economic, and religious ideologies; Benjamin Martin included news of the moment with the monthly installments of his *General Magazine of Arts and Sciences* (1755-1765); and Dennis de Coetlogon insisted that with the help of his treatise on surgery in *An Universal History of Arts and Sciences* (“and some Practice”), aspiring pupils could master the art (De Coetlogon 1745: 5). According to “What Wikipedia Is Not,” though, *Wikipedia* is not a publisher of original thought, a soapbox, a newspaper, an instructional manual, or a textbook.
Wikipedia policy, then, still (loosely) defines the encyclopedic as something less than universal both despite and because of its freedom from the material realm. Though the content of the current English-language Wikipedia would occupy roughly sixty times the space of the last printed Britannica and dwarfs even the most expansive Western encyclopedias of the last four centuries, the setting of limits nevertheless remains crucial to the encyclopedic enterprise. Smellie’s insistence that a universal dictionary of arts and sciences need not trouble itself with history and biography – subjects that could be comprehended by the Britannica but that in his opinion already had adequate housing in separate collections – is part of the same debate that now goes on between Wikipedia’s associations of Deletionists and Inclusionists. Smellie left the Britannica in part because the proprietors demanded the inclusion of materials he deemed beyond the scope and purpose of a universal dictionary of arts and sciences; many Wikipedia editors are now no less willing to stand upon similar principles. The occasionally vitriolic contest between the two associations hinges in large part upon the potential and the potential dangers of the new medium: while the Inclusionists advocate for “building the world’s largest and most complete professional encyclopedia,” the Deletionists wish to maintain “a quality encyclopedia containing as little junk as possible” (Meta contributors 2013; 2014). That the category of “junk” should comprehend overtly promotional entries, unverifiable information, or significantly subpar composition seems uncontroversial, but their assertion that subjects lacking in sufficient “general interest” or “notability” have no place in a “quality” encyclopedia regardless of a lack of size restrictions reveals an irresolvable ambiguity that inheres and has always inhered in the encyclopedic project: the distinction between all there is to know and all that is worth knowing.

The editors of the Britannica likewise remain wary of the dangers posed by digital technology to what they define as the purpose of the encyclopedia. Theodore Pappas, the company’s Chief Development Officer and Executive Editor, similarly describes these dangers in terms of genre. “We do updates every day,” he explains, “but we are conscious of not converting the encyclopedia into a newspaper or blog [in which] you would lose the narrative flow of an entry because you have simply tacked on a new sentence every week” (Pappas, 2013 informal interview, 13 June). Pappas’ association of generic integrity with “narrative flow” reflects a defining distinction between knowledge production and information gathering; in order to maintain the integrity of the encyclopedia as such, the editors have elected to combat or compromise with the sometimes counterproductively high periodicity enabled by the new medium (and perhaps expected or demanded by its users) via a continued emphasis on the collection of “evergreen” information and its integration into synthesized treatments of significant individuals, entities, or events. On 26 June 2013, for instance, the United States Supreme Court ruled section three of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) unconstitutional under the Due Process Clause of the Fifth Amendment. Within hours, the
case (United States v. Windsor) had its own brief entry, but the ruling also quickly became part of longer treatments of “marriage law” and “same-sex marriage,” both of which place the court’s decision in broader religious, social, political, and international contexts. Rather than merely updating the site to record a moment in history, the editors moved to reflect the ruling as an historical moment.

The front page of the digital Britannica nevertheless does acknowledge the immediacy of the modern information environment that it necessarily occupies and must constantly confront. The editors’ efforts to avoid the conversion of the encyclopedia into a newspaper or blog have to some extent resulted in their conversion of the blog and newspaper into encyclopedic paratexts or paragenres. A link to the Britannica Blog prominently occupies the third position on the right-hand side of the top bar of the academic edition’s homepage – just after “home” and “browse.” A team of Britannica editors manages a wide range of entries and responses that ideally strive towards rationality and “aggregate” objectivity but are not thoroughly checked for factual accuracy; the blog encourages discussions of topical issues in addition to more conventionally encyclopedic fare, and its writers have supposedly been given “a lot of freedom” with respect to the substance and tone of their posts. In other words, the blog frees the encyclopedist from modern encyclopedic conventions while simultaneously providing opportunities to network established encyclopedic content with records of personal experiences, current events, and external research sources. One editor’s first-person account of a recent trip to two small towns in “Tornado Alley” contains links to Britannica articles on tornadoes, the Great Plains, the Arctic Ocean, and the Gulf of Mexico in addition to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s Storm Prediction Center website, a separate Center page on tornado safety, and a scholarly article on microphysics and tornadogenesis. Another post marks the fiftieth anniversary of the 1963 March on Washington by showcasing a selection of images of the original event taken from the Britannica’s media collection.

Links to articles from the New York Times and BBC News in the right-hand column of the homepage serve a similar function. These links more straightforwardly alert users to the encyclopedia’s engagement with matters of the moment and tacitly suggest subjects for further inquiry within the database. This strategy, as suggested above, is not exactly new; the weekly publication of The Penny Magazine often allowed it to choose subjects reflective of recent events. The issue for February 3, 1838, for example, opens with a five-column article on the orangutan that begins by informing readers of the Zoological Society’s acquisition of a new living specimen “within the last few weeks” (The Penny Magazine 1838: 41). Digital media, though, have allowed the major encyclopedias to keep abreast of newsworthy events and to do so much more rapidly. On occasion, the items in the Britannica Online news article feed will actually align with those in an additional front-page section featuring new and recently updated entries. Such alignments advertise the encyclopedia’s synchrony with current events (which enhanc-
es encyclopedic utility) while reifying generic distinctions and hierarchical primacy. The selection of the new or newly revised encyclopedia entries is placed above and apart from the links to news articles, and though the former may contain subjects in common with the latter they are typically interspersed among others lacking any apparent connection. The news stories, moreover, refresh frequently while the selection of encyclopedia entries changes not more than once a day. Together, the two elements suggest the role of the news in generating encyclopedic content and the ways in which the Britannica situates that news in the broader context of durable “encyclopedic” knowledge.

Both Britannica and Wikipedia, then, maintain the encyclopedia’s conventionally curatorial disposition towards information management and knowledge production. The fundamental function of the encyclopedia is still the distillation of the “useful” from what would otherwise be an overwhelming deluge of information. The two projects, though, apply very different and sometimes internally inconsistent standards of usefulness the disparities of which are amplified by the practical limitlessness of “size” in a virtual space as well as the fact of restricted versus open editorial arbitrage. Wikipedia’s collaborative model allows for a more amorphous definition of utility that may be said to better or at least more directly reflect the wide and changeable interests of its users; it might therefore seem the more democratic, progressive, or modern of the two encyclopedic projects. The realities of current Wikipedian editorial demographics, however, to some degree complicate such an assessment. In at least one respect, Wikipedia cleaves very closely to a much older convention of encyclopedic knowledge production: as of April 2012, 90 per cent of its editors were male. As Sue Gardner, Executive Director of the Wikimedia Foundation, writes, it “shouldn’t surprise anyone that [Wikipedia] would fall victim to the same gender-related errors and biases as the society that produces it” (Gardner 2013). With only 9 per cent of its editors self-identifying as female, any agenda collectively pursued or any emergent sense of what constitutes “useful knowledge” must be influenced by this disparity.

Ironically, women were absolutely crucial to what Pappas sees as the Britannica’s pre-digital version of user-generated feedback and content production. Beginning in 1936, purchasers of the full encyclopedia received a number of coupons each one of which entitled them to a typed, cross-referenced, and bound report on a subject of their choosing. By the 1960s, the Britannica Library Research Service – then the largest private research service in the world and since 1947 under the direction of Virginia Stenberg, a graduate of Smith College – employed over seventy college-educated women charged with visiting libraries and research institutions across the country in order to answer the queries submitted. In 1968, the Charleston News and Courier reported that Stenberg and her “answer girls” (then as now, contributing to the encyclopedia did not always defend against sexism) received 175 000 requests each year; during peak periods, subscribers sent as many as a thousand per day (McCormack 1968: 2-C). These queries and reports,
Pappas explains, helped the editors determine what subjects needed additional coverage in the encyclopedia proper.

*Britannica* received and responded to these coupons until the early 1990s. An encyclopedia, though, must “evolve with the times,” and in 2008 the company made user-generated content and editorial suggestions part of its mission to make *Britannica Online* “a welcoming community for scholars, experts, and lay contributors” (“Britannica’s New Site” 2008). A strict editorial hierarchy remains in place, however, and according to the submission guidelines, relatively few user contributions will meet their standards – standards that apply to subject as well as content (Submission Guidelines 2014). The *Britannica* is thus more open now than in the past, but it continues in general to follow the agenda set by Tytler and Macfarquhar at the end of the eighteenth century: professionals and experts ultimately decide what does and does not constitute the “core knowledge” needed “to understand the world around us, past and present” (Pappas 2013). *Wikipedia’s* standards are, in terms of subject matter, much looser, but as I have indicated not everything can have a place in even the world’s largest encyclopedia. An off-site archive of deleted pages reveals that the editors drew the line at a New York band called The French Kings, a magazine published for twelve years in Oxford, Mississippi entitled *Southvine*, and the birth of a beagle named “Dallas Southard” in Benson, North Carolina. In the event that “some catastrophe so great as to suspend the progress of science, interrupt the labors of craftsmen, and plunge a portion of our hemisphere into darkness once again”—a moment described by Diderot as “the most glorious” for an encyclopedia (Diderot 2001: 290)—neither *Wikipedia* nor the *Britannica* would recall any of these to human memory.

Given the traditional function of the encyclopedia as a storehouse of civilizational knowledge, the *Britannica*’s far more narrowly defined criteria for notability are a matter of potentially historic importance. “An encyclopedia,” James Creech writes, “must fix the totality of knowledge in one moment, like an image of the national mind that will itself become a stable measure by which future progress can be gauged” (Creech 1982: 189). Though ongoing updates mean the *Britannica* is rarely if ever absolutely fixed, it will continue to provide what Chambers in his *Cyclopaedia* called a “survey of the Republick of Learning” and the “boundary that circumscribes our present Prospect” (Chambers 1728: n.p.). The Library of Congress, which holds every printed edition of the *Britannica* produced since 1768, has agreed to accept an annual donation to its archives in the form of a digital snapshot of the *Britannica* database as it stands on the first day of January in every year going forward. This initiative will maintain and make available to posterity an “unbroken record” that bridges the encyclopedia’s print and digital forms (Pappas 2013).

Building that bridge and extending it into the future, though, will require the keepers of encyclopedic knowledge to continually overcome the challenges of digital preservation. As the final report of the Blue Ribbon Task Force on Sustain-
able Digital Preservation and Access put it, “without preservation, there is no access,” and the technological, institutional, and economic obstacles to the long-term sustainability of digital information remain significant. The move of the *Britannica* from print to digital entails a shift from what the task force describes as a fundamentally linear preservation model focused on physical conservation to a recurrent model in which the merits of preservation must be reevaluated in accordance with technical developments and the persistent threat of obsolescence (Blue Ribbon Task Force on Sustainable Digital Preservation and Access 2010: 25, 29). The digital encyclopedia, in other words, is itself more susceptible to data loss or wholesale irretrievability as a result of the same processes of information evaluation and prioritization that are its own core functions in any medium. Just as new editions or updates pronounce some information obsolete or insignificant by declining to carry it forward, so too might entire encyclopedias be deemed not worthy of re-mediation.

Obsolescence and data loss have of course long governed the dynamics of encyclopedia production. Although several factors (including availability, cost, and reputation) could and did extend the lives of “old” encyclopedias beyond their time – many eighteenth-century readers continued to prefer early editions of Chambers’ *Cyclopaedia* to other, newer universal dictionaries – time inevitably degraded utility. Access to antiquated dictionaries could be had with relative ease, but rarely if ever do the prefaces or dedications to eighteenth or early nineteenth-century encyclopedias suggest that such access was desirable.

If digitization has on the one hand largely resolved one aspect of conventional encyclopedic obsolescence – perpetual updates obviate the need for successive editions, so the encyclopedia never need be out of date again (at least not for very long) – then on the other hand it has necessarily re-problematized issues of long-term, higher-order obsolescence related to potentially unstable or asymmetrical stakeholder interest. The priorities of archivists and audiences cannot always be anticipated, and a later Pepys might not deem having access to a thirty, forty, or hundred-year-old digital encyclopedia worth his time’s equivalent of 38 shillings. Indeed, any single encyclopedia from some near or distant future’s past might not by itself merit the time, effort, or cost of preservation, digital or otherwise. In continuing to hold every printed edition of the *Britannica*, and furthermore agreeing to accept digital versions as well, the Library of Congress has on behalf of the American government and nation implicitly conferred on such individual editions the “permanent” value once optimistically proffered by static works like *A New and Complete Dictionary*, insofar as those editions are part of a larger and dynamic series that has and always will have been preserved in its entirety.
Systematic Readers, Systematic Reading

That value results in part from a method of reading encyclopedias made possible only by the passage of time. Diachronic systematic readings of the encyclopedia have the potential to reveal the derivations of concepts or cultural phenomena in a limited informational context. In “Suicide on My Mind, Britannica on My Table,” for example, American thanatologist Edwin Shneidman traces the concept of “suicide” from its description as “self-murder” in the second Britannica (1777-1784) through each of the fourteen articles on the subject in every edition up to and including the fifteenth.8 The record that emerges reveals not only the history of suicide but also a meta-history of the changing means and methods by which the act and its epiphenomena are explained. The second edition is overtly religious, legalistic, and condemnatory whereas the morally neutral treatment of the eighth edition (1852-1860) is informed more by social science; the ninth edition (1875-1899) shifts the focus from ethics to statistics, and Shneidman’s own contribution to the fourteenth edition in 1973 eschews statistics absolutely in favor of recognizing suicide “as a response to individual human suffering, a tragedy that befalls real people” (Shneidman 1998). Just as Shneidman’s audit found new value in the “old” knowledge contained by the first, second, eighth, and ninth editions, so too might future readers find similar value in the outdated digital installments held by the Library of Congress.

The permanence of this value is and will paradoxically remain contingent on as-of-yet unmade determinations regarding encyclopedic utility, but the benefits of digital re-mediation are such that this kind of systematic reading has already become simpler to perform and may become even more effective, and therefore more useful, as the number of artifacts available for scholarly inquiry increases. “There is no better mirror of the evolution of knowledge in the western world from the western perspective than looking at the Britannica,” Pappas explains. “Simply because we’re no longer publishing the print set doesn’t mean we’re not cognizant of that.” The expanding digital mirror may help to illuminate trends within that evolution otherwise difficult to detect. Schneidman anticipates such potential in the conclusion of his essay:

Schneidman conducted his systematic reading of the Britannica entirely, or almost entirely, in print, and so could not extend his own “tag word” search much beyond the articles specifically dedicated to suicide; additional relevant information may have appeared in places he (or the indexers) did think to look for it or

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could not spare the time to seek. Digitization and the search technologies that come with it, though, have the capacity to spare the reader an impractical if not impossible effort by instantly locating every occurrence of a desired word in each of the hundreds of encyclopedic volumes or installments produced and archived over time.

The encyclopedia itself long has been a method of information management, and even in the eighteenth century numerous authors and editors insisted that only their new methods could make the large amounts of information comprehended by even a single universal dictionary truly useful. Enlightenment encyclopedists worked on much smaller scales and via much different methods than do those of the 21st century, but like the latter they too were motivated in part by the human limitations of short lives and shorter memories. The early editions of the Britannica claimed to have broken with the organizational conventions enshrined by Chambers’s Cyclopaedia and the French Encyclopédie for precisely such reasons. These encyclopedias organized all the terms of knowledge under their own alphabetized entries; readers would locate a desired subject or term and then rely upon extensive systems of cross-references to delineate the relevant pathways across the entire work (Sullivan 1990: 315-59). The method defined the essential form and function of the universal dictionary for close to half a century.

According to the proprietors of the Britannica, though, such dictionaries left every art and science “scattered under a variety of words; by which means, besides the labour of hunting for science through such a labyrinth, it is absolutely impossible for the reader, after all, to obtain a distinct view of any subject” (Proposals for Printing 1768: n.p.). The preface to the second edition insisted that any compendium that left knowledge so “dilacerated, dissected, and disseminated, without regard to connection, or systematic combination” was more aptly described as “a collection of Miscellanies than a Dictionary of Arts and Sciences,” and the third edition called using letters of the alphabet as organizational categories an “antiphilosophical” method that rendered a text like the Cyclopaedia merely “a book of threads and patches” (Encyclopaedia Britannica 1778: 1.iv; 1797, 1.viii). The cross-references, in other words, did not work – or at least, they did not work in accordance with what the proprietors of the Britannica understood as the right relationship between reading and human knowledge acquisition.

The first Britannica therefore made categories out of the arts and sciences themselves. William Smellie wrote extended “Systems” and “Treatises” of individual subjects and supplemented them with full explanations of the “detached” parts of knowledge. He designed these more comprehensive treatments to counteract the “lack of intrinsic logic” in alphabetical arrangement by gathering beneath single headings all those terms that would otherwise be scattered across the entire work (Kafker 1994: 151). His treatise on astronomy, for instance, spans some 66 pages while its two-page counterpart in the Cyclopaedia refers readers to nearly forty other short entries across both of its two volumes. Smellie’s systems
and treatises represent the defining featural change of the modern encyclopedia in the late eighteenth century and prioritize a more intensive encyclopedic reading than previous organizational methods apparently allowed. The editors of the second edition explain:

The systematic reader will be fully and regularly informed, by referring to the general name of the Science he wishes to explore; whilst the proficient who wishes to refresh and strengthen his memory in any particular part, may find the same by turning to the Alphabet, which, having general references, serves as an index to the Systems and Treatises, whilst others, who are willing to content themselves with partial and detached views of subjects, will find them explained under articles, by which they are denominated (Encyclopaedia Britannica 1778: 1.iv).

This passage divides encyclopedic reading and readers into three kinds, the last of which are described in somewhat dismissive terms while the first are labeled with a term of some contemporary novelty. According to Eighteenth Century Collections Online (ECCO), the “systematic writer” had been part of eighteenth-century literary discourse at least since 1753; the above selection from the second Britannica, however, is the first in which the database records the appearance of a “systematic reader” – in this case, one who reads a given system as written and in its entirety. While such readers certainly already existed, the phrase here naturalizes the practice to the encyclopedia as a means by which one could gain the “full” understanding of a subject that following cross-references failed to facilitate.

Though in the early eighteenth century “index-learning” inspired the ire of authors like Alexander Pope and Jonathan Swift, to whom it connoted “knowledge tenuously held, only superficially grasped…not only intellectually suspect but also potentially dangerous” (Swift lambasted it in A Tale of a Tub as a method by which one could avoid “the Fatigue of Reading or of Thinking”), systematic writing and reading of the kind embraced by the Britannica as an alternative also did not go without objection (Swift 1973: 337-38; Valenza 2009: 219). The anonymous author of A Compendium of Physic, and Surgery, for instance, warned that, “dry systematic writers, are often as disgustful, as they are voluminous, and deter the young student by their prolixity” (A Compendium 1769: vi). Oliver Goldsmith similarly disparaged them as those “whose only boast it is to leave nothing out” (Goldsmith 1764: 1.12). When George Selby Howard set about compiling the New Royal Cyclopædia, and Encyclopædia (not to be confused with Hall’s New Royal Encyclopaedia), he apparently took such lessons to heart. Selby acknowledged in his preface that “too many references should be carefully avoided, in order to save unnecessary trouble” but simultaneously insisted that an encyclopedia should just “as carefully avoid being absurdly systematic, which would hinder the reader from obtaining an immediate explanation, when wanted, of any particular term or subject in a complete system, and oblige him to read the whole system through” (Howard 1788: 1.iv). The usefulness of the extended treatise or system, then, also had its limits; the successful encyclopedist had to find a middle way
between the Scylla of superficial learning and the Charybdis of uninterrupted (or uninterruptable) explication.

Systems and systematic reading remained a major part the *Britannica* for centuries. The encyclopedia, or rather one of the pirates who printed “American” editions in violation of the rights given to the publishing firms of Charles Scribner’s Sons, Samuel L. Hall, and Little, Brown and Company by the Edinburgh publishing company A & C Black, continued to specifically encourage systematic reading at the turn of the twentieth century. That encouragement, though, came with an acknowledgement that readers now generally conceived of encyclopedic utility in terms of occasional reference. Along with their illicit version of the landmark ninth edition (the “Scholarly Edition”), the Werner Company of Chicago printed several editions of James Baldwin’s *A Guide to Systematic Readings in the Encyclopædia Britannica*. In the introduction to the work, Baldwin presents as a recent realization what had once been widely understood: “[the encyclopedia] has usually been regarded as a repository of general information, to be kept ready at hand for consultation as occasion should demand. But while this is the ordinary use of the *Britannica*, it has been found that it possesses a broader function, and that it may be utilized in such manner as to perform the office of a great educational agent.” Baldwin then attempts to redraw the line dividing dictionaries from encyclopedias. Occasional reference, Baldwin writes, “is the proper and only way in which to use a dictionary. But the *Encyclopædia Britannica* is a great deal more than a dictionary, and is capable of imparting more knowledge and more enjoyment than all the dictionaries in the world” (Baldwin 1899: iii, ix-x). The guide thus seeks to re-establish a practice excluded by a narrowed perception of encyclopedic functionality and argues to define the genre by use rather than content or pre-set organization.

The text that follows re-organizes the *Britannica* to produce systematic courses of readings intended for “the young people,” “the student,” and “The Busy World.” The first two largely follow familiar disciplinary divisions; Baldwin sets the young people general courses in history, biography, science, and sport whereas the student can choose from a wider and more specific set of subjects ranging from astronomy to zoology and biology to mathematics. He even offers a course designed for the “desultory reader” whose curiosity he presumes can be awakened by articles about eccentric inventions, strange natural specimens, or exciting historical events. As suggested by the inclusion of entries describing funeral rites, embalming practices, mummies, tombs, and suttee (a Hindu custom in which a widow burned herself upon the pyre of her late husband), even a morbid curiosity would suffice. Courses for adults in the “busy world” are organized by trade or profession; Baldwin charts a different path for the architect, for instance, than he does for the soldier, miner, or machinist. None of these courses, however, proceeds in an order determined by the encyclopedia itself. The student of philosophy begins with the introductory paragraphs on ethics in volume eight and then must
read selections from another 68 articles distributed across sixteen volumes and the supplement. The preliminary reading recommended to the inventor, meanwhile, includes the chronological table of great inventions and discoveries in volume five, a five-page history of patents in volume 28, and the list of patent laws in force across Europe and the United States included in the supplement.

Baldwin’s systematic readings, then, are not those authored or authorized by the encyclopedia per se; insofar as they are organized by an outside figure rather than the expert contributors and professional editors of the Britannica, they have more in common with Schneidman’s diachronic reading of all the articles on suicide. Though both led their readers through reams of printed pages, the users of twenty-first century online encyclopedia users might nevertheless recognize them as something akin to their own journeys down what are colloquially referred to as “wiki-holes” or “wiki-trails.” Loosely defined as the spontaneous and self-perpetuating process of reading an extended series of encyclopedia articles by clicking on embedded links in an order determined more by curiosity than purpose, falling down a wiki-hole or following a wiki-trail lacks the proscription of Baldwin’s guide or the determinacy of Schneidman’s thanatology. The hours-long sessions, however, do involve a species of intensive investigation and the agential creation of systematic readings no more necessarily disjointed than any of those not deliberately crafted by authors as coherent and self-contained single articles. Such readings do not always achieve an ideal or even discernible systematicity, but as they unfold they do have the potential to generate emergent (if highly idiosyncratic) categories or organizations bound by the cognition of the individual. Links reify relation, and while following them might seem like a reversion to searching for knowledge scattered under a variety of words – by which means, as noted above, the proprietors of the first Britannica believed a distinct view of any subject was lost – they allow readers to discover new views and subjects in conjunction with rather than only by order of the actual encyclopedia.

Though removed in many respects from Smellie’s original systems and treatises as well as from each other, the plans and practices examined above all find ways of using the encyclopedia not necessarily anticipated by its editors and authors. The “systematic reader” of the nineteenth, twentieth, or twenty-first century is not the same as that identified by the second Britannica in 1778, but systematic readings of the encyclopedia have persisted. Technological change has altered the techniques, outcomes, and perhaps even the point of systematic reading, but it remains a legible if less recognizable part of the encyclopedic tradition.

Conclusion

The Enlightenment, then, has left what seems to be an indelible mark on even the digital encyclopedia. Indeed, much of the critical language now circulating around and about digital or online texts in general contains clear echoes of Enlightenment
discourse about print encyclopedias and encyclopedic learning. Bertrand Gervais, for example, describes the beginning of Stuart Moulthrop’s Hegirascope, a hyper-text fiction “of about 175 pages traversed by more than 700 links,” as including the following warning to the reader: “you are now entering a labyrinth where you will not only be clueless as to where you are at any given point, but your own progression will be decided by the work itself” (Moulthrop, cited in Gervais 2008: 183-84). Readers of the work, Gervais writes, are “pressed into the position of Theseus…we hope to acquire enough knowledge to get a clear view of the work itself through our exploration of its maze, thereby possibly arriving at Daedalus’s perspective.” Leaving readers lost in a labyrinth and at the mercy of cross-references is precisely what the editors of the early Britannica wished to avoid, and a clear (or rather “distinct”) view of knowledge is exactly what they hoped their systems and treatises would provide. In the same collection, meanwhile, Christian Vandendrope makes a direct connection between the reading revolution of the eighteenth century, which elevated “extensive reading” and “foster[ed] the production of big encyclopedias” like the Cyclopædia and Encyclopédie, to the fragmentary and action-oriented browsing of the typical internet user (Vandendorpe 2008: 204).

The other part of the story, however – the emphasis and reinstallation by the Britannica of a limited kind of intensive or “systematic” reading within the encyclopedic tradition – is perhaps too easily obscured by the shadow cast back on the eighteenth century by the digital age. Roger Chartier has characterized surfing the web as “segmented, fragmented, discontinuous” and suggests that the “fragmented structure” of encyclopedic texts corresponds to that type of reading. It did and did not, does and does not. In the larger context of its whole life since the late seventeenth century, the modern encyclopedia only briefly aspired to be among those genres “the appreciation of which implies familiarity with the work in its entirety and a perception of the text as an original and coherent creation” (Chartier 2004: 151-52). Even though the first Britannica formally abandoned the idea that all knowledge could be represented and comprehended as a cohesive totality, though, it maintained that individual arts and sciences deserved extensive, self-contained explanation and focused consideration. Several of Smellie’s treatises took up hundreds of columns; Baldwin extolled the comprehensiveness of the 84-page general article on horticulture in volume 12 of the ninth edition; and though the overwhelming majority of articles in the Micropædia of the fifteenth edition contained fewer than 750 words, the longest of the Macropædia went on for 310 pages.

Digital remediation has, for all that, definitely brought with it a kind of generic devolution. “There is a greater tendency now,” according to Pappas, “to want to break up larger articles...because there is a need for the succinct dictionary-type synopses of things.” Pappas even conceives of the Britannica in terms of encyclopedic coverage and knowledge production in terms more appropriate to the uni-
versal dictionaries of old. “It’s cross-references,” he explains. A given article might only contain a paragraph, “but you are linking off to 20,000 types of X, 20,000 words on the history of Y.” These words suggest, however, that within the re-fragmented encyclopedia, the potential for sustained reading and in-depth learning still exists. Rather than reading systems or treatises pre-written by single experts, readers in search of a fuller understanding will follow the links and fashion their own. Others, as always, will content themselves with partial views. “When you think about it,” Pappas suggests, “it’s kind of back to the future.”

I do not wish to suggest, therefore, that the digital encyclopedia has not brought significant changes to the encyclopedic project and the forms of knowledge it might generate; it has and will almost certainly continue to so. In 1998, with the first CD-ROM edition of the Britannica only four years old and the introduction of Google Print still six years away, even Schneidman likely did not anticipate the algorithmic analysis of hundreds or hundreds of thousands of digitized texts or databases that might have made his work both faster and far more comprehensive. The “distant reading” of encyclopedias – whether within editions, across them, or in the context of numberless other documents – would on the one hand be a novel approach, but it would on the other be only a logical extension of the method with which Schneidman experimented. It would also be only another in a long series of different kinds of reading designed to maximize the usefulness of the work by making manageable what would otherwise be an overwhelming amount of information. Wherever such an intention “does not plainly appear,” as Smellie put it in the second sentence of the first Britannica, “neither the books nor their authors have the smallest claim to the approbation of mankind” (Smellie 1768: v).

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Notes

1 See, for example, Henry Peachham’s The Compleat Gentleman (1622) and Johann Heinrich Alsted’s Encyclopedia septem tomis distincta (1630). Though the former over the course of 40 years expanded from some 200 to roughly 450 pages in octavo, it was still of very modest size compared to Alsted’s single edition of 2400 pages in folio.
The list in the second edition of 1791 gives the prices of the *Cyclopædia* and (presumably) the second edition *Britannica* at £13 and £19, respectively. The first edition (1788) lists this price advantage in the second position, but the promise of a bargain still leads: the proprietors promise at least one copperplate free with every number (Hall 1788: n.p.).

On 21 May 2013, Tom Panelas, Director of Communications at Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., responded to my email inquiry regarding the possibility of speaking to a data editor about statistical information (average article length, optimal page load times, web traffic, etc.). I provided a description of my interests and a link to *Culture Unbound*, at which point Mr. Panelas forwarded my request to Mr. Pappas. We met at Britannica global headquarters at approximately 9:15AM CST on 13 June 2013. He provided a brief tour of the lobby and second floor, where a display houses several original *Britannica* plates. At his suggestion, the informal interview took place over coffee at the Merchandise Mart, an art-deco architectural landmark roughly one block away from Britannica HQ. The interview lasted from approximately 9:30-10:15AM CST and was recorded, with permission, on a SONY ICD-BX132 digital voice recorder (without external microphone). Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from Pappas are from my subsequent transcription of that recording.

“Same-sex marriage” was updated to reflect the finding of the Supreme Court within four hours of the ruling on June 26th; “marriage law” was not updated until the late afternoon or evening of the following day (the page histories of *Britannica* articles do not reflect the exact times at which changes were made). SCOTUSblog and the *Wall Street Journal* posted the ruling to their liveblogs of the proceedings at 9:02AM CDT; the Wikipedia entry on DOMA was updated at 9:05AM CDT (Live Blog: 2013). The approximate times of *Britannica’s* updates were garnered from my own observations of both pages as the events unfolded.

During the last weeks of August, for example, the news media dedicated extensive coverage to the events then unfolding in Syria; at 12:55PM CST on August 30th, the first two of three articles listed beneath each source referred to such events. The subsection on “foreign engagement and domestic chance since 1990” in the *Britannica’s* entry on Syrian history had already been revised on August 29th to reflect reports of suspected chemical weapons attacks outside of Damascus and the denouncement of said weapons by officials of the British, French, and United States governments.

The no-longer operational Deletionpedia archives over 62,000 pages deleted from the English-language Wikipedia between February and September 2008; Speedy Deletion Wiki contains over 181,000 pages that have been or “are in danger” of being deleted, including those it has imported from Deletionpedia (*Speedy Deletion Wiki* 2014).

Blue Ribbon Task Force on Sustainable Digital Preservation and Access was convened in 2007 and produced several reports, the last in early 2010. The task force received funding from the National Science Foundation and the Mellon Foundation, in partnership with the Library of Congress, the Joint Information Systems Committee of the United Kingdom, the Council on Library and Information Resources, and the National Archives and Records Administration.

Shneidman himself contributed seven pages on “Suicide” to volume 21 of the fourteenth edition *Britannica* produced in 1973; by that time he had co-founded the Los Angeles Suicide Prevention Center, founded the American Association of Suicidology and its peer-reviewed academic journal, *Suicide and Life Threatening Behavior*, and become the first Professor of Thanatology at UCLA.

For the reading revolution, see esp. Rolf Engelsing, *Der Bürger als Leser. Lesergeschichte in Deutschland 1500-1800* (1974).

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Abstract
Encyclopedias present and contain knowledge, but historically they have also been commercial commodities, produced for sale. In this article, we study the self-presentations of a selection of Norwegian encyclopedias, as these are expressed in the form of commercial images, advertising texts and slogans. We thus present a brief but detailed study of what might be called a number of paratextual matters associated with 20th-century Norwegian encyclopedias, with the aim of identifying the most significant or recurring topoi in the material. Our analysis shows that claims about speed and modernization are among the most conspicuous ingredients in these self-presentations, claims which, we argue, feed into a particular logic of a particular version of 20th-century modernity. The article begins with an analysis of the commercially successful Konversationslexicon, the first Norwegian encyclopedia, published in 1906 and for a long time market leader of the bourgeois tradition. The Konversationslexicon was produced with the explicit aim of providing a source of conversation for the educated classes, a new and expanding group of readers. We also show how the publisher Aschehoug went on to strengthen its own position in this market through a sophisticated process of differentiation. Seen as a contrast to these market leaders, we explore the Norwegian tradition of counter-encyclopaedias, with the radical PaxLexikon as our main example. This encyclopaedia came into existence as a result of a strong ideological motivation and was run by left-wing idealists. Nevertheless, and perhaps inevitably, it ended up situating itself within the same market mechanisms and the same commercial logic as the bourgeois encyclopaedias. The article ends by a brief consideration of the change from commercial print encyclopaedias to internet-based encyclopaedias, and of the new challenges this poses in a small nation, rhetorically and in the struggle for funding.

Keywords: Encyclopaedia, encyclopaedism, Norway, history, market
Introduction

Encyclopaedias acquired a unique place and exceptional status in Norwegian publishing during the 20th century. Egil and Harald Tveterås, historians of Norwegian booksellers, concluded about their country’s publishing industry in the 1970s that encyclopaedias simply became “the kind of books which it was easiest to sell” (Tveterås 1996: 398). For quite some time, the publishers’ perspective seems to have been that the market was “insatiable”.\(^1\) Our aim in this article is to present a brief but detailed study of what might be called a number of paratextual matters associated with 20th-century Norwegian encyclopaedias. By “paratextual” we refer to Gérard Genette’s notion of texts at the threshold of the main text which form “a privileged place of a pragmatics and a strategy, of an influence on the public” (Genette 1997: 2). Here we are primarily interested in a sub-category of the paratext which Genette terms “the publisher’s epitext”, in reference to materials, such as advertisements, posters, promotional dossiers and periodical bulletins for booksellers (ibid.: 347). More generally, our approach is informed by recent work and theory related to the history of the book, in which Genette’s structuralist perspective is supplemented with more historicist and sociological emphases. This kind of approach to texts requires attention not only to the particular physical forms in which a text meets its reader – the manifold functions of its materiality – but also to its various institutional dimensions. Encyclopaedias clearly participate in what Jerome J. McGann calls “The Textual Condition”, and one of the dimensions of this “condition” – and of the “socialization” of texts more generally – is their inevitable situatedness as printed matter in a marketplace (McGann 1991: 3-16 and 124-25).\(^2\) The “physically determinate and socially determined form” in which reading takes place most often has commercial dimensions. As a result, our claim is that we cannot understand the “textuality” of encyclopaedias without paying attention to how they have circulated in the world, including their “modes of production”.

The particular paratexts in our corpus are primarily found in the form of commercial images, along with advertising texts and slogans. In studying this material, we have, in addition to consulting publishers’ archives, had access to the Norwegian National Library’s “Småtrykkstaslingen”, a collection of smaller print material, including leaflets and all kinds of commercial material intended for booksellers and readers, as well as “Plakatsaslingen”, which is an extensive collection of posters.\(^3\) Our goal has thus been to investigate and analyze a kind of empirical material that we believe has not yet been adequately explored, either in a Norwegian context or in general. This contribution should be considered a first step, however; it is clear to us that much more work can be done in this area.

In the following, we will study the self-presentation of a few different encyclopaedias, with the aim of identifying their logics and the most significant new or recurring topoi in the material. Our analysis will show that claims about tempo
and modernization are key ingredients in these self-presentations that reveal a particular logic of modernity. This article does not present a complete chronological survey of encyclopaedias in Norway in the 20th century. Instead, we have chosen to analyze the commercially successful “konversasjonsleksikon”, which was the Norwegian market leader of the tradition established by the German publisher Friedrich Arnold Brockhaus. The German genre of the Konversationslexicon was produced with the explicit aim of providing a source of conversation for the educated (“gebildete”) classes, a new and expanding group of bourgeois readers (Conrad 2006: 23-66; see also Meyer 1966). We will also show how Aschehoug, the publisher of this leading Norwegian encyclopaedia, went on to strengthen its own position through a process of differentiation.

Seen as a contrast to these market leaders, we will explore the Norwegian tradition of counter-encyclopaedias, with the radical PaxLeksikon as our main example. This encyclopaedia came into existence as a result of a strong ideological motivation and was run by idealists. Nevertheless, and perhaps inevitably, it ended up situating itself within the same market for encyclopedic products, within the same commercial logic, as the bourgeois encyclopaedias. Along the way, the publisher Pax managed to produce an impressive repertoire of inventive sales strategies, slogans and commercial material. Towards the end of this article we will touch on developments in the last part of the twentieth century, when the market could no longer uphold the production of encyclopaedias in Norway.

In a more general survey of the large marketing material available to us, we could have chosen to dwell on a number of other recurring rhetorical topoi, such as utility, comprehensiveness or pleasure, to mention but a few. Our reason for focusing on the many claims to novelty, modernity and up-to-datedness is that there seems to be a particular double dynamic at hand in this area. Such claims about encyclopaedias, whether they relate to content or organization, are of course not new. They are at least as old as some of the most famous 18th-century examples of the genre. But this well-established and seemingly necessary claim, a modern and dynamic idea of knowledge, seems, in our material, also to respond to, be involved in and fed by another and more aggressive logic, namely that of the marketplace. Again, we would not want to claim that this dynamic is entirely new, but the 20th-century market, with its increased pace and its strong demands for creating new commodities and customers, seems to have helped this development accelerate. In this way, two demands for newness seem to have fed off and strengthened each other in ways that make the 20th-century encyclopaedia a particularly strong example of the forward thrust in some of the great narratives of modernity. The promotion and branding campaigns for this commodity helped create and affirm the notion of a new kind of age in which knowledge must be continually updated and consumption must increase steadily.
A Counter-encyclopaedia Introduced

It was in the context of this exceptionally strong encyclopedic tradition, one that was dominated by the bourgeois Konversationslexicon, that a new encyclopaedia emerged in 1978. In the marketing material for this enterprise, planned as an encyclopaedia in six volumes, a clear diagnosis of the current situation was offered: “Norway does not have too few, but too many encyclopaedias” (“Her kommer Pax Leksikon” 1978). One of the members of the editorial board, the historian Hans Fredrik Dahl, went on to note that there was no other country than his own relatively young nation in which so many encyclopedic works were sold per inhabitant, before posing a challenge: “Is this a gain for our cultural environment?” (“Et opprør i seks bind” 1978). Those behind the new and radical PaxLeksikon thought not. While existing encyclopaedias might be useful for those occupied with crossword puzzles, and perhaps for essay writing and self-education through correspondence schools, “An encyclopaedia, a ‘Konversationslexicon’, is a parcel of knowledge aimed at quick consumption and minimal understanding” (ibid.). From such a perspective there was little to separate “our two national encyclopaedias”, Dahl claimed, referring to the multi-volume works by market leaders Aschehoug and Gyldendal. The content was generally the same, even if the number of volumes might vary. PaxLeksikon, in opposition to these market leaders, wanted to be “a rebellion in six volumes”, a “counter-encyclopaedia against our great Norwegian heritage” (“Her kommer PaxLeksikon” 1978). The ambition was, as illustration 1 clearly shows, to utilize the potential of the genre in new ways:

We want to present knowledge with understanding. We will use an elementary encyclopedic form in order to say something different, to offer complete knowledge of society, a way into politics, culture, social problems, power structures, a new scheme through and through (ibid.).

PaxLeksikon was different, but also similar; it represented a negation, but also an affirmation of a tradition in a number of ways. This was so in its claims to newness and modernity, but not least in the ways in which it utilized these claims in the launching of a new product.
Ill. 1: This “pyramid of knowledge” is carried by those for whom it is meant: workers in all countries, the so-called “grass-roots” men and women. The road to liberation and a new society went through active acquisition of critical knowledge: through the purchase of PaxLeksikon. The poster is clearly alluding to the satirical image of the “Pyramid of Capitalism”, a well-known image for the political left in the 1960s.

Unknown artist, Here comes **PaxLeksikon**, Pax Forlag: 1978. Brochure A5 format, 14,85x21 cm.

**The Main Tradition**

Before returning to **PaxLeksikon**, we would like to sketch the history of the strongest line of Norwegian encyclopaedias in the twentieth century, again primarily relying on their commercial self-presentation. The first big Norwegian **Konversationslexicon** came into being as a result of a Danish initiative, namely the publisher Eiler Hagerup. Aschehoug’s William Nygaard agreed to adopt some of the same texts, along with the same pictures and maps, but insisted that the Norwegian edition be introduced as a separate and independent work (Rudeng 1997: 176). Since the 1890s Aschehoug had operated with the motto, “Norwegian books with a Norwegian publisher”, a motto which situated his publications within a national discourse against rival Danish firms publishing Norwegian authors.
The new encyclopaedia, called *Illustreret Norsk Konversations-leksikon* and published in 1906, only a year after the dissolution of the union with Sweden, has been hailed as a “marking of Norway’s new independence” (Tveterås 1996: 194). By 1913 this work numbered six volumes. Nygaard had been very conscious of the importance of marketing the work, and Aschehoug distributed as many as 250 000 invitations for subscription, plus a great number of posters to booksellers and others (ill. 2). This first Norwegian *Konversationslexikon* became a considerable success, selling 20 800 sets (Tveterås 1996: 195).

Ill. 2: Subscriptions wanted for *Illustreret Norsk Konversations-Leksikon*! The poster presents images that became iconic in the Norwegian encyclopaedia tradition: the naked man of Aschehoug, gazing at the stars and “a world of knowledge” – surrounded by columns, like the ancient columns of Hercules, representing the boarders between the known and the unknown world.

With the second edition of 1919 the work’s title had changed to *Aschehougs Konversationsleksikon*. It was published in nine volumes and sold more than 50,000 sets. When the fifth edition was issued in 1971, it had been expanded to 20 volumes, with a print run of 140,000 (Tveterås 1996: 196). While the appeal to the national sentiments in a newly independent nation may have been dominant around the time of the first launch of this encyclopaedia, the publisher also, in calling the work “a modern Konversationslexicon”, relied on a language that stressed the need to keep up with the times (“En prisregulerung” 1931). The marketing of new editions went on to rely much more heavily on this topos, however.

In the supplementary volume launched in 1932, itself a symptom of the concern with updatedness and topicality, the advertising held that “One must of course with works like these always make sure that the information at any given moment is always in step with the times”. In addition, in a message to booksellers, the publishers noted that this volume would bring the encyclopaedia “up to date” (“En prisregulerung” 1931). Accompanied by a photograph of Adolf Hitler, one of the new biographical entries in the supplementary volume, the text claimed that *Aschehougs Konversations-Leksikon* would now be “the most modern, most extensive and detailed, most complete and up-to-date encyclopedic work ever published in Norway” (“Under pressen” 3.3.1931). The argument that the passing of time itself demanded new encyclopaedias or new editions of encyclopaedias is among the most frequently used claims in these marketing operations. In an advertising campaign for *Aschehougs Konversationsleksikon* in 1939, potential customers were told that

> people of our time seem to have an increasing need for reference books of all kinds. This strong tendency must be explained from man’s new sense that the whole world affects him personally. Distances are disappearing, and through film, the press and radio the common man is presented with a chaotic material of images, concepts and words (“Aschehoug 15-bind” 1939).

This notion that the particular form or quality of the age itself demanded such new knowledge products was further strengthened in the same encyclopaedia’s 1955 campaign:

> Time demands much of modern man, and his existence is becoming more and more complicated. Who? When? Where? Why? In this way questions arise many times a day through newspapers, broadcasting and literature. We now have the past, the present and the future thrust upon us in quite a different way from earlier generations. That is why keeping informed about the world has become a necessity of life for modern man, and the Konversationslexicon is no longer a luxury for the few (“Aschehoug konversasjonsleksikon 18 store bind” 1955).

Along with such extended appeals to the necessity of keeping up with the times as a requirement for existence in the modern world, Aschehoug coined slogan after slogan in order to convince its potential customers:

> “The one who buys Aschehougs konversationsleksikon is safe!”

> “The answer to all questions.”
“Everything about everyone for every Norwegian home.”

“Everything about everyone – for everyone – always at hand. New, useful and absolutely necessary!”

“First! Biggest! Leading!” (Aschehoug Konversasjonsleksikon, different pamphlets).

For the 1932 supplementary volume, the publishers informed booksellers that they had coined as many as 29 new slogans, one for every letter of the (Norwegian) alphabet. Such slogans were produced en masse throughout the century as part of ever larger and more sophisticated marketing campaigns. These one-liners made the case that the encyclopaedia in question was the most reliable, useful, extensive, simple, different, enlightening, illustrated and modern in the country.

Aschehoug’s main rival in the market, Gyldendal Konversasjonsleksikon, was first published in 12 volumes between 1933 and 1934. A main point in the early advertising campaigns was that this was a cheaper encyclopaedia than Aschehougs, and a more user friendly one. It was only in 1960 that Gyldendal really stepped up the competition against its main rival, however. When director Harald Grieg later described the project, Gyldendals Store Konversasjonsleksikon – the “great” or “big” had now been added in spite of the fact that the work was reduced to four volumes – he described the cost of seven million Norwegian kroner as “a colossal one-time investment” (Grieg 1971: 812; Tveterås 1996: 397). The marketing organization had been extended and professionalized, and around 40 sales representatives had been trained for the task of travelling the country in order to secure pre-publication orders (ill. 3). Two years later, the number of sales representatives had grown to 50. One of the selling points emphasized in Gyldendal’s multi-faceted marketing operations was the one of simultaneity.

Contrary to their main competitor Aschehoug, Gyldendals Store Konversasjonsleksikon published its four
volumes at one and the same time. The customer would not have to wait for the later volumes, and, along the way, realize that the early volumes had become outdated. Here was, instead, instant access to a huge wealth of knowledge. The first print run ran to 32,000 sets with a total value of 24 million kroner, making up as much as 7 percent of the annual sales in the Norwegian book market. By this time, the competition for being the most modern and up-to-date reference work had intensified. When the single-volume edition of Gyldendal’s encyclopaedia appeared, it was marketed under the slogan: “A new age needs a new encyclopaedia” (ill. 4).

Ill. 4: The answer to the demands of modern times: “A new age needs a new encyclopaedia!” The single-volume encyclopaedia of Gyldendal was a huge success and sold more than 50,000 copies. EM (unidentified signature), no title, Gyldendal: 1948. Litography 99x70 cm.
Differentiations for the Market

Aschehoug’s FOKUS encyclopaedia became perhaps the strongest example of a marketing operation placing its emphasis on the topos of the modern and up to date. This product of the late 1950s focused on speed and efficiency; it aimed to meet the needs of a modern reader caught in an age of rapid change. In launching their new encyclopaedia the publishers adopted terminology from the most advanced sectors of modern technology. The six-volume work was nothing less than “A 6-stage rocket!” (“En seks-trinns-rakett!” 1958) (Ill. 5). The slogans centered around the demands for reliability, plus immediately accessible knowledge: “No one can be without an encyclopaedia today”; “A thousand and one questions occur and demand answers in the ever-changing situations of everyday life”; “All you want to know about what is happening in our time”; “FOKUS – the reference work for all situations!”; “FOKUS – An encyclopaedia in line with the demands of the age”; and, going one step further, “FOKUS – for the future!” FOKUS was, furthermore, the “modern man’s modern encyclopaedia” (FOKUS, different pamphlets). The colorful promotional brochure of 1958 also claimed that FOKUS was “more than a new encyclopaedia – it is an encyclopaedia in an entirely new fashion, first and foremost in the way in which it communicates knowledge” (“FOKUS – kunnskap på en ny måte!” 1958). Much emphasis was placed on the efficient communication of knowledge achieved through so-called “narrative pictures”, and when one reviewer dubbed the encyclopaedia “The television of the book shelf”, the publisher was able to make use of yet another marker of 20th-century modernity in its promotional material (ibid.).

Ill. 5: Totally up to date: “A six-stage rocket!” Unknown artist, En 6-trinns-rakett, Aschehoug: 1958. Small print, 50x35 cm.
In her book *Forbrukeragentene [Agents of Consumption]*, the historian Christine Myrvang argues that the conditions for what would evolve into the so-called *consumer society* in a Norwegian context were established in the transition between the 19th and 20th century (Myrvang 2009): in other words, just at the time when the first Norwegian encyclopaedia, Aschehougs, was published. Myrvang describes how a variety of agents and institutions began to actively shape the market, and how they sought to remove “purchase resistance”, so that a wider population would want to purchase goods – even things you had not previously thought there was a need for, and far less an opportunity to acquire. ⁴ Especially during the formative phase of the Norwegian consumer society, which mainly seems to have taken place between the years of 1914 and 1960, there were “various forms of knowledge exchange, where science, technology and expertise were used in the surveys of customers, and in advertising and sales operations and other promotional work” (Myrvang 2009: 13). To measure and map the consumer, various tools and techniques were developed and perfected. Targeted and specially designed advertising helped create new needs, and new market segments were identified and established (ill. 6).

Ill. 6: A new target group is singled out: the family. In the centre of the contemplative family is the father, holding the new product: an encyclopaedia described as “the fairytale of the real”.

Back to *PaxLeksikon*

As noted at the beginning, when it was launched, the 1970s radical *PaxLeksikon* presented itself as something new. Placing itself as a work in opposition to the standard *Konversationslexicon*, and in terms of content clearly giving an impression of being a counter-encyclopaedia, *PaxLeksikon* nevertheless performs particularly interesting cultural and political work, while not escaping, or even wanting to escape, the standard marketing operations we have described. While openly and obviously indebted to its radical predecessor *Arbeidernes Leksikon* [*The Workers’ Encyclopaedia*], published between 1932 and 1936, *PaxLeksikon* could nevertheless plausibly claim that it was “unusual” and “the only one of its kind in Western Europe” (“Her er PaxLeksikon. Nyskrevet av folk som har preget samfunnsdebatten de siste 20 åra» 1978). Here was a distinct and conscious ideological profile, an encyclopaedia “in which the authors do not hide their opinions, but systematically try to enlighten things from a unified perspective” (ibid.).

For the radical intellectuals behind Pax, newness was not just about organization or content; it was about thinking anew as part of a necessary response to what they deemed to be a new phase of capitalism. But they also placed themselves in a tradition, one which bypassed the *Konversationslexicon*. In an ingenious interview with Denis Diderot in the promotional material for the first volume of *PaxLeksikon*, the great *encyclopediste* advised his young Norwegian successors to think new thoughts (Dagblabla 5.3.1979). But thinking anew, he noted, was not possible without an “overview of experience”, a key synthetic principle which of course informed the new encyclopaedia (ibid.).

*Pax* was, to repeat, different from the *Konversationslexicon* in a number of ways. This was proven by the rejection of objectivity, by the explicitly socialist, feminist and international perspectives, and the selection of entries. But in other ways it was very much similar to the encyclopaedias against which it so strongly distanced itself, such as in the organization of knowledge and the relatively distinguished material appearance of the books, as well as, and not least, in the stress on newness. This was, furthermore, representative of the degree of its market orientation, and the active efforts these publishers and idealists made in order to create and reach new customers.

By August 1978 the small publisher had more than 25 people employed in selling the work in the largest Norwegian cities, and commercial material was supposed to reach all of the country’s 1.4 million homes (“Dagsorden/framdriftsgruppa” 14.6. [1978]). Those in charge believed that *PaxLeksikon* had an “enormous sales potential”, and the campaign would include “exhibitions, direct contact, phone calls, window exhibitions and DM [Direct Marketing] among other things” (ibid.). The country’s booksellers were told that:

> There is a big market for *PaxLeksikon*! Surveys undertaken by Pax show that a big public are waiting for *PaxLeksikon* with expectation and interest. Those that want *PaxLeksikon* are, admittedly, special groups – but these groups are big, they are tra-

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ditional book buyers and they are spread all over the country. It is all about reaching them! (“Her kommer PaxLeksikon, kampanjetidsplan” 1978)

As part of its innovative marketing, the publisher also made effective use of its own existing network. When volume three was published in October 1979, and the sales had proven themselves considerably lower than anticipated, the 4,300 people who had bought the encyclopaedia directly from the publishers were contacted and asked to do their part: “Now we must get to know your friends – and it is you who will have to make the contact!” (“Vervekampanje” 1979). In spite of all of these efforts, PaxLeksikon ended up as a commercial disappointment. In 1980, two years after the first volume had been published, the minutes from a meeting of the encyclopaedia’s editorial board opened as follows: “Sales stand almost entirely still” (“AML” 1980-01-10).

PaxLeksikon was not a great commercial success, but it functioned as a marker of identity for large parts of an entire generation. If you had PaxLeksikon on your bookshelf, you sent a signal to others about your view of the world. As a commodity, PaxLeksikon, furthermore, took part in a dynamic, in which commercial material and a sales apparatus helped build an encyclopaedia as a brand. Part of this construction meant that the encyclopaedia presented itself as something new, and that owning this product meant that you moved with the times, perhaps even ahead of them.

Going Online

The 20th-century print encyclopaedia seemed to gain momentum while creating an ever stronger sense of urgency, until it finally began to slow down toward the end of the century – in terms of sales, that is – and eventually disappear. The disappointment felt by the idealists behind PaxLeksikon may not have been related to the technological, structural, and economic difficulties to come, but their greatest rivals in the Norwegian encyclopaedia market would soon experience even more radical setbacks. In the era of online encyclopaedias, however, some of the issues we have discussed above remained, both in terms of their connections with the dynamics of the market, and their self-presentations.

A first definite ebb in this tide may be said to have come when Aschehoug and Gyldendal, the publishers with by far the biggest market shares, in 1987 decided to pool their resources together and launch Store Norske Leksikon (SNL) [The Great Norwegian Encyclopaedia]. This must be seen as the last concerted effort on behalf of the printed encyclopaedia in the marketplace. When the publishers decided to stop publishing SNL on paper 20 years later, in 2007, the argument was simply that there was no longer a market for such products. It also turned out that even the online version of the encyclopaedia was a product that seemed impossible to sell: the 140 000 users simply did not attract enough advertisers at the time. On February 25, 2009, it became available for free. At one point the owners of what had recently been such a valuable commodity even tried to give it to the
Norwegian state for free, in the hope that this rich knowledge resource would be maintained through public funding; the offer was promptly rejected by the then Norwegian Minister of Culture, Anniken Huitfeldt: “There are other, more important things to support than something neither users nor advertisers have shown an interest in,” she observed (Morgenbladet 12-18 March 2010). A heated debate soon ensued. One point of attack was the fact that the Minister of Culture seemed to say that economic support of non-profitable cultural initiatives should not be the task of the government. Critics responded sarcastically, as reported on NRK.no, asking what the task of the Ministry of Culture would be if not this (NRK.no 2010). Another key issue was Huitfeldt’s own understanding of knowledge, in which the matter of speed seemed to be central:

The Internet has revolutionized our chances of collecting and sharing information. While we in earlier times consulted encyclopaedias because they were our most accessible source, we now go straight to the source and our demands for updated information have increased in step with digital developments. (Morgenbladet 26 March-8; April 2010)

In other words, new knowledge for modern people, Huitfeldt seemed to insist, was already available – in Wikipedia.

The obvious counter-argument that was soon made was that Wikipedia was not an encyclopaedia written by a traditional academic group of editors, like the SNL. The Minister of Culture responded by stating that people should seek knowledge wherever they wanted to, and continued to note that the real challenge was to achieve a critical attitude to all sources of knowledge, expressing the somewhat commonsensical notion that academics in any case always disagree: “Claiming that you find truth in an encyclopaedia is problematic” (NRK.no 2010). Kjell Lars Berge, professor of rhetoric at the University of Oslo, gave a pithy summary of the minister’s argument: “Huitfeldt concluded that no one has a monopoly on truth and that it is therefore problematic for the state to support an encyclopaedia project. Such a view of knowledge is not just quasi-pragmatic, it is New Age-like and absolutely scandalous” (Klassekampen 24 March 2010).

At the end of 2010, the Fritt Ord Foundation and the savings bank foundation Sparebankstiftelsen DNB finally found a way in which to help secure the continued existence of SNL online. The Fritt Ord Foundation allocated 16 million NOK for a period of three years, with an intention to achieve more long-term funding and to form a permanent organization. At record speed, SNL managed to establish a highly operative and well-used online encyclopaedia, relying on the traditional practice of an editing board and named – rather than anonymous – authors for the articles. But SNL still depended entirely on external financial support to secure its continued existence.

With a head start of six years on the first digital version of the old SNL, Norwegian Wikipedia had established its position as the first encyclopedic port of call for Norwegian internet users. As a part of the Wikimedia Foundation Organiza-
tion, *Norwegian Wikipedia* also had a technological and economic lead, from the outset benefiting from their shared publishing platform, and from the financial support of 60 million NOK from private benefactors. The Arts Council of Norway have by now even given 530 000 NOK for the development of both *SNL* and *Wikipedia*, having shown a particular interest in training writers in how to write *Wikipedia* articles (*Arts Council Norway* 2014).

*Norwegian Wikipedia* is one of oldest *Wikipedia* versions, established as the 16th to be created since 2001, when the *Wikipedia* project was founded. The Norwegian project was inactive for a substantial period of time, however, until it was revived in the autumn of 2003. In 2004, a separate version for the minority language New Norwegian (*nynorsk*) was created, and this was launched in 2005. Since that time, two Norwegian *Wikipedia* versions have therefore existed side by side.

As of 2012, *SNL* had more than one million users each month. The vice-chancellor of the University of Oslo, Ole Petter Ottersen, board member and active supporter of the non-commercial *SNL*, has referred to a new and strong enthusiasm for submitting articles to *SLN* among his employees (*Aftenposten* 20 March 2012). This interest goes hand in hand with the new editorial policy of *SNL*, where speed and the need to update have become highly important factors. Chief editor Anne Marit Godal has noted how there is now a new pressure on old-style encyclopaedias:

> It affects our legitimacy if a particular subject is dead. Our readers notice when a particular article was last updated and whether there has been an active discussion. [...] You are supposed to be able to see whether a Professor emeritus has in fact been involved in the discussion. Earlier it was possible to hide behind a CV-based authority. But what gives legitimacy on the web is action. We will always want to get rid of editors who don’t respond or who use more than three days to respond and thus demonstrate their presence. (ibid.)

At this point, however, Godal is not overly worried about the competition between *SNL* and *Wikipedia*:

> We can live very well with *Wikipedia*. We want to be the primary source for updated, academic knowledge, while they are a secondary source. We have the responsibility of a publisher, while they need sources in order to publish things (ibid.)

Godal stresses the need for both a Norwegian *Wikipedia* and an encyclopaedia of the *SNL* kind, where all contributors write under their full names and the quality is vouched for by Norwegian experts in their fields.

**A Question of Trustworthiness**

It is still necessary for encyclopaedias to attract financial support from external sources, but now that the market of paying customers has collapsed in Norway, in new ways. Interestingly, the arguments for gaining such support now seem to fol-
low the lines of a more traditional legitimization of knowledge. The issue of trustworthiness has been a pillar in the production of encyclopaedias for centuries, and has been a “unique selling point” (Sundin & Haider 2013: 2).

At the moment of our writing, the continued existence of SNL is being challenged more directly by Norwegian Wikipedia. When the new conservative government presented their budget for culture in November 2013, they included a grant of five million NOK to online encyclopaedias, a move clearly intended to secure the existence of SNL. But Erlend Bjørtvedt, second in command at Wikimedia Norway, soon confirmed that they also wanted to apply for this funding (Morgenbladet 15-21 November 2013). Anne Marit Godal from SNL noted, “There’s a crisis because we’re out of money by The New Year”, sarcastically adding that if they don’t get the support, they will have to move back to selling paper encyclopaedias and knocking on doors (Ibid.).

The lines of argument have clearly shifted, however. The guidelines for funding have not yet been finalized, but the press release from the Ministry of Culture “recognizes the need to increase the diversity of scholarly edited and high-quality online encyclopaedias” (Ibid.). The bone of contention in the resulting debate is the definition of “scholarly edited” [“fagredigert”]. Godal finds that the wording excludes Wikipedia, as it breaks with their fundamental idea of a democratic and open editorial practice, but Bjørntvedt does not accept the argument. He even finds it “very difficult to understand” what is meant by the term (Ibid.). In Morgenbladet, he points to the fact that a Google search typically results in very few hits in Norwegian, most of which are associated with SNL. In what may or may not be a tone of mock-naivety, he warned that Wikipedia will react if applicants will be asked to fulfil criteria that do not exist in the language. While SNL hopes that the Ministry will demand that such “scholarly edited” encyclopaedias must operate with authors credited by name, Bjørntvedt somewhat audaciously claimed that he is in fact involved in the only properly quality-controlled encyclopedic online project in Norway: “All changes must be approved by another person besides the one writing them”, he noted, whereas this is not the case with SNL (Ibid.). In other words, the battle seems to focus on scholarly authority rather than on speed or democratization.

Conclusions

As we have shown in this article, some of the most striking aspects of the marketing strategies for the print encyclopaedia were the prominence of claims to modernity and to continually bringing the readers up-to-date on the world. In online encyclopaedias, this old encyclopedic challenge has been solved by new and more efficient means of being up-to-date. The legitimizing strategies for funding the production of this recent encyclopedic knowledge seem to re-activate and strengthen another old generic topos, namely that of trustworthiness. Rather than
framing knowledge within political terms, in the way that the counter-encyclopaedia PaxLeksikon did, both Wikipedia and SNL are grounded in framing themselves as fundamentally democratic, even if both editorial practices and their respective views on the role of expertise are markedly different. This leaves online encyclopaedias in a position where the main question concerns trust.

Ours is not a comprehensive study, but we have chosen to follow some of the most significant examples of the Norwegian encyclopedic genre over the course of a century all the way up until what may seem like its exit from the marketplace. It is hard to think of another product in the Norwegian book trade of the 20th century, with as much investment in marketing efforts as the encyclopaedia. As such, in the way in which some of the most ambitious products become laboratories for market innovation, the genre can also be seen as a motor in the general professionalisation and commercialisation of the publishing trade.

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Notes

1 We would like to thank the editors and the anonymous readers for their patience and useful suggestions along the way. A particular thanks goes to Michael S. Lundblad at the University of Oslo for his final reading of the manuscript and his many perceptive comments and The National Library of Norway. An earlier and shorter version of this article was published in Norwegian in the sub-section ‘Leksikon som vare og ting’, in All verdens kunnskap. Leksikon gjennom to tusen år (Oslo: Press, 2012), pp. 186-97. All translations from the Norwegian material have been done by the authors.

2 For two other pioneering studies in this field, one concerned with the materiality of the book, the other with the history of reading and the distribution of texts, see D.F. McKenzie, ‘The Book as an Expressive Form’ and Roger Chartier, ‘Labourers and Voyagers: From the Text to the Reader’, in The Book History Reader, ed. by David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery.

3 These collections are particularly comprehensive in this case because such material has been included among the mandatory submissions to the national deposit library.

4 For further reading on the emergence of a consumer society, see Matthew Hilton, Consumerism in 20th-Century Britain: The Search for a Historical Movement; Elizabeth Cohen, A Consumers’ Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America; Regina Lee Blaszczyk, American Consumer Society, 1865-2005; and Susan Strasser, Satisfaction Guaranteed: The Making of the American Mass Market.

5 The Norwegian terms are ‘fagredigert’ and ‘faglig kvalitetssikrede’.

6 It should perhaps be noted that this is not the case. Articles in SNL are first vetted by an internal editor, then by the editor responsible for the subject area.

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Reviewing Encyclopaedia Authority

By Vanessa Aliniaina Rasoamampianina

Abstract

As traditional encyclopaedias appear to be loosing the favour of the general public, the current paper investigates the extent to which encyclopaedias are still presented as authoritative texts. Here, authority in texts is mostly construed from the theory of cognitive authority according to Józef Maria Bocheński, Richard De George, and Patrick Wilson; in particular from their reflections on the roles, measures and bases of cognitive authority. The content of 80 book reviews on science and technology encyclopaedias is analysed in order to highlight comments pertaining to encyclopaedia authority. Although many aspects of cognitive authorities are covertly discussed within these book reviews, encyclopaedias are not explicitly presented as absolute authorities.

Keywords: Cognitive authority; encyclopaedias; book reviews
Introduction

Reference works such as encyclopaedias have always been one of the first materials to be consulted by the general public in the search for answers to their questions. In fact, Patrick Wilson (1983: 81) states that reference materials such as encyclopaedias often have ‘absolute’ cognitive authority, thereby implying that answers found in encyclopaedias are considered enough to settle the question. Unsurprisingly, encyclopaedias have traditionally held a prominent place on library shelves within households, schools and universities. However, since the boom of the Internet and with the arrival of Wikipedia and other online encyclopaedias, people have had the possibility to access a plethora of alternative resources which are in direct competition with printed encyclopaedias (e.g. Tenopir & Ennis 2001; Bradford et al. 2005; Lewis 2010). In fact, with the never-ending debate surrounding Wikipedia (e.g. Magnus 2009; Soylu 2009; Chen 2010), the authority of other encyclopaedias has started to be scrutinised (e.g. Bell 2007; Rector 2008; Younger 2010; Kubiszewski et al. 2011) and even well-established works such as Encyclopaedia Britannica have been vehemently criticised (e.g. Giles 2005).

The current paper investigates the extent to which, in the 21st century, encyclopaedias are still presented as cognitive authorities, especially in book reviews where recommendations on recent publications are offered to potential buyers and users. Eighty book reviews on science and technology encyclopaedias published between the years 2000 and 2010 are considered here. When, in a previous study, these book reviews had been analysed to assess encyclopaedia quality, it was hinted that these reviews may hold an underlying discussion around the theme of encyclopaedia authority (Rasoamampianina 2012). The content analysis I am undertaking here is intended to expose that underlying discussion. The main question I am addressing is: Beyond the reviewers’ critical assessment of encyclopaedia quality, what is being said on encyclopaedia authority? The theoretical framework I am drawing on is firmly grounded on the literature on cognitive authority.

From Defining Cognitive Authority to Studying Encyclopaedia Authority

Initially, the term ‘cognitive authority’ was introduced to information studies by Patrick Wilson – a librarian, information scientist and philosopher – in his book Second-Hand Knowledge: An Inquiry into Cognitive Authority (1983). Wilson acknowledged that his concept of cognitive authority is based on the concept of ‘epistemic authority’ as defined by Józef Maria Bocheński and Richard De George. Bocheński was a logician who studied, among many other topics, the concept of authority. Bocheński mentioned cognitive authority in several publica-

Other researchers have continued reflecting on the nature of cognitive authority (e.g. Peters 1965; Adams 1976; Chambers 1979; Watt 1982; Rieh 2005). Recently, there have been a growing number of researchers who used cognitive authority as theoretical framework for their empirical studies (e.g. Rieh & Belkin 2000; Fritch & Cromwell 2001; McKenzie 2003; Moed & Garfield 2004; Savolainen 2007; Hughes et al. 2010). Many researchers have also studied specific facets of cognitive authority such as trustworthiness, credibility, or reliability; and some of them have done so by focusing on the particular case of *Wikipedia* (e.g. Chesney 2006; Lackaff & Cheong 2008; Goodwin 2009; Magnus 2009; Francke & Sundin 2010; Lucassen & Schraagen 2010; Kubiszewskiet al. 2011). Because researchers commonly adhere to the general tenets of cognitive authority as outlined by Bocheński, De George and/or Wilson, the current paper mostly – but not exclusively – discusses cognitive authority according to these three philosophers. For the sake of consistency, the term ‘cognitive authority’ is used throughout this paper.

In non-specialist terms, a cognitive authority is an individual or an institution considered as ‘an authority’ on a particular subject, as opposed to an individual or an institution ‘in authority’ within a particular community (Peters et al. 1958; Young 1974; Green 1998). In the literature, cognitive authority is not only seen as the authority of people who ‘have more knowledge than normal /…/ more knowledge than other people’ (De George 1985: 27), people with ‘superior knowledge’ (De George 1976: 80) but it is also seen as the authority ‘of one who knows better, i.e. of the expert in the field’ (Bocheński 1965b: 167). Moreover, a cognitive authority is a person who is being actively sought after for insights and whose influences are being consciously recognised as ‘proper’ (Wilson 1983: 15). In other words, a cognitive authority is a person who is accepted to exert some form of intellectual ascendance over other people.

Although reference works such as encyclopaedias are often recognised as absolute cognitive authorities, the literature on cognitive authority tends to overlook the case of texts (and institutions) and concentrates more on the case of individuals. In fact, Bocheński (1989: 62) does not even accept that texts may hold authority. For him, the bearer of authority should be a conscious being, which is not the case with texts. Of course, all texts are written by individuals and it could be argued that it is the authority of these individuals which is transferred to the texts they author; yet Bocheński does not allow such a transfer. By contrast, De George
(1970: 200) writes that the bearer of authority could also be a text or other human artefact. Taking the example of reference materials such as encyclopaedias, De George (1985: 28) explains that, in theory, it is the author who is the authority on the topic discussed in the text, but, in practice, the author is often ignored by the readers who directly put their trust in the text. Wilson agrees with De George and further argues that there are cases where ‘a text may acquire cognitive authority independent of the authority of its author’ (Wilson 1983: 168). For instance, ‘for the very naïve people, any publication may carry authority; the mere fact of something being said in print /…/ is enough to give it weight’ (Wilson 1983: 81). In fact, even among the more educated people, a text which has been used by many or which has been used for quite some time can gain a reputation – hence an authority – of its own. Similarly, a published text which has gone through many revisions and re-editions can gain a reputation and authority to the extent that it may be ‘thought of as an institution in its own right’ (Wilson 1983: 169). This said, De George and Wilson only sporadically examine the authority of texts in their works. Because of this oversight, many of my reflections on the cognitive authority of texts are drawn from existing discussion around the cognitive authority of individuals.

In the current paper, I am revisiting three aspects of cognitive authority and analysing how these aspects are discussed within the book reviews on encyclopaedias in order to answer the following questions:

- Which of the roles of cognitive authorities are played by encyclopaedias?
- How is encyclopaedia authority measured?
- How is encyclopaedia authority justified?

**Book Reviews on Science and Technology Encyclopaedias**

A systematic sampling conducted on the Elsevier’s ScienceDirect database on 31st March 2011 provided the 80 book reviews analysed in the current paper. From the list of journal articles published between the years 2000 and 2010 within the ‘review article’ category, those with the words ‘encyclopaedia’ or ‘encyclopedia’ in their title and those which pertain to science and technology topics were selected. As many as 75 out of the 80 reviews focus on printed encyclopaedias although some of these reviews also include brief comments on alternative formats. In three cases, the reviews focus on CD-ROMs and in two cases, on online encyclopaedias.

These 80 reviews concern 66 specialised encyclopaedias published by 27 publishers: a third of these titles are by Elsevier/Academic Press, a quarter by Wiley, and the remaining titles by other well-known publishers located in North America and Europe (e.g. CABI Publishing, Taylor and Francis, Chapman & Hall, Oxford University Press, or Cambridge University Press). Most of these titles are in their
first edition: there are only six titles in their second edition, two titles in their third edition and one title in its twelfth edition.

As many as 73 out of 80 reviews are signed, gathering up to 85 reviewer names altogether. Limited information is provided on who these reviewers are or how they got involved in the task of reviewing encyclopaedias. One reviewer reported that he is a journal editor who had failed to find suitable reviewers, three reviewers had been approached by the book review editors, and a handful of reviewers seem to be conducting book reviews for specific journals at regular intervals. Within my sample, reviewers are rarely involved in the writing of more than one review, as seen in 8 cases. More often than not, they are the sole author of their review, as seen in 61 cases.

The 80 reviews range from one paragraph comments to ten page essays. In general, reviewers’ comments on the authority of encyclopaedias are interspersed throughout the text and – as described in the rest of this paper – very diverse in nature.

Roles of Encyclopaedias

Firstly, according to the literature, the principal role of a cognitive authority is not only to effectively communicate knowledge (Bocheński 1989: 61) but also to ‘substitute the knowledge of one person in a certain field for the lack of knowledge of another’ (De George 1970: 201). Secondly, a cognitive authority is expected to serve as a guide and source of advice (De George 1970: 201); thirdly, to influence the thinking of others (Wilson 1983: 14); and finally, to express informed opinions (Wilson 1983: 16-18). This last point combines the interpretation of current knowledge and the formulation of predictions beyond what is already known. In practice, it means that a cognitive authority should be able to (1) indicate the state of knowledge on a specific topic; i.e. tell whether the knowledge can be consi-dered as correct – or at least widely accepted – or not; (2) answer questions never asked before from the current state of knowledge; and (3) assist in times of uncertainties and controversies by weighting the various competing ideas, by indicating which ideas can be taken into consideration and which ideas can be ignored, and by suggesting how to deal with these competing ideas.

Within the 80 book reviews analysed in the current paper, comments on the role to be played by encyclopaedias are found in 32 cases. The majority of the reviewed encyclopaedias are reported to be playing only one or two roles at a time. Most roles suggested in the literature on cognitive authority are mentioned, even if the terminologies used by reviewers often differ. For instance, in relation to the principal role of cognitive authority, a handful of encyclopaedias are presented in a way that their chief goal seems to be the communication of existing information. Examples of such goals are: ‘to present information’ (Clements 2002: 106); ‘to list every person, every event and every occasion that has some
bearing on [a subject]’ (Williams 2001: 285); ‘to provide a comprehensive collection of knowledge’ (Sapidis 2005: 137); or ‘to cover everything in a complex range of topics’ (Kennedy & Jin 2005: 392). Some encyclopaedias are reported to be making more efforts than others by summarising the main ideas, by synthesising and organising existing knowledge logically, by ensuring both a broad and in-depth coverage, or by highlighting the links between interconnected ideas.

Regarding the role of encyclopaedias as guides and sources of advice, encyclopaedias are typically described as ‘a reference’ (e.g. Okamoto 2001: 212). More specifically, encyclopaedias are reported ‘to provide a complete resource for research’ (Kennedy & Bandaiphet 2003: 394), ‘to direct the reader on to further specific topics’ (Kennedy & Mistry 2003: 344) and ‘to ensure that readers will be able to find accurate and up-to-date information on all major topics’ (Emery 2003: 93). In several cases, encyclopaedias are presented as ‘authoritative answers to perplexing questions’ (Kennedy & Jin 2005: 392) or as ‘an attempt of collecting a series of answers on the major issues in [a given science]/…/ so that the readers can receive rapid answers on the major questions’ (Vercelli 2007: 60) and can ‘more easily find answers to questions from their own desks’ (Kennard et al. 2005: 201).

Some of the roles of cognitive authority are less commonly observed in encyclopaedias. For example, although most encyclopaedias are reported to aim for up-to-date information, the state of the knowledge presented within these encyclopaedias is rarely made explicit. Few reviewers talk about encyclopaedia entries with information which is presented as questionable or as a consensus according to the current state of knowledge within the scientific communities. One reviewer even complains that some of the entries within the Encyclopedia of Atmospheric Sciences should discuss existing uncertainties in the use of measuring devices and argues that

knowing these uncertainties is critical to determining the bottom line. The answers to the aforementioned questions may be debatable, and we can no doubt have fun in discussing them. But they are necessary. /.../ Let that debate be resurrected. (Anonymous 2003: 317)

One role of cognitive authority, which is never explicitly discussed within reviews, is the intellectual influence that encyclopaedias may exert on their readers, although anecdotal evidence is sometimes provided. For instance, within the review of The Concise Encyclopedia of Fibromyalgia and Myofascial Pain, one can read: ‘Anyone who may have been sceptical about the existence of these conditions is likely to think again!’ (Rugg 2003: 622). Similarly, no one mentions the potential assistance provided by encyclopaedias in times of uncertainties and controversies as explained in the literature on cognitive authority.

Finally, there are three additional roles played by encyclopaedias which are not mentioned in the literature on cognitive authority but which are reported by the reviewers. These roles are: ‘to share the excitement and to feed the curiosity of
others [on a subject]’ (Lawler 2002: 135), ‘to make jumping into [a new subject] highly accessible’ (Griffin & Silliman 2009: 65), and ‘to make [information on a subject] universally available at no cost to users’ (Kennard et al. 2005: 201). Although important and legitimate, I would argue that these roles have limited relevance to the authority of encyclopaedias, except maybe by amplifying the attractiveness of the encyclopaedias for the public, thereby increasing the chance of the encyclopaedias to be chosen as the preferred reference materials.

**Measures of Encyclopaedia Authority**

The cognitive authority of a published text can be measured according to five parameters: the scope, the degree, the extent, the intensity and the sphere of authority. But before mentioning anything specific regarding the encyclopaedia under scrutiny, many reviewers start or end their review with qualifiers hinting at the perceived authority of the latter. Below are typical examples: ‘a major publication’ (de Silva 2002: 1241); ‘a key reference work’ (Edwards 2003: 279); or ‘the most definitive text on…’ (Carvel 2001: 185).

**Scope of Authority**

The scope of authority is defined from the range of topics and from the depth of treatment, which allows the communication of greater knowledge to the readers. When the range of topics covered is considered limitless, the scope of authority is immeasurable and one can talk about ‘universal authority’ (Wilson 1983: 20), though, only generic encyclopaedias – and some religious texts – may fall, if at all, within that category. In practice, the readers can relatively easily assess the scope of authority of a text by looking at the titles, tables of contents and indexes.

A close analysis of the reviews indicates that the scope of the encyclopaedia is mentioned in 57 reviews. Most reviewers simply present a quick run-through of the table of contents volume by volume, section by section, or chapter by chapter. Other reviewers provide an in-depth description of the major sections or even a detailed overview of the content of selected entries, which appear to be chosen at random or which fall within the domain of expertise of the reviewer. In a few cases, the reviewers assess the scope of the encyclopaedia by making a comparison with the content of other texts. For instance, Sparkman (2004) compares *The Encyclopedia of Mass Spectrometry* with other reputable reference works published in the last 50 years. More commonly, reviewers compare the consistency of the coverage within the encyclopaedia instead of comparing this latter with other texts. For instance, when assessing the scope of the *Encyclopedia of Soil Science*, it is reported that

the treatment of soil biological and ecological issues is much less extensive than physico-chemical aspects of soil science. Of the more than 350 chapters, less than 30
are focused directly on biological issues, although there are biological and ecological inputs into many other chapters. (Edwards 2003: 279)

The scope of the encyclopaedia is deemed inappropriate for the targeted audience in only one case. That is when the reviewer of the Encyclopedia of Hormones criticises

The publishers have indicated in their publicity that this volume is designed to be read by non-endocrinologists. /…/ It is difficult to imagine an individual with an interest in introductory information over such a broad range of endocrine topics. Instead, it seems best suited for wider usage, for example, by a biology department or library as a first source of endocrine information. (Castracane 2003: 446)

In general, it is rare that reviewers offer some value judgment on the scope of the encyclopaedia they are reviewing.

Degree of Authority, Extent of Authority, Intensity of Authority

The degree of authority is another parameter used to measure the cognitive authority of a text. It is related to the probability of being believed or accepted by the readers. De George (1985: 20) talks about this in terms of extent of authority and intensity of authority. The extent of authority can be seen as a function of the number of people who are considering the text as an authority. A practical approach to capture the extent of authority is to refer to the number of people who are recommending the text to others. By contrast, the intensity of authority – also called weight (Wilson 1983: 13) or degree of seriousness (Wilson 1983: 17) – can be seen as the level of acceptance of that text among the people for whom it is an authority. This can be captured through an analysis of citation patterns where texts, which are most cited and endorsed by many people, are considered the most authoritative in the field. When all statements are unconditionally accepted, as was traditionally the case for encyclopaedias and religious texts, one can talk about ‘absolute authorities’ (Wilson 1983: 18).

I discovered that book reviewers do not really provide a detailed assessment of the degree, extent, or intensity of authority of a given encyclopaedia according to the approach described above. Only the extent of authority is sometimes discussed but in very broad terms since no number is provided. The most detailed assessment I found within my sample is the report made on Anaesthesia and Intensive Care A to Z: An Encyclopaedia of Principles and Practice, when the reviewer recounts

Many of our anaesthetists, ODPs, theatre nurses and paramedics have gone out and bought the book after ‘borrowing’ my copy in the operating theatre. That fact speaks for itself! (Greenslade 2000: 93)

In the task of assessing the extent of encyclopaedia authority, some reviewers refer to the experience of people around them, as illustrated in the quote above. One alternative adopted by other reviewers is to refer to their own experience, past or future. For instance, reflecting on the past, Greenslade (2000: 93) recalls that, in
his department, ‘[Anaesthesia and Intensive Care A to Z: An Encyclopaedia of Principles and Practice] was attracting the same sort of attention normally reserved for a new Ferrari in the car park’ whereas Enser (2006: 182) confesses: ‘In my student days, many years ago, I would have appreciated a work such as [the Encyclopedia of Meat Science].’ Projecting in the future, Dorr (2001: 189) claims: ‘I intend to use the MITECS [MIT Encyclopedia of the Cognitive Sciences] extensively over the next several years and will make parts of the volume required reading for students in my classes.’ Finally, instead of referring to personal experience or to the experience of other people, a couple of reviewers opt to invite the individual reader to imagine his or her own experience with the encyclopaedia. A typical example can be seen in Fisher’s (2009: 535) comment: ‘You may want to keep [Epilepsy A to Z: A Concise Encyclopedia] near your clinic office to pull down on behalf of a patient who is befuddled by a particular medical term.’ In fact, a common way to provide a measure of the extent of authority is to speculate on the possible impact the encyclopaedia may have on a larger audience. Such speculation can be based on the encyclopaedia’s potential to provide unique contributions or to fill a knowledge gap within a discipline – arguments which both are used by Okamoto (2001) regarding the MITECS and its contribution to the field of artificial intelligence. The extent of authority can also be inferred from the timeliness of the publication, as argued by Kennedy and Jin (2005) regarding the release of The Encyclopedia of Grain Science at a time when cereals are playing paramount roles as a global food source. It should, however, be noted that, when reviewers are speculating on the extent of the authority of an encyclopaedia, many of them make vague and unfounded statements which could eventually fail to provide any useful indication for the readers.

**Sphere of Authority**

One last way of measuring cognitive authority is through what Wilson (1983: 19) calls ‘the circumscribed spheres of authority’ which combine the scope of authority and the intensity/weight of authority. According to this concept, each text covers a well defined range of expertise within which the influence exerted on the readers is at a maximum – that is within the core of the sphere of authority – and as the text ventures away from this core, its influence decreases. But precautions have to be taken when measuring the sphere of authority because the range of expertise offered within a text and the information sought by the readers do not always overlap. For instance, the readers may be looking for answers outside the stated scope and sphere of authority of a given text; or the readers may only be looking for answers on only one or two topics whereas the text may have a much wider scope. So, ‘it is finally for the audience to decide on the scope or the sphere within which it would value the authority’s words’ (Wilson 1983: 20).

Surprisingly, although many reviewers within my sample define the scope of an encyclopaedia, few of them actually make the distinction between the topics
which are within the core of the sphere of authority and those at the periphery. Among those who do, Windley (2006), for instance, specifies that among the strong points of the *Encyclopaedia of Geology* are entries on Southeast Asia, Pan-African Orogeny, or Brazil whereas the weaker points are entries on Central Asia, China and Mongolia, and Japan. Typically, topics outside the core of the sphere of authority consist of entries with perceived gaps and shortcomings.

In order to grade the weight of different topics within the same encyclopaedia, some reviewers prefer to classify topics according to various audiences with different centres of interest and levels of expertise. This is what Kemeirait (2006) does when he subdivides the content of the *Concise Encyclopedia of Plant Pathology* into sections of great importance for professional plant pathologists, sections for college students, and sections for gardeners and other people generally interested in plants. More generally, some sections may simply be inappropriate for a certain type of readers whereas other sections may be more ‘interesting’ (Williams 2001: 285), ‘fascinating’ (Petrie 2010: 215), etc. This last point is related to the ‘level of attractiveness’ of a text, which I am discussing in a later section of this paper.

**Justifications for Encyclopaedia Authority**

Wilson provides a detailed analysis of the basis of authority in texts. He identifies five major ways whereby the public justify their choice of a given text as their cognitive authority on a specific topic.

**Reference to the Authority of Authors and Editors**

The public primarily rely on the authority of the authors. If a given author is considered as an authority in his or her field—because the public intuitively or rationally believes it to be the case (Bocheński 1989: 62), because the public refers to the author’s formal education and diplomas, occupational specialisation, professional experience, and reputation among experts (Wilson 1983: 21-22), or because of many other reasons (De Georges 1985: 34-42) – then the text that the author writes is authoritative. And considering the similarities between the tasks performed by authors and editors, if the latter are considered authorities in their fields, then the texts that they produce are equally authoritative.

Reviewers within my sample seem to pay particular attention to the authors’ occupational specialisations, professional experiences and reputations, as seen in 36 cases. Typically, a headcount of the experts involved is provided along with a breakdown of their area of expertise and their country/region/institution of origin. At times, the credentials of the editors and those of the members of the editorial board are also specified. Reviewers also seem to care about the number of people involved in the development of the encyclopaedia under scrutiny, as seen in 38
cases. In general, great number, high level of expertise and high diversity of authors and editors are considered a guarantee for authority; there are, however, a few reviewers who disagree. Van Loon (2006), in particular, complains that, in the case of the Encyclopaedia of Geology, having a 26-person advisory board on top of an editorial panel is counter-productive because it jeopardises the balance in topic coverage and hinders the control of incoming manuscripts.

Reference to the Authority of Publishers and to the Publishing History

Reference to the authority of the publisher is sometimes used by the public to assess the authority of a given text because some publishers are known to be ‘big producers of works of high quality’ and ‘the winners of the struggle for recognition of cognitive authority’ (Wilson 1983: 45-46). In fact, ‘a publishing house can acquire a kind of cognitive authority, not that the house itself knows anything, but that it is thought to be good at finding those who do and publishing their work’ (Wilson 1983: 168). In other words, because a publisher is known to work with many authors who are authorities in their fields, it is assumed that any text from the same publisher would also be written by authors of similar calibre. But in the process of assessing the authority of a text, the public also refer to its publishing history. Indeed, ‘the issuance of several successive editions and translations serves as an indirect test of authority, counts as an extraordinary accomplishment, since for most texts the first edition is also the last’ (Wilson 1983: 168). The underlying argument is that a text, which is translated or reprinted, must be highly demanded by the public, possibly due to the superiority of its content; and a text which is re-edited must be a better, or at least an updated, version.

Within my sample, the name of the encyclopaedia publisher is typically provided in the title of the book review, along with other information necessary to identify the encyclopaedia under scrutiny (the title, the name of the authors, the year of publication, etc.). However, the publishers’ credentials are never specifically discussed in any part of the review. By contrast, the development process and the publishing history of the encyclopaedia attract more attention. In particular, the amount of time and effort needed for the development of an encyclopaedia is readily mentioned. Yet, it is unclear which is preferable: ‘a collection which represents over 40 years of labour,’ as Buster (2001: 1249) reports on The Encyclopedia of Visual Medicine, or ‘an encyclopaedia which was written and published under two years,’ as Clements (2002: 106) reports on The Encyclopedia of Arthropod-Transmitted Infections of Man and Domesticated Animals. The case of reprints and re-editions is clearer in that reviewers seem to value them. They readily mention not only the date and number of reprints and re-editions but also typically provide information pertaining to the success and authority of the earlier versions. For instance, regarding Anaesthesia and Intensive Care A-Z: An Encyclopaedia of Principles and Practice, it is explained that ‘the first edition became so popular that reprints were made in 1996 and 1997’ (Tang 2000: 297), and that
‘the latest edition has a lot to live up to as its forerunner is well established as a fundamental anaesthetic guide, but [it is believed] it will achieve this comfortably’ (Jones & Columb 2004: 300). Some reviewers also particularly insist on specifying the rate of update as well as the amount of change in content between reprints and re-editions. Talking about the Encyclopedia of Virology, Desselberger (2009: 140) for instance explains that ‘the third edition has been prepared nine years after the second edition and has been updated substantially, commensurate with the enormous amount of new data in all areas of virology and increasing the size of the work from 3 to 5 volumes.’

Something which is related to the publishing history and found within a couple of book reviews but which is not explicitly mentioned in the literature on cognitive authority is the possibility for some encyclopaedias to be modelled on other authoritative works. For instance, Fisher (2009) reports that Epilepsy A to Z: A Concise Encyclopedia was derived from the well-known Dictionary of Epilepsy. Although not stated explicitly, reviewers seem to be of the opinion that part (if not all) of the authority of the model is expected to be passed on to any text which derives from it.

Reference to the Recommendation from Other People and Institutions

Another strategy commonly used by the public in the process of choosing which text to consider as a cognitive authority is the reference to the recommendation from other people which are already recognised as cognitive authorities (parents, teachers, etc.), or not. A book reviewer – and by extension the reviews he or she writes, such as those analysed in the current paper – offer indirect recommendation on which text to consider as cognitive authority. However, it is crucial to check who the reviewer actually is because

if the reviewer already has cognitive authority for us, his review constitutes a personal recommendation (or not). If we are given sufficient information about the reviewer, along with the review, we may be able to arrive at an estimate of his authority. If the reviewer is unknown, his judgment may mean nothing, while if he is an anti-authority, unreliable and wrong, his praise may be fatal to the works he reviews.

(Wilson 1983: 168)

As a general rule, only recommendations from experts should matter (Wilson 1983: 68), along with the recommendations from librarians (Wilson 1983: 165-196) as the latter know how to recognise cognitive authorities from practice and from principles already widespread within their profession. Additionally, recommendations from reputable institutions –which Wilson (1983: 168) refers to as ‘institutional endorsements’– can be accepted. Typical examples are the case of texts published by a governmental agency or by a state printer and the case of texts sponsored by a learned society or by a professional organisation. Even the award of a prize to a text (or to its author) or the use of a text as a textbook in an educational institution can be seen as forms of institutional endorsement.
In 74 out of the 80 reviews from my sample, reviewers warmly recommend the purchase and the use of the encyclopaedias under scrutiny despite the fact that the latter are often reported to contain flaws and shortcomings. There are only three cases where reviewers do not recommend the encyclopaedia and one case where the reviewer does not provide any form of recommendation at all.

Although reviewers sometimes talk about the experience of other people with the encyclopaedia under review, they never report of any direct recommendation from these people, or from librarians. Also, out of 80 reviews, only the one written by de Silva (2002) refers to some form of institutional endorsement. In this case, an institution – the American Psychological Association – is mentioned to be collaborating with a publisher – the Oxford University Press– on the publication of the *Encyclopaedia of Psychology*; however, no additional detail, which could be used to get a better picture of the potential authority of this encyclopaedia is provided. Obviously, the readers are expected to know that the American Psychological Association is a prestigious institution within its field. This expectation is legitimate since the review is published in a journal for American psychologists; otherwise, the implication of the involvement of this institution in the development of this encyclopaedia would be lost on the readers. This is also the only case where the name of the publisher is mentioned in the core of the review. Because American psychologists also probably know of the Oxford University Press, the publisher’s reputation can contribute towards establishing the authority of the encyclopaedia, as explained in earlier section of this paper.

**Reference to the Genre**

It is possible to find cognitive authority without any reference to the people who are writing, publishing or recommending a particular text. Wilson (1983: 184) explains that authority can be implied when the text belongs to a genre already recognised as authoritative, which is the case for all reference works. Then, the public only needs to check whether the text actually respects widespread expectations on the genre or not.

In the majority of the reviews within my sample, there is a description of the encyclopaedia under scrutiny (in particular the size, the layout of the text, the appearance of the illustrations) even if the length and amount of details provided vary from one review to another. A few times, adherence to common expectations, norms and standards within the world of encyclopaedias is also hinted. For instance, Bianchi Porro (2006: 70) writes: ‘As expected, all the articles are arranged in a single alphabetical reference by title/…/ article titles begin with the keyword or phrase indicating the topic, followed by any generic term,’ and immediately adds: ‘Articles are arranged in a standard format starting from title, glossary, defining statement, body of the article, cross-references and further reading’ (emphasis mine). It is explained that ‘the readers are immediately looking for a ‘standard look and feel’ ’ (Kennard et al. 2005: 206). When widespread expecta-
tions, norms and standards are not respected, encyclopaedia authority is swiftly questioned, as clearly illustrated in the following comment:

Is the Encyclopedia of Soils in the Environment really an encyclopaedia? Any layman would probably say yes looking at the four glowing red covers with gold lettering— that is certainly how an encyclopaedia should look. But when considering the length of an entry, it is doubtful as the average entry is a mini-review or article of about 8 pages, and not a concise and informative 300-word piece of information. (Hartemink 2006: 240)

Test of Time, Test of Intrinsic Plausibility, Test of Contentment

As a way of recognising cognitive authority, Wilson (1983) suggests three additional tests which the public can apply. Firstly, there is the test of time whereby the public is assessing whether the text was published within a relatively acceptable period. This test highly depends on the topic as, in ‘conservative sciences,’ the rule is: the older the better; whereas in ‘progressive sciences,’ it is the total opposite. Secondly, there is the test of intrinsic plausibility which consists of a rapid assessment of a brief excerpt of the work. This test not only refers to the perceived plausibility of the content but also takes into account key characteristics such as the school of thought, the theoretical framework, or the research paradigm. We can use our background knowledge of and expectations on the topic to help us assess the work. In practice, the rule is simple:

If the sample of text we read strikes us as nonsense, we are unlikely to continue; if it seems eminently sensible, we may read on. (Wilson 1983: 169)

Finally, the last test for recognising cognitive authority – which Wilson (1983: 169) calls ‘a test of credibility’ but which I would call ‘a test of contentment’ – is to ask: ‘Need I look further or can I take this source as at least provisionally settling the matter?’ In practice, we generally start by evaluating whether whatever text already available to us seems authoritative enough for our taste. If the text fails to directly respond to and amply satisfy our needs, only then would we search until we find something of satisfactory quality.

Nothing on the test of time, as explained above, is mentioned in the 80 reviews within my sample. By contrast, the test of plausibility and the test of credibility/contentment seem to be embedded within the quality assessment that reviewers conduct on the encyclopaedias. Large portion of book reviews are dedicated to detailed quality assessment of the entire encyclopaedias, of specific sections, or of specific entries. In this process, the reviewers pay the greatest attention to the quality of the content by focusing – in decreasing order of frequency – on the completeness and informativeness; on the currency, clarity, objectivity, reliability and accuracy; and finally on the stability and representativeness of the information provided. This last parameter – which I define as conformity with the general expectations regarding encyclopaedias, as well as conformity with conven-
tions specific to the subject field – combines the test of the genre and the test of plausibility mentioned earlier in this paper.

Regarding the test of plausibility, reviewers often compare the content of encyclopaedias with what is commonly discussed within the scientific community. Two examples can be given as illustration. On the content of *The Encyclopedia of Mass Spectrometry*, it is written:

*As one might expect, much of the subject matter of Chapter 10 involves reactions of carbanions/*.../.* Logically enough, the topics of ion chemistry are divided into three chapters: Chapter 8 on neutralization and charge reversal; Chapter 9 on positive organic ion chemistry; and, Chapter 10 on negative organic ion chemistry. (Wilkins 2004:1, emphasis mine)*

Similarly, on *The Encyclopedia of Arthropod-Transmitted Infections of Man and Domesticated Animals*, it is explained:

*This book follows the convention that parasites and pathogens can be transmitted by vectors, and that infections also can be transmitted in that way, but that diseases, even infectious diseases, are not 'transmitted'. (Clements 2002: 106)*

Regarding the test of credibility/contentment, firstly, there are a few cases where reviewers actually present the encyclopaedias under review as a direct response to an active demand from the public. For instance, Carr (2001) talks about the encyclopaedia as a timely effort in that the publication occurs at a time when the topic covered is of great concern for the public, thereby implying that the latter is actively looking for texts on the matter. In fact, even reviewers acknowledge that it should not be taken for granted that the public would always be looking for the information offered within encyclopaedias. Castracane (2003: 446) reports for instance on the *Encyclopedia of Hormones*: ‘It is difficult to imagine an individual with an interest in introductory information over such a broad range of endocrine topics.’ Secondly, there are other cases where reviewers claim that the encyclopaedia under review amply satisfy the public’s need, For instance, de Silva (2002: 1242) presents the encyclopaedia as ‘a first place to look up a topic, and as a source that points one towards further reading’ whereas Sparkman (2004: 763) claims that the encyclopaedia ‘will save countless hours of searching through many references,’ i.e. the readers would be so satisfied that they would not need to look for other texts.

**Attractiveness as a Way of Increasing Encyclopaedias’ Chance of Becoming Cognitive Authority**

Before concluding this paper, I would like to comment on one aspect of texts which – as far as I am aware – is not explicitly discussed by neither Bocheński, De George, nor Wilson, but which is repeatedly mentioned in book reviews. I am referring to what I call the ‘attractiveness’ of a publication. A particular work is not only attractive because it may provide the readers with the information needed
to understand a given topic, it is also considered attractive because of the writing style, the graphical illustrations, the general appearance or the external packaging. It could be argued that these features not only grab the readers’ attention, but they also provide pleasant feelings during the reading and encourage the readers to read further, even on topics they may not have been looking for. For encyclopaedias, which have the widespread reputation of being boring and forbidding despite enclosing invaluable knowledge, attractiveness contributes to hold the readers’ attention long enough until the value of the information presented permeates the readers’ mind and convinces them of the authority of the work as a whole. Some of the features mentioned above may be used primarily by authors to improve the informative value of a given publication and by publishers to increase the market price; but I would argue that they may also be used by the public as one of a number of pragmatic steps towards finding authoritative texts even they may not be considered as a legitimate basis on which authority should be grounded.

In fact, attractiveness is a feature of text, which is often discussed by researchers who study information trustworthiness and credibility. For instance, Teun Lucassen and Jan Maarten Schraagen (2010) indicate that, in general, the longer a text and the higher the number and quality of relevant images used as illustration, the greater its chance of being trusted. Helena Francke and her collaborators (2011) add that it is generally considered better if the text is well structured and if the publication is in print rather than in digital format. Obviously, no universal rule can be set as the same feature of a given publication may be perceived differently based on the individual reader’s expectations in a given situation. Indeed, there are cases where long and detailed texts can deter the readers (Lackaff & Cheong 2008), complex images can have little impact (Richman & Wu 2008), and online materials can be more attractive than books (Biddix et al. 2011).

In as many as 78 out of 80 reviews within my sample, there are descriptive comments pertaining to the attractiveness of encyclopaedias: on the clarity and arrangement of the text, on the number and aesthetic value of the illustrations, on the quality of the typography and the binding (in the case of printed encyclopaedias), or on the user-friendliness (in the case of digital and online encyclopaedias). For example, it is written regarding the *Encyclopedia of Geology*:

My first reaction when I inspected the set of books was: ‘What a [sic] beautiful books.’ They are well bound, very well printed and the illustrations (the book is fully printed in four colours, but there are, of course, some black-and-white photographs and drawings) are almost all attractive... (van Loon 2006: 134)

Reviewers readily praise these encyclopaedias, which are pleasing to the eyes, but they also seem to value those, which appear serious and have an air of authority. By contrast, any shortcoming may adversely affect the way the encyclopaedia is perceived by readers, as illustrated by the comment on the *Chemical Engineer’s Condensed Encyclopedia of Process Equipment*:
After receiving this book for review I started browsing through it and that gave me an as yet unidentified bad feeling. Then I started reading some entries /…/, although it remained difficult to pinpoint what the real problem was I had with the book. /…/
The book contains a lot of illustrations to elucidate the text, but most of them are of very bad quality. This is where my son helped me out: a lot of illustrations have apparently been picked from other publications and have been adapted in size and/or form to fit the space. This has led to distorted equipment (ellipses instead of circles) and gives the impression that process equipment is full of ellipsoidal rotors, pulleys, vessels, etc. (van der Meijden 2001: 338)

Some reviewers seem more eager than others to talk about the attention-grabbing potential that encyclopaedias may have, as illustrated by Lawler’s account of his experience with the *Encyclopedia of Marine Mammals*:

> There is the value of the unexpected things that one stumbles upon by curiosity and find attractive: I began reading (sampling) the book by first looking for articles by authors of whom I know. One of the first of these was Tim Gerrodette, who wrote the ‘Tuna-Dolphin Issue’ section. Despite my intention to turn directly to that section, my eye was continually caught by other interesting sections. I took well over two hours to get to the Tuna-Dolphin section, steps along the way including diving physiology, surveys and feeding strategies and tactics. (Lawler 2002: 135)

In general, most reviewers simply use very warm and expressive words to point to the potential emotional response a text may rise in the readers: ‘An absorbing read!’ (Petrie 2010: 215), ‘This was fascinating’ (Lord 2006: 125), ‘Included is a long chapter entertaining as a novel and addressing everybody’ (Skovgaard 2008: 213), ‘It certainly will make any reader discover the amazing history of /…/’ (Modi 2008: 356), ‘Most readers will be surprised to discover that /…/’ (Wanamaker & Grimm 2004: 1275), etc.

**Concluding Remarks**

In addition to pointing out the influence of attractiveness in increasing the chance of encyclopaedias of becoming cognitive authorities, the analysis of the 80 book reviews conducted in the current paper indicates that book reviewers generally offer a very detailed – albeit sometimes rather concealed – discussion on encyclopaedia authority. Firstly, regarding the expected roles played by cognitive authorities, encyclopaedias are portrayed as valued reference materials, which effectively inform and guide the public. However, they are sometimes criticised for failing to provide clear information on the state of knowledge, particularly in the case of uncertain and controversial topics. Moreover, the intellectual influence that encyclopaedias may exert on the public (if any) is almost never explicitly acknowledged. Secondly, regarding the measure of encyclopaedia authority, the scope of encyclopaedias is often greatly described; whereas only incomplete assessments of the degree, extent and intensity of encyclopaedia authority are provided, often through alternative and somewhat imprecise methods. Finally, regarding the basis for encyclopaedia authorities, the majority of the tests generally prescribed to jus-
tify authority in texts are found in book reviews. There are many comments pertaining to the credential of encyclopaedia authors and editors, to the rigor of the development process, to the timeliness of the publishing history, to the plausibility and credibility of the content, to the adherence to widespread norms and standards within the genre, and to the degree of contentment of the readers with the work; but nothing on the test of time. Overall, book reviews tend to present encyclopaedias as invested with less authority than in their traditional image of absolute authorities.

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**Book Reviews Cited in the Text**


How Readers Shape the Content of an Encyclopedia: A Case Study Comparing the German Meyers Konversationslexikon (1885-1890) with Wikipedia (2002-2013)

By Ulrike Spree

Abstract

How knowledge is negotiated between the makers of encyclopedias and their audiences remains an ongoing question in research on encyclopedias. A comparative content analysis of the published answers of letters to the editor of the German Meyers Konversationslexikon (Korrespondenzblatt) from 1885 and the discussion pages of the article potato of the German Wikipedia (2013) reveals continuities as well as changes in the communication between encyclopedia producers and their audiences. The main reasons why readers and editors communicate are the need for updated factual information, an exchange on editorial principles and the intellectual exchange of ideas on ideological and philosophical questions in relation to the encyclopedic content. Editors and readers attach a lot of importance to the process of verifying information through bibliographical references. Whereas, for the editors of Meyers Konversationslexikon the leading role of experts remains undisputed, Wikipedians work in a contradictory situation. They are on the one hand exposing knowledge production to a permanent process of negotiation, thereby challenging the role of experts, on the other hand relying strongly on bibliographical authorities. Whilst the reasons for the communication between readers and editors of Meyers Konversationslexikon and among Wikipedia contributors coincide, the understanding of the roles of readers and editors differ. The editors of the Korrespondenzblatt keep up a lecturing attitude. As opposed to this, administrators in Wikipedia want to encourage participation and strive to develop expertise among the participating contributors. Albeit power relations between administrators, regular authors, occasional authors and readers continue to exist they are comparatively flat and transient. Regardless of these differences, the comparison between Meyers Konversationslexikon and Wikipedia indicates that the sine qua non for activating an upwards spiral of quality improvement is that readers accept, learn and cultivate common rules – including how to deal with dissent – and identify with the product at least so far as that they report mistakes.

Keywords: Wikipedia, Meyers Konversationslexikon, case study, literary reception, general encyclopedia, information behavior, user study.
Introduction

Many years ago I grabbed a copy of the fourth edition dated 1964 of the Junior Pears Encyclopaedia, a one-volume young people’s reference book, in a second hand bookshop. In the chapter “About This Book” the editor Edward Blishen reflects on the question, “what an encyclopaedia is” and starts his strain of thought with an ostensible opposition: “It’s [an encyclopaedia] technically […] a book that tells you everything about everything […] but in practice most encyclopaedias have to make a fairly sharp choice of the subjects they shall cover, bearing in mind the audience to which they are addressed.” He finishes his preface with a plea and a pledge: “[…] a book like this one ought to be shaped not only by a body of contributors but by a body of readers” (Blishen 1961: 5). The question how knowledge is negotiated between the editors of encyclopedias and their audiences remains an ongoing question in research on the history of encyclopedias (Herren; Michel; Rüesch 2007b: 7).

Selectively contrasting the talk pages and the version history in Wikipedia “the free encyclopedia that anyone can edit” (Wikipedia: Welcome to Wikipedia 2013) to the regularly published responses to letters to the editor of the 4th edition of the German Meyers Konversationslexikon (Korrespondenzblatt (Vol. 1 – Vol. 18)(1885-1890) this study explores differences and similarities between the ways in which readers shape the content of an encyclopedia in the 19th century and in the 21st century. The comparison is intended to root the approach of “an encyclopaedia that anyone can edit” into the broader tradition of encyclopedic production and to carve out what is really unique about the way in which knowledge is negotiated in Wikipedia. The analysis focuses on the following two research questions: 1) What are the occasions for the communication between editors, readers and contributors and what underlying causes of negotiable knowledge do they indicate? 2) What information on the understanding of the roles of editors, readers and contributors is revealed?

The paper is organized as follows. In the first two paragraphs the encyclopedic tradition is briefly outlined to contextualize Wikipedia and Meyers Konversationslexikon within the history of encyclopedia production. The main part of the paper consists of a case study comparing the communication between editors and readers in the responses to letters to the editors of Meyers Konversationslexikon 1885-1890 and the discussion of the article potato in Wikipedia 2002-2013. The conclusion carves out continuities and changes in the communication between editors and readers and links them to modes of encyclopedic production.

Encyclopedia – An Adaptive and Customisable Genre

The concept of encyclopedia underwent many changes and is the object of intense philosophical discussions (Hennigsen 1966; McArthur 1986). For the purpose of
this article a broad understanding of the concept encyclopedia that is in line with the definition given in WordNet is applied.

encyclopedia, cyclopedia, encyclopaedia, cyclopaedia (a reference work (often in several volumes) containing articles on various topics (often arranged in alphabetical order) dealing with the entire range of human knowledge or with some particular specialty) (WordNet Search 3. 1: Entry encyclopedia).

Encyclopedias are characterized by:

1. a structured arrangement of entries following a given ordering principle that aims to ease the use of the reference work;
2. an atomistic approach that favours and encourages a selective access to information and is usually not meant to be read linearly;
3. a primarily practical informative purpose and the aim to eliminate doubts on the reader's side regarding the meaning and use of individual words and concepts (Spree 2013: 550ff).

During the cause of the 19th and 20th centuries general reference works changed considerably. From a text-book-like, in parts moralizing and opinion-forming form of knowledge transfer, its role changed to a kind of prompter or stooge for the educated conversation, a function inseparably connected with the German Konversationslexikon (conversational encyclopedia) that was shaped by the internationally well known Leipzig based publishing house Brockhaus (Keiderling 2005). Since the beginning of the 19th century the rapid increase of published knowledge induced the major publishing houses to a high amount of diversification of the encyclopedic genre that served the growing audience. At the upper end of the price range we find voluminous comprehensive encyclopedias like the Encyclopaedia Britannica written and edited by more than 2 000 contributors, among them well-known academics, and a large amount of namely signed articles. The content is presented alphabetically under a broad lemma that discusses the topic within a wider context. The number of entries lies between 50 000 and 60 000. Usually, references to further literature are provided. Concurrent with the development of the comprehensive encyclopedia, since 1860 the conversational encyclopedia was gradually converted into a type of reference work for which the name Universalllexikon (universal lexicon) was coined. A coherent comprehensive presentation of larger topics was replaced by a more fragmented presentation under a narrow lemma to grant access to pieces of (factual) knowledge (Spree 2013: 551). In the 20th century encyclopedia production went through further diversification. The German encyclopedia market was shaped by the two main competitors, Brockhaus and Meyer, which merged in 1984. After the German unification the sale of printed encyclopedias boomed for the last time (Keiderling 2005: 270-378). Since 2005 the competitive pressure on the print-market for encyclopedias by the free Internet encyclopedia Wikipedia has risen noticeably and is referred to as the main reason for the cessation of long-standing encyclopedia projects. Notwithstanding the special position Wikipedia occupies on the encyclopedic
market, regarding its business model as well as the collaborative mode of production, the phenomenon Wikipedia can only be fully understood against the background of the rich encyclopedic tradition (Pscheida 2010: 441ff.). Among others, to confront ahistorical discussions about Wikipedia, Reagle & Loveland (2013), drawing on examples from antiquity onward, pin down the way in which encyclopedic knowledge is produced in Wikipedia in a long tradition. They identify three modes of content production that characterize encyclopedic production then and now: (a) compulsive collection describes encyclopedias that mainly owe their existence to the collecting passion of individuals, (b) stigmeric accumulation describes a way of text production based on revising, combining and rewriting existing texts, in (c) corporate production a group of (expert) authors collaborates more or less closely under an editor or editorial board. Reagle and Loveland conclude that the “distinction between a collectively authored Wikipedia and its individually authored predecessors turns out to be murky” (2013: 5). The basic principles Wikipedians adhere to, the programmatic Five Pillars, are an expression of this ambivalence between the commitment towards a long series of precursors from antiquity onwards and the pursuit for a new and more open way of “content” production. Whereas the first and fundamental principle states “Wikipedia is an encyclopedia: It combines many features of general and specialized encyclopedias, almanacs, and gazetteers”, the third pillar underlines that “Wikipedia is free content that anyone can edit, use, modify, and distribute” (Wikipedia: Five Pillars 2013). This striving for openness also becomes apparent by the use of the term content instead of more emphatic and contested concepts like knowledge or information.

Encyclopedias and their Audiences

What the lexicographer and educationalist Edward Blishen 1964 (cf. Introduction) described as a requirement – the shaping of an encyclopedia by its readers – is the general case. Readers always have directly or indirectly influenced the content, structure and organization of encyclopedias in various ways. Numerous studies on encyclopedias and their audiences establish not only the social proximity between lexicographers, encyclopedia authors and readers but also the transition and fluency between the roles of the authors/editors and the reading audience (Darnton 1979; Spree 2000: 89 ff; Herren, Paul & Rüesch 2007b: 9-74; Prodöhl 2011: 32-66; Reagle & Loveland 2013). Having the same background as their readers, encyclopedia authors and editors demonstrate a firm understanding of their readers’ needs and ways of thinking. At the same time, the body of editors often was anything but homogenous and characterized by a thick network between society and editorial board (Prodöhl 2011: 143). The emergence of new reading audiences, for example after the French Revolution and during the period of the Wars of Liberation (1813-1815) or the European revolutionary movements (1830 – 1848), al-
ways fostered new ideas for lexicographic products like the genres of the German conversational encyclopedia or encyclopedic dictionaries aimed at the so called “lower orders” (Penny Cyclopaedia: Prospectus 1832). Apart from these indirect influences, readers were integrated directly into the production process and acting as external experts or informants – the large encyclopedias resorted to a huge army of informants among academics, diplomats, military people or travellers (Spree 2000: 89-149).

Case Study: How the Audience Shapes the Encyclopedic Content 1885-1890 and 2002-2013 – Between Critical Reader and Collaborator

Earlier research situating Wikipedia within the long tradition of encyclopedic production is predominantly based on the comparison with well known (lexicographic as well as philosophical) projects of the 18th century, like the French Encyclopédie by Diderot and d’Alembert or the Encyclopedia Britannica (Haider & Sundin 2010, Reagle 2011: 18 ff, Reagle & Loveland 2013) as well as with visionary encyclopedic approaches like Paul Otlet’s Mundaneum (1910) or H.G. Wells World Brain (1936) (Reagle 2011: 17-25). In the present article knowledge production in Wikipedia is compared to a popular late 19th century German encyclopedia. In addition to the mentioned encyclopedias, Meyers Konversationslexikon is a further adequate and worthwhile object of comparison, since our contemporary everyday notion of what to expect from an encyclopedia is not less influenced by the aforementioned philosophically and epistemically ambitious and sophisticated projects than it is by the late nineteenth century confinement of the genre to a “fact-bound everything about everything” (Bates 1986: 37ff, Spree 2000: 327).

Meyers Konversationslexikon

Initially founded in 1826, the economic success of the publishing house of Meyer’s encyclopedia productions — it traded under the name Bibliographisches Institut — as well as its reputation date from the publication of the 52 volumes of the “Grosse Conversational-Lexikon für die gebildeten Stände” (Large conversational encyclopedia for the educated classes) 1839-1855 (Sarkowski 1976: 10ff). The preface of the first volume was a fervent plea for revolutionary change in the German states. The publication appeared on the scene as a liberal democratic competitor to Brockhaus’ encyclopedic productions defending free access to knowledge and the ideas of the 1848 revolution (Spree 2000: 229 ff.). During the 19th century the republican liberal-democratic political orientation of the Bibliographisches Institut was gradually replaced by a more and more nationalistic tendency, supporting the idea of a constitutional monarchy in the German Reich.
The 4th edition of *Meyers Konversationslexikon* (1885-1892), discussed in this case study, indicates a decisive change in the publishing policy of the *Bibliographisches Institut*. The fact that the encyclopedia was published without a programmatic preface can already be interpreted as an implicit dedication to factual information abstaining from any political or ideological positioning. It was only in the preface to the 6th edition (Zur sechsten Auflage von Meyers Konversations-Lexikon: V) from 1909 that the editor explicitly distanced the publication both from the mainly entertaining and conversational direction of the previous editions and from taking sides with right-liberal persuasions in favor of an assumed superior national interest. In a highly ideological text the presentation of positivist scientific knowledge, which served the requirements of a lay audience as well as the university scholar and which was in the national interest, are described as neutral and unbiased (Zur sechsten Auflage von Meyers Konversations-Lexikon: VI). Thus, the 4th edition retrospectively occupies a transitional position between the understanding of the genre of the *Konversations-Lexikon* as presenting empirical knowledge from a current (liberal political) perspective in a comprehensible and entertaining way and its demeanor as an unbiased authoritative academically vetted source of correct knowledge. The 4th edition was published between 1885 and 1892 in 19 volumes comprising nearly 20 000 pages and about 97 000 lemmata. With 200 000 sold copies the edition was economically very successful (Sarkowski 1974: 118). Most copies were either sold by local bookstores or by travelling booksellers to an upper and middle class audience of business people, public servants and academics (Sarkowski 1976: 118; retrobib – Lexikonkauf 1890).

**Wikipedia**

Since 2006 the rise of the free online encyclopedia *Wikipedia* has been constantly accompanied by multifarious research. In their systematic review on research on *Wikipedia* Okoli and others (2012) report more than 300 publications regarding infrastructure, participation and community-building in *Wikipedia*. The precondition for *Wikipedia*’s enormous success was the introduction of the Wiki-Software in 2001. It allowed readers to read as well as edit entries directly via their browser. The fact that the Wiki-Software was able to log all changes encouraged the editors to refrain from formal editing in advance and from peer review process and to allow the publication of the articles immediately after an editorial change. Currently, the number of published articles (30 million articles worldwide, 4.3 million in the English version, 1.6 million in the German version) (Wikipedia: Wikipedia 2013) is unsurpassed by any other encyclopedic production. Regardless of the fact that being freely editable has persisted in principle until the present day, over the years Wikipedians have developed a complex organizational structure, which includes distribution of labor as well as a power structure distinguishing between contributors and members of the *Wikipedia* volunteers’ bureaucracy, like administrators, checkusers or ombudsmen (Pentzold 2012; Simonite 2013).
These are mainly based on commitment (amount of contributions) as well as persistence of the respective protagonists, and an entire body of rules and guidelines governing content production (Pscheida 2010: 347-387; Reagle 2011). Although, it is true that most Wikipedia users do not get actively involved (editors 33 174 (English) compared to over 19 000 000 (passive) users (Wikimedia: Wikimedia Report Card 2014), the transitions between authors and readers remain fluid.

Comparing the Communication Between Editors and Readers 1885-1890 and 2002-2013

Usually, collaboration between editors and readers/users can only be inferred implicitly from the encyclopedic entries themselves or from the surrounding texts, like prefaces, or uncovered by archival studies, as letters to the editor or the evidences of the communication of the editorial staff with external experts, normally remain unpublished (Spree 2000; Keiderling 2005; Prodöhl 2011). In this respect, the approach of Wikipedia grants a new level of transparency, as it not only offers a plethora of programmatic texts and editorial guidelines but also tools that allow readers to observe the lexicographer at work. The version history function records all changes of an article from the first emergence to the current version. Additionally, the production process is accompanied by a talk page that invites contributors to debate on a topic in a larger context or to comment on changes of the article. This amount of transparency of the encyclopedic production process via granting a live view into the workshop of the author/editor is unprecedented in the history of encyclopedias, however not without precursors. Beginning with the seventh volume of the 3rd edition (1876-78), nearly each volume of Meyers Konversationslexikon was supplemented by a so called Korrespondenzblatt (correspondence paper) consisting of – presumably a selection of – answers to requests and notifications by readers regarding the articles in the respective volume.

Methodological Approach

The subsequent analysis employs a combination of a hermeneutic close reading (Kain 1998) of the contributions and a qualitative content analysis (Mayring 2000) to a) identify expressed reasons for the communication, and b) to more closely describe patterns of communication between readers and editors (Konversations-Lexikon) or user/contributors and administrators (Wikipedia) in order to infer the roles and the habitus the answerer assumes (Coney & Steehouder 2000).

In a first step the genesis as well as the layout and format of the communication are described and analyzed. In the second step units of analysis are determined. In the case of the Korrespondenzblatt the response to one letter to the editor (figure 3) is regarded as one communication. Analogically, regarding the ver-
version history (figure 1) and the talk pages (figure 2), a version change or a topic in the archived discussion pages (topics from 1 to 11 on figure 2) are the basic unit of analysis. The statements are coded for a) reasons for communication like for example request for or passing on of information and b) the assigned rhetorical roles of editors and readers taking into consideration aspects like formality of communication, assumed previous knowledge and politeness. As the focus is on the communication purposes and structure and the topics as such are neglected the comparison of the discussion on multifarious encyclopedia entries (Korrespondenzblatt) to the talk pages of the single entry (that as such covers numerous topics) potato in Wikipedia is justifiable. The entry potato was chosen as an example for a not obviously controversial topic on an everyday object. 

Figure 1: Screenshot Wikipedia Version History
In a preface the reasons for starting the Korrespondenzblatt are summarized. It owes its formation to the numerous letters to the editor; mainly corrections of petty mistakes and typos as well as improvements of articles employees could not conduct due to insufficient information. The Korrespondenzblatt also aimed to explain the structure and organization of the encyclopedia and give background information from the encyclopedia workshop. The editor assumes this information could be useful not only for the individual enquirer but for the audience at large (Korrespondenzblatt II 1876: 1). As the Konversationslexikon was published in separate numbers the answers were initially published on the cover of each number and eventually collected and published as appendix to each volume. The following analysis is mainly based on the Korrespondenzblatt for the 4th edition.\(^6\)

The entire Korrespondenzblatt amounts to 45 pages. The layout is similar to the main part of the encyclopedia: the text is printed in two columns and the names of the enquirers replace the entry lemma (figure 3). Through this layout decision the...
Editors succeed in simultaneously presenting the responses as a germane part of the *Konversationslexikon* and appreciating the enquirers. At the same time a certain degree of formality of the communication is retained. Presumably, the answers were written by a member of the editorial team, who was responsible for the respective topic (Wie ein Konversationslexikon gemacht wird 1879: 771). The topics of the correspondence comprise everything from factual information on geographical details to political and administrative topics to scientific and philosophical questions.

An anonymous article about the third edition of *Meyers Konversationslexikon* in the illustrated magazine *Daheim* from 1879, based on “authentic notes”, grants a rare insight into the workshop of an encyclopedia and is suitable to further contextualize the communication in the *Korrespondenzblatt* within the complete production process (Wie ein Konversationslexikon gemacht wird 1879: 770). According to this article, the lexicographic practice was characterized by a high amount of
division of labor between the editorial board, the authors and the editors of the individual articles. The main responsibility of the editorial board was to handle the wealth of material and to solicit qualified authors. The description of the actual production process corresponds to what Reagle and Loveland (2013) describe as “stigmeric accumulation”: the 70,000 articles of the 2nd edition were cut out and pasted on independent paper sheets. Subsequently, the lines were counted to get an overview about the scale of the different knowledge domains. On this basis, the editorial board decided on the appropriate space for each subject field for the new edition. The editorial board also employed so called “Notizensammler” (note collectors) who monitored around 50 national and international newspapers mainly for biographical and geographical facts (Wie ein Konversationslexikon gemacht wurd 1879: 770). The effective writing and editing was carried out by dedicated editorial teams in various university cities (770). The actual writing of the articles, according to the anonymous author, only accounted for a relatively small amount of work involved in the production of the encyclopedia. Particular attention had to be paid to checking of the listed “authorities”, whereby the German “Autoritäten” refers to bibliographic sources as well as to eyewitnesses and personal informants (771). This corresponds with the introduction to the Korrespondenzblatt that assigns the letters from the subscribers a similar role as the personal informants and appreciates their “voices” as valuable hints for the execution of the project. The subscribers are cordially invited to carry on pointing to effective errors (Korrespondenzblatt II 1876: 1).

Wikipedia Version History and Talk Pages of the Articles Kartoffel/potatoe (2002-2013)

In Wikipedia the articles are written collaboratively. The editing process of the article “Kartoffel” conforms to the findings of Kallass regarding the writing process in Wikipidia. It is heterogeneous, unstructured and long (Kallass 2008: 3). The article Kartoffel developed gradually from a four sentences entry started in September 2002. Between 2002 and 2013 the article was edited more than 2696 times and has grown to 60,332 bytes by May 2013 (Wikipedia: Kartoffel: Versionsgeschichte (2013). By April 2004 a consolidated formal structure had been achieved and the article was suggested as excellent article. Since 2002 the community has been working constantly on the article, albeit at varying editing speeds. For the first 500 versions (2006-02-24) roughly 51 months were needed whereas the next 500 versions only took 8 months. The version history as well as the talk pages exhibit many small changes, like the addition of new facts as well as discussions on the structure and the transfer of content in separate articles.

The tone is factual, sometimes chatty and usually friendly. For instance, in 2004 the deletion of some passages in the article is discussed. User mmr insists on
the cancellations after the user M_mb had revoked them. In the end, user M_mb complies to the changes although – she/he explicitly mentions – she/he is not convinced. Common ground between the collaborators can be found as they both agree that two different articles should never share identical text (Wikipedia: Diskussion Kartoffel: Kandidat für “Exzellenter Artikel” 2004). By 2007 the article had changed so much through occasional additions that the structure got completely lost. The user Carstor, who also seems to have administering rights or at least a status above a normal registered user, suggested a complete restructuring of the article as it contained too much how-to information and had degenerated into a mere conglomeration of facts. Although, during the review process she/he obviously nearly lost patience and used strong language (“meine Fresse” (Bugger me)) she/he is careful to keep her/his fellow authors informed that she/he saved the previous version in case someone should disagree with the changes (Wikipedia: Diskussion Kartoffel: Stand vor dem Umbau 2007). In April 2007 Carstor entered the article in the list for quality management biology. As a reaction to this step a short discussion renegotiating author roles took place. A user complains that the page is – as he assumes – as a consequence of the quality management measure still blocked for further editing. Carstor resolves this as a misunderstanding explaining to the complaining user that he only needs to register as a user to be allowed to work on the article (Wikipedia: Diskussion Kartoffel: Stand vor dem Umbau 2007). Although, Carstor makes a considerable number of suggestions for the restructuring process, he is careful not to dominate the discussion and effectively achieves that users Griensteidl and Denis Barthel join in the revising process. Usually, the discussion remains factual spiced with scarce teasing remarks like Denis Barthel’s “would I contradict a future main author” (Wikipedia: Diskussion Kartoffel: Stand vor dem Umbau 2007). To sum up, the Wikipedia community managed to constantly improve the article over a period of more than ten years. Dozens of contributors collaborated in different roles and with varying amounts of commitment. Apart from a few blockings due to vandalism the contributors acted in concert and focused on their common topic. In the few cases of stagnation or discord the resorting to existing rules and guidelines (like neutral point of view, structure templates, incentives like labeling as article worth reading and agreed quality management tools) sufficed to calm the waves and stimulate constructive writing.

**Continuity and Change in the Communication of Editors and Readers as Collaborators**

The comparison of the version history and the talk pages in Wikipedia on the article potato and a close reading of the 19 issues of the Korrespondenzblatt (1885-1892) reveal a considerable amount of continuity in regard to the first research question concerning reasons for a communication between readers and editors,
respectively among Wikipedia collaborators with different levels of expertise. These can be subsumed under three main headings:

1) Satisfying the need of readers and contributors for updated factual information

A considerable part of the communication between readers and editors or among the contributors simply serves as an exchange of factual information.

   a) Requesting additional information and/or updated information. Not surprisingly the communication between readers and editors or among collaborators simply serves the exchange of topical additional information. W. Walter wishes to be updated on the results of the census, Rud. Herman wants to know which river is longer, the Mississippi or the Amazonas (Korrespondenzblatt zum vierten Band 1885) and Dr. H. wishes elucidation on the name of Austrian military leaders (Korrespondenzblatt zum siebten Band 1890). Wikipedians constantly exchange and update information for example regarding the exact amount of starch in potatoes or their geographical origin (Wikipedia: Talk: Potato: Edit request 2012).

   b) Asking for guidance for everyday life. Unlike Meyers Konversationslexikon as such, the Korrespondenzblatt provides the enquirer with detailed advice on practical questions like finding suitable accommodation for German nursing students in Paris or positive and negative effects of tobacco (Korrespondenzblatt zum fünften Band 1886). Independent of the actual work on the article itself, the authors of the article Kartoffel in Wikipedia discuss whether the amount of solanin contained in potato peel is harmful to humans. In the discussion they also resort to commonplace reasons like the eating habits of a contributor’s grandmother (My granny eats them with the peels and she is healthy/fine) (Wikipedia: Diskussion Kartoffel: Kartoffelschalen Problem 2010).

2) Editorial principles

A large amount of the communication revolves around editorial aspects of the encyclopedia.

   a) Suggesting editorial improvements. Readers of Meyers Konversationslexikon as well as contributors in Wikipedia make numerous suggestions regarding grammar; punctuation (Wikipedia: Talk Potato: Grammar review 2012) and layout or they exchange information on pronunciation. Reader P. V. in D. receives an extended answer on his request regarding the correct pronunciation of the family name Beaconsfield based on a personal request from the vicar of Beaconsfield (Korrespondenzblatt zum ersten Band 1885). In this category also belong b) meta-discussions on the functions of an encyclopedia. A recurring reason for communication between editor and readers is the reassurance about the purpose and function of an encyclopedia as well as negotiating what content should be included and excluded. The editors of the Korrespondenzblatt for example lecture their
enquiring readers that daily news, information on small languages, biographies of Greek aristocrats (Korrespondenzblatt zum dreizehnten Band 1889) or authors of trashy literature and not yet verified information are not incorporated in the encyclopedia (Korrespondenzblatt zum dritten Band 1886). In the Wikipedia version history and talk pages on the article Kartoffel / potato the contributors discuss intensively what content should be included or excluded like for example references to potato recipes (Wikipedia: Diskussion Kartoffel: Gerichte 2003). Although, the scope of Wikipedia regarding everyday culture is broader than that of the Konversationslexikon the exclusion criteria are similar and include the exclusion of daily news as well as not yet verified information. Wikipedia does not exclude biographies of authors of pulp fiction on principle, however the inclusion of biographies as a separate lemma is bound by certain conditions like “significant coverage” – Wikipedia even introduces the term of “low-profile individual” (Wikipedia: Who is a low profile individual? 2013) – and not of “mere short-term” interest (Wikipedia: Notability 2013).

3) Intellectual exchange of ideas on ideological and philosophical convictions

The communication between readers and editors as well as between the contributors of Wikipedia articles is also a forum for serious philosophical and political debates. In the Korrespondenzblatt we find a) lengthy philosophical or academic discourses on the meaning of various philosophical concepts like realism, conceptualism or the political role of Wallenstein (Korrespondenzblatt zum vierten Band). Authors of the article potato in Wikipedia in 2012 discuss at some length the dispute between Chilean and Peruvian scientists whether the potato variety brought to Europe was adapted to long day conditions (Chilean) or short day conditions (Peruvian) (Wikipedia: Talk: Potato: Origin). In the context of encyclopedia production b) claiming or contesting academic authority can be interpreted as a more subtle form of dealing with ideological disagreement than an open dispute on ideological or political topics. In the Korrespondenzblatt a critical comment in an article of the Konversationslexikon on the ultramontane historian Janssen is justified by remarking that protestant critics had founded their assessment academically and that parity is a non entity in academic appraisement (Korrespondenzblatt zum siebzentnten Band 1890). In this case recourse to academic/scientific authentification is used as a strategy to defend bias. In the talk pages on the German article “Kartoffel” (“potato”) in 2007 the contributors discuss the relationship between science and truth and whether it is correct to simply equate scientific and true. The discussants compromise about the statement that a reference to a considerably reliable published source is more credible than the idea of some sort of user (Wikipedia: Diskussion Kartoffel: Einführung in Europa 2007). Readers, editors and contributors of Meyer as well as of Wikipedia resort to c) claiming and defending a (neutral) point of view. In the Korrespondenzblatt we find a striking example of how referring to a neutral point of view can be used to
justify bias. Replying to a critical comment of Müller in Alt-Dombrowo, the editor defends the national-liberal conviction of the *Konversationslexikon* claiming that the presentation of current political history cannot be written in a way that suits all political parties. He backs his response with recourse to historical scholarship. Historians had agreed, so the editor, that history could not and should not be objective und unbiased and that a historian had to write from a political conviction to assess political occurrences. Moreover, the national-liberal conviction is defended as a mediating political position. An adequate position to suit the encyclopedia’s striving for completeness, correctness, justness and a lenient judgment that seeks to avoid extremes (*Korrespondenzblatt* zum siebzehnten Band 1890). References to the neutral point of view are common in the *Wikipedia* talk pages too, even in politically not controversial articles like potato. In the talk pages the wording “a really good salad” is discarded because the encyclopedic objectivity of the expression is contested as it sounded more like a housekeeping suggestion (*Wikipedia: Diskussion Kartoffel: Verwendungszweck 2012*).

Whereas the reasons for communicating between readers and editors of *Meyers Konversationslexikon* and among contributors of an article in *Wikipedia* coincide significantly the understanding of the role readers and editors should play in the production process — I investigated in my second research question — partially differ. In the *Korrespondenzblatt* as well as in *Wikipedia* readers/editors appear as sovereign subjects, who demand and grant additional information. As the readers’ contributions are not quoted directly in the *Korrespondenzblatt*, they can only be inferred indirectly. Mostly, from the air of the answer, it seems as if the editors are responding to an inquiring and self-confident audience. Even though the editors of the *Korrespondenzblatt* treat their readers respectfully on an equal footing, they keep up a lecturing attitude. For example E. v. Bülow in B. is advised of the fact that the article “labor colony” (“Arbeiterkolonien”) is anything but ignored as the relevant information is subsumed under the article colonies of the poor (“Armenkolonie”). Reader v. M. in Neiße is politely reminded that it is beyond the task of *Meyers Konversationslexikon* to deal with the historical development of the different countries in addition to comments on the military, as the general interest is served better by a reliable account of the current situation. However, the reply carries on, abiding by his wish a short outline of the English military history is provided in the *Korrespondenzblatt* (zum sechsten Band 1886).

Notwithstanding the fact that most *Wikipedia* users do not get actively involved, the transition between authors and readers is fluid. The talk pages show examples where the active contributors try to put themselves in the shoes of the (passive) readers. For example Berlin-Jurist assumes that other readers, especially non biologists, would be interested in a passage on storage of potatoes (*Wikipedia: Diskussion Kartoffel: Lagerung 2008*) and in 2011 one author complains about the extensive use of scientific terminology “as if *Wikipedia* were a university reference work” (*Wikipedia: Diskussion Kartoffel: Zu Fachspezifisch formu-
liert 2011). Although there is a certain amount of hierarchical behavior recognizable among contributors – mainly derived from different degrees of personal commitment – the power relation between administrators, regular authors, occasional authors and readers is flat and transient. The version history and the talk pages reveal that parts of the article content may very well originate from personal everyday experiences on behalf of the participating contributors. However, in the resulting article facts are always backed by published sources, although during the review process contributors often resort to commonplace information and everyday problems – like expertise from an acquainted potato farmer. The authors are bound together by the common goal of producing a trustworthy article worth reading and display a high degree of identification with the article. The results of the analysis coincide with Sundin’s (2011) observation that the writing process often needed an external impulse (ambitious author, threat of change of status, discussion of certain facts) to trigger more structured epistemic work.

### Conclusion

Not just since the rise of Wikipedia in the 21st century, readers have been shaping encyclopedias either by their critical remarks or their questions regarding “the organization” of the work. Already at the end of the 19th century, the editors of Meyers Konversationslexikon learned to appreciate letters to the editor as a way of communicating with their subscribers and welcomed it as a supplemental way to promote the encyclopedia and feed in current information. They explicitly exploited the exchange of ideas with the audience as valuable incentive to improve the lexicographical principles such as the access structure of the encyclopedia as well as to eliminate factual mistakes. The critical remarks of the readers also served as an inducement to account for ideological as well as political positions advocated by Meyers Konversationslexikon. To determine to what degree Wikipedia and Meyers Konversationslexikon are part of the same encyclopedic tradition I finish with a hypothetical question. Which, if any, of the famous five pillars, the credo of Wikipedians, would readers and editors of Meyers Konversationslexikon have subscribed to?

1. Wikipedia is an encyclopedia
2. Wikipedia is written from a neutral point of view
3. Wikipedia is free content that anyone can edit, use, modify, and distribute
4. Editors should treat each other with respect and civility
5. Wikipedia does not have firm rules (Wikipedia: Five Pillars 2013, November 11)
From what we have seen before, it follows, presumably all of them, except the third one. While the readers sometimes probably wished to directly modify the content of the encyclopedia the editors vehemently defended their professional expertise and responsibility. In this respect they keep up the claim of a certain social and political guiding role of the encyclopedia. It is also likely that readers and editors of Meyers Konversationslexikon would have agreed that an encyclopedia should be written from a neutral point of view. Neutral was understood as more or less synonymous to the political position of the national-liberal political camp as a kind of mediating position between the opposing political camps. This comes with no surprise taking into consideration the social and political background at the end of the 19th century. The German Reich was a constitutional monarchy divided into fiercely opposing political and ideological camps namely national (or national and liberal), catholic and socialist (Wehler 1985). As we have seen, this understanding of the neutral point of view could result in a highly ideological argumentation. For Wikipedians adopting a neutral point of view means explaining major points of view, weighting them with respect to their prominence and characterizing information rather than debating it (Wikipedia: Five Pillars 2014). As could be seen in the talk pages, a policy that is based on a neutral point has to face constant inherent contradictions because in Wikipedia the neutral point of view results from a constant negotiation among the contributors. The transparency and openness of the editing process help to constrain the deployment of the neutral point of view argument in an ideological manner. This can also be interpreted as a strategy to neutralize political dissent in favor of the common purpose to produce an encyclopedia. Regarding pillar five, the absence of firm rules, although Meyers Konversationslexikon adheres to editorial principles, frequent deviations from a given structure occur. For example the actual coverage of an article depended to a high degree on the accessibility of material and information.

All three models of encyclopedic production mentioned by Reagle and Love-land (2013) (compulsive collection, stigmeric accumulation, corporate production) can be found in Wikipedia. The dominant model of Meyers Konversationslexikon is stigmeric accumulation. The Korrespondenzblatt as well as the “view in the workshop” illustrate that at least the informants and authors also worked under the imperative of compulsive collection. In their — sometimes justifying, however never apologetic — responses to the audience the editors take care to ensure their role as experts both regarding factual correctness and opinion leadership in political and academic (scientific) questions as well as proving their professional expertise as information specialists regarding the introduction of forward looking editorial principles. As opposed to this, administrators in Wikipedia strive to encourage participation and build expertise among the participating contributors. The high amount of “nitty gritty daily cleaning work and other small edits” compared to debating the actual content, Sundin (2011:20) observes in his
ethnographic study on *Wikipedia* is not limited to *Wikipedia*, but rather seems to be a general characteristic of the editing process of encyclopedias (Wie ein Konversationslexikon gemacht wird 1879: 771). The comparison shows that readers and editors in *Meyers Konversationslexikon* as well as *Wikipedia* contributors attach great importance to the process of verifying information through bibliographical references. In this respect, *Wikipedians* work in a constant contradiction, on the one hand exposing knowledge production to a permanent process of negotiating thereby challenging the role of experts, on the other hand relying severely on bibliographical authorities. Leaving aside the differences concerning the amount of reader contributions to the encyclopedia, the comparison of *Meyers Konversationslexikon* with *Wikipedia* confirms that the sine qua non for activating an upwards spiral of quality improvement is that readers feel responsible for “their” encyclopedia and learn, accept and cultivate common rules – including how to deal with dissent – and identify with the product at least so far as that they report errors. The case study could demonstrate that the compliance with Edward Blishen’s request that an encyclopedia should always be shaped by its readers is indeed viewed as an important aspect of successful quality management by readers as well as editors.

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Notes

1 Wissenmedia, the current publisher of the German Brockhaus encyclopedia, which in recent years changed its publisher for several times announced in July 2013 the step-by-step cessation of the house-to-house distribution by mid 2014 and the closure of updating the online version by 2020 (Roesler-Graichen 2013).

2 It is an irony of history that the Bibliographisches Institut in 1984 merged with its former competitor F.A. Brockhaus of Wiesbaden to Bibliographisches Institut & F.A. Brockhaus AG (Keiderling 2005: 277).

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4 In the German article Wikipedians the example of the history of the article on the Hermannstraße (Berlin) is given. Due to the commitment and personal involvement of ‘normal’ users the article developed from an entry that was initially suggested for deletion as it did not
meet the notability criteria into an article marked as excellent (Wikipedia: Wikipedianer 2014).

5 The choice also seemed natural to me as I used the example in my history of the genre of the popular encyclopedia in Germany and Great Britain in the 19th century (Spree 2000: 149-191).

6 The analysis is based on the online version of the fourth edition of Meyers Konversationslexikon 1885-1890 at retrobib (Meyers Konversationslexikon (1885-1890))

7 In the documented case study the collaboration process went always smoothly. The fact that Wikipedians over the last ten years have developed a sophisticated system for dispute resolution consisting of guidelines as well as formalized processes like third opinion, formal mediation and arbitration indicates that this is of course not always the case and that conflicts do happen (Wikipedia: Dispute resolution (2014), Reagle 2011: 45-137). Nevertheless, a study by Kim Osman on the talk pages of the article Australia very much coincides with the findings on the article potato. Osman describes the collaboration process as quite similar to traditional forms of quality control as a “generative friction, regulated by references to policy” (Osman 2013: 6).

8 Ultramontane signifies a person who places strong emphasis on the prerogatives and powers of the institution of the Catholic church and the Pope. (Conzemius 2002).

9 As entry date March 2007 is mentioned however the archive dates from 2006.

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The Free Encyclopaedia that Anyone can Edit: The Shifting Values of Wikipedia Editors

By Kim Osman

Abstract

Wikipedia is often held up as an example of the potential of the internet to foster open, free and non-commercial collaboration. However such discourses often conflate these values without recognising how they play out in reality in a peer-production community. As Wikipedia is evolving, it is an ideal time to examine these discourses and the tensions that exist between its initial ideals and the reality of commercial activity in the encyclopaedia. Through an analysis of three failed proposals to ban paid advocacy editing in the English language Wikipedia, this paper highlights the shift in values from the early editorial community that forked encyclopaedic content over the threat of commercialisation, to one that today values the freedom that allows anyone to edit the encyclopaedia.

Keywords: Wikipedia, encyclopaedias, encyclopaedism, mass collaboration, internet studies, grounded theory, online community.
Introduction

*Wikipedia* is an encyclopaedia in transition. Its core values are being called into question as an increasing number of users are paid to contribute to the encyclopaedia. How then is the open editorial community of this free encyclopaedia responding to the increasing presence of commercial interests and paid editors? Through an analysis of three failed proposals by the community to impose bans or limits on paid editing, this study reveals how the values of the English language *Wikipedia* editorial community are in transition and how these shifts reflect wider changes in assumptions about commerciality in digital media.

Throughout its history *Wikipedia*’s status as a non-commercial, non-profit, top web property among commercial counterparts has often seen it being praised for holding all the promises of an open and democratic web. In this discourse, debates about freedom, openness and non-commercialism often get conflated or neglected in favour of celebratory accounts of collaboration. However, it is important to recognise that there are different logics at work in each of these narratives and this paper aims to untangle the threads of freedom, neutrality and commercialism to investigate how ideals around the collaborative production of knowledge online are changing and how within *Wikipedia* there has been a shuffling of the community’s values.

Once the threat of commercial activity in *Wikipedia* and the ability to derive a profit from the unpaid labour of others prompted a volunteer walk-out, known in *Wikipedia* folklore as the Spanish Fork. In response to suggestions in 2002 that *Wikipedia* may take advertising, Spanish language volunteers forked their content to other servers and started a new encyclopaedia (Lih 2009; Tkacz 2011). Now the presence of paid advocates – those editors who gain financial benefits from editing *Wikipedia* articles on another party’s behalf – has drawn a public response from the Wikimedia Foundation, its then Executive Director Sue Gardner and founder Jimmy Wales (who has always been a vocal opponent of PR involvement in the encyclopaedia) (Wikipedia 2012; Roth 2013; Wikimedia Foundation 2013b). However, the community response has been divided. It is interesting to analyse these divisions, along with the involvement of different actors and groups in *Wikipedia* to see how paid advocacy has been constructed and how it reflects a separation of the values of openness and freedom and a shift away from the ideals of earlier contributors to the encyclopaedia. Indeed, as *Wikipedia* is reconfiguring its norms and values, this analysis reveals important truths about how the boundaries between the commercial and the non-profit in the context of peer production are sometimes fuzzy, overlapping and far from clearly defined.
An Experiment in Knowledge

*Wikipedia* started life as an online experiment, a side project, to build a free encyclopaedia, and one of the strongest ideological threads between *Wikipedia* and earlier encyclopaedic efforts based on Enlightenment ideals is the desire to make available the totality of knowledge. In *Wikipedia*, this ideal is expressed as providing access to the ‘sum of all knowledge,’ and this similarity between *Wikipedia* and earlier efforts has contributed to the experiment becoming an extremely successful global encyclopaedia (*Wikipedia* 2013d). Indeed as Benjamin Mako Hill found in his study of failed encyclopaedias, one of *Wikipedia*’s strengths is that despite being online, it still largely resembles a traditional encyclopaedia (Garber 2011).

However these encyclopaedias of the past have been of a momentary nature, taking ‘snapshots’ of information (Yeo 2001) at different points in time. On the other hand, *Wikipedia*, which is popularly criticised (Sanger 2006) for its information being unstable and transient, is perhaps the only encyclopaedia to aggregate these ‘snapshots’ to construct a history of a particular subject over time. As each edit is logged and timestamped, Haider and Sundin (2010) note that in *Wikipedia*, ‘permanence has reached a new height…Everything is constantly changing at the same time as it is always being saved and stable, archived.’

Indeed, encyclopaedias are important in exemplifying the ideals of a period in history, of capturing intellectual consensus and establishing the knowledge of the time. These ‘snapshots’ provide an insight into the current ideals around free and open access to knowledge, and in *Wikipedia*’s case the potential of the web to be a forum for this knowledge. Ideals concerned with the greater social good are a historical feature of encyclopaedias as debates about property and copyright have played out since the early 18th century, just as they play out about commercialisation in *Wikipedia* today (Yeo 2001; Loveland & Reagle 2013). Analysing how *Wikipedia* has responded to paid editing can therefore reflect wider popular feeling about commercial activities on the web.

Untangling the Threads: Peer Production and Collaborative Knowledge Ideals in Reality

Events in the platform’s history, such as the Spanish Fork, suggest that *Wikipedia* has long been opposed to commercial involvement and values its place as a neutral non-profit. As Wikimedia Foundation spokesperson Jay Walsh notes in relation to paid editing in the community, ‘there’s a historical resistance towards it from early days within the project’ (Mullin 2014). Now however, the encyclopaedia is negotiating how to maintain its ideals in a web environment where commercial players inevitably want to be involved in producing content for a top six website (Alexa 2013). In order to examine what and how things are changing, we
must first look back at the ideals in question – freedom, neutrality, and commercialism – and how they have been conflated in imaginings of Wikipedia in utopian discourses of peer production.

The popular discourses (Benkler 2006; Leadbeater 2006; Tapscott & Williams 2006; Bruns 2008; Shirky 2008) around peer production, collaboration, prosumption and produsage normally invoke Wikipedia as a separate entity from market forces and portray its users as contributing due to a commitment to free and open knowledge. Attributing these motivations and ideals ‘fits neatly with the long-standing rhetoric about the democratizing potential of the internet, and with the more recent enthusiasm for user-generated content (UGC) [and] amateur expertise’ (Gillespie 2010: 352). Indeed Wikipedia is often situated as part of a gift, or sharing economy that operates differently to traditional market forces (Benkler 2006; Lessig 2008).

These narratives also suggest that one of the key aspects of peer production and co-creation is collaboration, where amateurs and/or volunteers work with traditionally commercial content producers in a mutually beneficial relationship. Indeed as Nathaniel Tkacz notes about these discourses, ‘Collaboration is literally everywhere and can be attached to almost anything, immediately giving it a positive value’ that is ‘beyond that of simply co-labouring’ (Tkacz 2010: 41-42). Tkacz (2010) also notes that there is a gap between popular and romanticised accounts of collaboration with how projects such as Wikipedia actually operate in an attempt to enact ideals (Kittur et al. 2007; Matei & Dobrescu 2010; Halfaker, Kittur & Riedl 2011; Laniado & Tasso 2011). This process of enacting ideals is ongoing and the encyclopaedia is in transition as both a knowledge producer and web platform. Tarleton Gillespie notes of web platforms:

> Like the television networks and trade publishers before them, they are increasingly facing questions about their responsibilities: to their users, to key constituencies who depend on the public discourse they host, and to broader notions of the public interest. (Gillespie 2010: 348)

Like other online platforms Wikipedia is a socio-technical construction that has evolved through a negotiation and formation of rules by the community. From its founding ideals Wikipedia has developed in a political context where ideals and principles scaffold the construction process (van Dijck 2013). This ‘nonprofit, nonmarket business model that Wikipedia has chosen is inimically interwoven with the volunteer-based peer-production system the platform so successfully implemented’ (van Dijck 2013: 148), and commercialism in this environment is consequently a controversial subject.

So while scholars like Benkler have given us a romantic view of Wikipedia as being based on peer production, on a system somehow apart from the commercial market, this is not in reality the case (Tkacz 2010). Websites are highly interconnected and this connected nature means that Wikipedia inevitably includes com-
mercial actors. Indeed, sustainability in this environment is linked to a platform’s ability to integrate content across multiple places and spaces on the web (for example Wikipedia’s Facebook entries (Park 2010) and translation project with Google (Galvez 2010; van Dijck 2013).

Additionally, being conflated with other online platforms, being something other than an encyclopaedia, may reveal why Wikipedia is seen as open slather for so many marketing professionals. In using the term ‘platform’, which Gillespie (2010) points out is a politically charged term, we can see how it can be appropriated as a marketing ‘platform,’ or conflated with other ‘platforms’ that offer up marketing opportunities (such as YouTube, Facebook, Twitter), or indeed how Wikipedia may be packaged as part of a larger online media campaign. The difference is Wikipedia to many of its contributors and readers outside the PR sphere, is a platform for advocating the value of, and providing, free and open knowledge.

This is the fine line that Wikipedia straddles between an encyclopaedia and a platform, between an institution and a community. Where an encyclopaedia has an established tradition, a platform is still being negotiated. Whereas an institution is compromised of rules, a community is a more ad hoc assemblage where members can come and go freely, and it is in this context that Wikipedia is trying to negotiate the values associated with peer production and the creation of a volunteer-led online encyclopaedia, and what commercial involvement means for its future sustainability.

Wikipedia’s Core Policies as an Expression of Ideals

Wikipedia’s ideals are linked to its non-profit business model (van Dijck 2013), and as an organisation free from commercial pressures it is perceived as ‘free’ to create neutral and objective knowledge. Setting the conditions for what Wikipedia is and its core policies – its five pillars – reflect these ideals of freedom and openness.

Of Wikipedia’s five pillars, neutrality is arguably the most venerated (Greenstein & Zhu 2012; van Dijck 2013). It is the ideal to which editors aspire, a truly fair and representative article. While the possibility of this may be challenged by those editors who consider knowledge a social construction (Matei & Dobrescu 2010), it is still upheld as a core policy by most Wikipedia editors. And this ideal of the community to produce truly neutral, information is tested by the presence of paid advocates within the editorial community.

Advocacy by paid editors, in Wikipedia, is the antithesis of neutrality. The promotion of one position over another is seen as against the ideals of free and representative information. It would follow therefore that the community (which has been so good at constructing rules and norms in the past to regulate behaviour (Halfaker et al. 2012)) would want to create a policy to prevent such contribu-
tions. However the three proposals and associated votes to form such a policy all failed to achieve the support of the community. This is despite the Wikimedia Foundation (WMF) sending a cease and desist letter to the organisation found to be engaging in extensive paid editing that resulted in widespread media coverage (Wikimedia Foundation 2013a).

Such a move by the WMF, presumably not only in response to some sections of the editorial community, but also in response to the threat to their brand, shows that how *Wikipedia* is perceived (as a hub of neutral information) to groups outside of the editorial community is equally as important as how it is constructed by the community. In this discourse in the mainstream press, paid editing is being constructed as an issue that undermines the integrity of the encyclopaedia and is against its core operating principles of freedom and openness.

In order to preserve (or perpetuate the idea of) *Wikipedia*’s neutrality, Jimmy Wales has often called for a ‘bright line’ where PR professionals should never edit directly in article space, that is – any contributions they want to make or issues they want to raise should first be raised on the talk page of the relevant article an then escalated through existing channels, without ever editing any article content directly (Wikipedia 2012). In line with this, the UK’s Chartered Institute for Public Relations has published the *Wikipedia Best Practice Guidance For Public Relations Professionals* that is based on Wikimedia UK’s own draft guidelines (Chartered Institute of Public Relations 2012). However the response from some PR quarters to this approach is that it can be too slow and cooperation with editors can be difficult (Distaso 2012), leading to the conclusion that many professionals will indeed edit in article space.

The Case of Wiki-PR

A consulting business, Wiki-PR is behind one of the biggest covert editing efforts in *Wikipedia*’s history. Banned by the community after a community-led investigation and discovery of its activities, Wiki-PR claimed to have 12 000 clients and employ *Wikipedia* administrators as part of its operations (Owens 2013). Rather than going through the traditional channels and protocols that *Wikipedia* has established for editors with a conflict of interest (posting to the talk-page, requesting an article for creation), Wiki-PR used experienced editors familiar with the policies of the site and able to negotiate the rules and norms to ensure that the articles survived the creation process. Employees created 323 fake accounts, called sock puppets, to create and contribute to pages about clients. This large-scale astroturfing resulted in several hundred articles on *Wikipedia* that were largely promotional in nature, and that were removed following the investigation (Owens 2013).

However the legacy from such activity remains, not only in the widespread press accounts of Wiki-PR’s actions, but in how *Wikipedia* has positioned itself in
response to the revelations of the extent of the sockpuppeting activity. At an institutional level, the WMF expressed concern that its brand and reputation as a non-profit site of independent knowledge had been damaged by Wiki-PR’s activities:

> The Wikimedia community of volunteer writers, editors, photographers, and other contributors has built Wikipedia into the world’s most popular encyclopaedia, with a reputation for transparency, objectivity, and lack of bias. When outside publicity firms and their agents conceal or misrepresent their identity by creating or allowing false, unauthorized or misleading user accounts, Wikipedia’s reputation is harmed. (Wikimedia Foundation 2013c)

This event therefore demonstrates the gap in English language Wikipedia between norms around commercial involvement and actual practices. For at a community level, the response has been less decisive, reflecting the shifting values of the Wikipedia community members as they engage in discussion to define and construct paid advocacy editing and its position in Wikipedia’s landscape of volunteers, paid editors and public relations professionals.

**Methodology**

In order to map the debates, I conducted a grounded analysis of the three main votes on paid editing conducted in the community in November 2013. These discussions formed one response to the Wiki-PR revelations and are a discrete object through which to analyse immediate user feeling in relation to a well-publicised event that challenges the encyclopaedia’s ideals. It is theoretical sample, chosen to illuminate a specific response to a specific controversy rather than be a representative sample of the entire Wikipedia editorial community.

Using a Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) approach to the problem of mapping how the editorial community of Wikipedia is responding to the increasing presence of commercial interests and paid editors allows for new themes to emerge through the coding process that may not be reflected in dominant responses from other places. Grounded Theory works well when applied to online discussions such as these as it allows for quickly ‘gaining a clear focus on what is happening in your data without sacrificing the detail of enacted scenes’ (Charmaz 2006: 14). Kathy Charmaz notes that, ‘like a camera with many lenses, first you view a broad sweep of the landscape. Subsequently, you change your lens several times to bring scenes closer and closer into view’ (Charmaz 2006: 14). Such a close reading of all three votes revealed divisions in the community about supporting measures to limit or ban paid editing as proposed. However it also revealed the justifications offered by editors in the conversations often aligned as editors seek to negotiate what paid editing actually is.

As mentioned above, the institutional response from Jimmy Wales, Sue Gardner and the WMF was definite in its opposition to paid advocacy editing, reflecting the assumption, based on past actions that the community is against such in-
volvement. However in favouring an open approach to the coding the data using CGT methods, a more nuanced response from the community emerged from the conversations, one that did not necessarily always fall in line with the institutional reaction.

CGT therefore offers insight into how the ideals of *Wikipedia* are changing as the internet changes around it. In describing these debates, the study reveals the tensions that compromise paid advocacy editing and how *Wikipedia*’s founding principles are interpreted by those who edit the encyclopaedia a little over a decade later. As Geert Lovink (2011: 1) points out, ‘The participatory crowds suddenly find themselves in a situation full of tension and conflict,’ and these situations can reveal much about how platforms and collaborative projects are evolving.

### Three Proposals

The three proposals analysed here are ‘No paid advocacy’ (NPA), ‘Paid editing policy proposal’ (PEPP) and ‘Conflict of interest limit’ (COIL) (Wikipedia 2013b; Wikipedia 2013c; Wikipedia 2013a). The three discussions and votes were carried out on English language *Wikipedia* in November 2013 in response to the Wiki-PR controversy. Remaining open to all possible understandings of the data, I undertook a four-stage coding process to ‘separate, sort, and synthesize these data through qualitative coding ...[and]...emphasise what is happening in the scene’ (Charmaz 2006: 3). Overall, 573 posts were analysed in the study. The first stage consisted of an initial round of coding where each response was coded as a support, oppose or comment along with short description of the post. In a second close reading both the posts and the descriptor and a list of key words was formed. In the third stage the key words were refined to a set of categories, and then finally each post was assigned relevant category tags. In total there were 21 categories to emerge from the discussion, ten that opposed the formation of a policy, nine that supported a new policy and two that were neutral (for example where votes either supported or opposed the policy, but called for a clarification of the policy wording).

There was a relatively large number of participants with 300 individual contributors to the discussions and proposals regarding paid editing on *Wikipedia*. Among the three conversations NPA was the largest vote and involved 256 individual participants contributing 408 posts, PEPP had 86 participants contributing 242 posts and COIL was the smallest discussion with 43 participants contributing 74 posts.

All three discussions were linked by an ‘infobox’ on each page stating that, ‘In November 2013, there were three main discussions and votes on paid editing’ along with a link to the other two discussions (Wikipedia 2013b). 22% of users
contributed across these different discussion spaces, 16% who participated in two of the conversations about the proposals and only 6% contributed across all three discussions. Additionally in the collaborative tradition of the few doing the most, a small number of users contributed heavily to the discussions. In NPA the ten most frequent commenters contributed 16.9% of the posts, while in PEPP and COIL, the top ten contributed 49.2% and 51.4% of all posts respectively (although this was often just short replies to votes, rather than involved discussions among users).

‘We are at the Barricades’

The first, and most obvious result is that all three proposals failed. Despite much debate and discussion across a variety of spaces both on-wiki and off, and the swift formation of the policy proposals, all three failed to garner enough support via the votes to effectively ban paid advocacy editors by way of a formal written policy. It became apparent in analysing the discussions that ‘free’ does not necessarily correlate with ‘free from commercial interests’ and that remaining open to contributions from all editors, paid, volunteer or somewhere in between, is more important than creating more regulatory mechanisms to assist in the production of quality, neutral content. Therefore one of the major themes to emerge from the analysis was that editors felt existing policies in Wikipedia already cover the issues raised by paid advocacy editing, the two most cited being neutrality and notability. Neutrality is expressed as an impartial point of view where articles are written from a fair and representative position (Wikipedia 2014b). Notability guidelines outline the criteria under which a topic is considered significant enough to have an article in the encyclopaedia (Wikipedia 2013e). The most common response from users to the proposals reasoned that the application of these existing policies would weed out the edits made by someone with a conflict of interest, and an additional policy is not necessary.

Further, advocacy of any sort as a motive doesn't really address edit quality. Only application of existing Wikipedia guidelines does that.

One of the issues here is our incredibly low notability standards….Sorry, but I think we need to clean up our own act before we create policies that will be used primarily to gain advantage against opponents in ideologically-based editing. (Wikipedia 2013b)

The alternative view from supporters of the proposed policies, is that an explicit, new rule is needed. One that specifically bans paid advocacy editing so that a message is sent to editors that this type of commercial activity is not welcome in the encyclopaedia. Supporters maintain that traditional non-profit organisations are required to have policies on conflicts of interest and Wikipedia should be no different.
Wikipedia needs a clear, written policy on financial COI [conflict of interest], like every other major non-profit. We owe it to ourselves, and to the public that trusts us, to get this done.

I don't want to explain to my grandkids (if I ever have some) that I stood by and watched while this great experiment of our was inundated by a tsunami of commercialism. We are at the barricades, let us not back down. You have to decide if I am crying WOLF or, is the wolf at the door, here, now. (Wikipedia 2013b)

While some participants outlined their support of such a policy because paid editing is against the ideals of Wikipedia, another group of editors opposed such a policy saying that preventing paid editors violates Wikipedia’s core premise – that it is the encyclopaedia that anyone can edit.

Be clear and honest here, this policy change won't eliminate paid editing and COI, it will hide it. It's a deterrent to honesty and a line right through the Wikipedia slogan ‘The encyclopaedia that anyone can edit’. Thanks

…and yes as always the original foundation of wikipedia remains ‘Welcome to Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia that anyone can edit.’

If it is principles that you want I would start with, ‘If it ain't broke don't fix it’, followed by not eroding the two basic principles of ‘Attack content not editors’ and ‘The encyclopedia that anyone can edit’. (Wikipedia 2013b)

The last quote raises an interesting point, and one put forth by a number of editors who discussed the norm of focusing on the quality of edits as opposed to the type of editor making contributions. This reason was often given in conjunction with an oppose vote to the formation of the proposed policy, also citing existing policy as being sufficient to address the issue of paid editing.

We have policies and guidelines for how articles should be written and developed. We have built up the project to focus on the content not the contributors. (Wikipedia 2013b)

This was a recurring theme among users, that a fair and accurate encyclopaedia article can be achieved by addressing the quality of the edits, not the people contributing the content. There was also the view among editors that such a policy would be unenforceable and create extra work for already over-burdened volunteers who would be required police it.

Unenforceable. Waste of time and resources. Creates more problems that [sic] it solves. It is impossible to eliminate paid editing, so we might as well accept it and try to regulate it as best we can. (Wikipedia 2013b)

Highlighting the gap between institutional and community response only one editor referenced Wikipedia’s reputation in the discussions, which the Wikimedia Foundation cited as a reason to cease and desist in its letter to Wiki-PR. Also, only one comment called for institutional involvement in this issue, suggesting that overall the community sees this as an issue it can manage itself.

Another challenge to forming an explicit policy against paid advocacy editing is that the community is still not clear about what constitutes paid editing. It can
be taken to mean anything from a museum employee updating information about an artefact in their collection, or a funded graduate student contributing in their area of expertise to paid professionals who are editing for a third party to advocate a particular point of view.

Also, no one anywhere on this project has ever clearly defined the differences between ‘paid editing’ and ‘paid advocacy’, and until definitions exist then discussions probably cannot proceed. The working definition is that ‘paid advocacy’ is ‘paid editing’ which does not comply with Wikipedia community guidelines. All discussions on this topic make no sense to anyone outside this movement because advocacy in the Wiktionary sense of the term has nothing to do with its use in this small community on Wikipedia. (Wikipedia 2013b)

What constitutes a conflict of interest, and indeed what threat editors with conflicts of interest pose to the encyclopaedia is still very much up for discussion in the community. It demonstrates a shuffling of values among different editors as to the place of commercial players in the Wikipedia ecology. Interestingly where commercial involvement was once viewed by the community as being in direct opposition to Wikipedia’s core values (and this rhetoric is repeated at an institutional level) and should be prevented, some community members now accept the presence of paid professionals and are resigned to their presence in the encyclopaedia.

Dishonest paid editors will do it anyway, so why punish the honest ones? Or drive them to dishonesty?

We can strongly discourage paid editing but not ban it. We should try to work with the COI editors to develop a lasting relationship, not declare all out war. (Wikipedia 2013b)

There are therefore values more important to the community than whether or not an editor is being paid, and these relate to the encyclopaedia’s existing standards of notability, verifiability and most importantly neutrality. Participants expressed the need to differentiate between the different types of paid editing and that as long as the editorial pillars of Wikipedia are held up, the issue of whether or not someone has a commercial interest in editing Wikipedia is secondary to them holding up these ideals.

Conclusion

‘Wikipedia is the flagship of peer production and the most celebrated open content project’ (Tkacz 2010). It is the free encyclopaedia that anyone can edit and this ideal is valued by Wikipedia contributors over and above remaining free from commercial activity. The reality that Wikipedia is no longer (if indeed it ever was) free from commercial involvement, is one that many editors are resigned to. Rather than take an ideological stance against paid editing like the Spanish Fork,
editors are willing to find ways to manage it based on existing ideals of neutrality and openness.

While debates continue to play out in the English language Wikipedia about paid editing, in other language versions, working arrangements have been reached with those editors who are paid to write for the encyclopaedia. In the German language encyclopaedia (which is the third largest version behind English and Dutch) companies can edit through a verified account (Wikipedia 2014a). Similarly advocates for paid editing from Wikimedia France welcome the input of corporate editors as they see it as improving articles that would otherwise languish and to keep information relevant and up-to-date (Wikimania 2013).

In line with this more open approach from other Wikipedias, the English language Wikipedia community is responding to the increasing presence of commercial interests and paid editors by favouring the ideals of openness and neutrality over freedom from commercial involvement. It is looking at ways of defining and regulating this involvement, but not in any way that would impede the ability of anyone to edit.

For the popular discourses about peer production that hold Wikipedia up as an ideal of free, open, volunteer-led, non-commercial activity, no longer hold in an environment where companies will want a presence on one of the world’s most popular websites. And while the Wikimedia Foundation and founder Jimmy Wales are drawing bright lines around paid advocacy editing, the Wikipedia editorial community is taking steps to manage commercial involvement by looking at the variations of paid editing as they ‘seek to strike a balance between stability and open-ended flexibility’ (Coleman 2013: 208).

English language Wikipedia editors are still negotiating and constructing paid editing. Indeed as the nature of the web is changing and commercial activity is more overtly evident across other platforms, some editors seemed resigned to commercial activity in the encyclopaedia (Song & Wildman 2013). The question is then not how to prevent commercial involvement from paid editors (such as through the policy proposals discussed), but how to manage it. In reconfiguring their values from earlier editorial communities, editors are reflecting the changing nature of the web and separating out the values of openness, freedom and non-commercialism into a workable model that upholds the central ideals of neutral and objective information in an encyclopaedia that anyone can edit.
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Crowdsourcing Knowledge
Interdiscursive Flows from *Wikipedia* into Scholarly Research

By Simon Lindgren

Abstract

Information increasingly flows from smart online knowledge systems, based on ‘collective intelligence’, and to the more traditional form of knowledge production that takes place within academia. Looking specifically at the case of *Wikipedia*, and at how it is employed in scholarly research, this study contributes new knowledge about the potential role of user-generated information in science and innovation. This is done using a dataset collected from the Scopus research database, which is processed with a combination of bibliometric techniques and qualitative analysis. Results show that there has been a significant increase in the use of *Wikipedia* as a reference within all areas of science and scholarship. *Wikipedia* is used to a larger extent within areas like Computer Science, Mathematics, Social Sciences and Arts and Humanities, than in Natural Sciences, Medicine and Psychology. *Wikipedia* is used as a source for a variety of knowledge and information as a replacement for traditional reference works. A thematic qualitative analysis showed that *Wikipedia* knowledge is recontextualised in different ways when it is incorporated into scholarly discourse. In general, one can identify two forms of framing where one is unmodalised, and the other is modalised. The unmodalised uses include referring to *Wikipedia* as a complement or example, as a repository, and as an unproblematic source of information. The modalised use is characterised by the invocation of various markers that emphasise – in different ways – that *Wikipedia* can not be automatically trusted. It has not yet achieved full legitimacy as a source.

**Keywords:** *Wikipedia*, collective intelligence, academia, encyclopaedias, citations
Introduction

This article analyses how information flows from so-called smart online knowledge systems – based on ‘collective intelligence’ (Lévy 1999) – and how this compares to the more traditional form of knowledge production that takes place within academia. Looking specifically at the case of Wikipedia and how it is employed in scholarly research, this study contributes to new knowledge about the potential role of user-generated information in science and innovation. The notion of collective intelligence is based on the idea that no single person knows everything but everyone knows something, and this collective knowledge can be harnessed through social media. People networking and sharing knowledge, experience and ideas results in a form of intelligence that, according to Lévy, is universally distributed, coordinated in real time, and constantly enhanced. This leads to an effective mobilisation of skills.

Modern digital culture makes all of us potential members of a shared virtual universe of knowledge, and the common fostering of this intelligence has the potential to make social ties the most important currency in future society. Collective intelligence, Lévy argues, can disrupt the power of government and can lead to a diversification of knowledge and creativity. Lévy argues that we will increasingly witness the development of skill zones that are ‘fluid, delocalised, based on the singularities, and agitated by permanent molecular movements of association and rivalry’ (Lévy 1999:5). The utopian result will be a form of real-time democracy where knowledge is no longer ‘padlocked like a treasure’ but instead ‘pervades everything, is distributed, mediatised, spreads innovation wherever it is found’ (Lévy 1999:212). This emerging knowledge system – ‘the cosmopedia’ – makes available ‘to the collective intellect all of the pertinent knowledge available to it at a given moment, but it also serves as a site of collective discussion, negotiation, and development’ (Lévy 1999: 217).

Other researchers have also pointed out similar processes of networked, non-profit, and democratised knowledge production, including Rouse’s (1991) notion of ‘media circuits’ as adapted by Lange (2008), Jones’ (1997) concept of ‘virtual settlements’, Wenger’s (1998) idea of ‘communities of practice’, and Gee’s (2005) construct of ‘affinity spaces’. Some of these are conceptualisations of how the ‘fluid skill zones’ are formed and structured, while others provide a terminology for the collaborative activities going on within them once they have been established. This conceptual redundancy – and there are certainly more terms to be found in the literature – is symptomatic of the field. A significant amount of effort has been made to name processes and patterns of online connection and engagement. It is natural for a wide array of conceptualisations to emerge in relation to new processes, and an attempt to bring the variety of overlapping theories together is needed.
Aim and Questions

While it is obvious that ICTs have the potential to dramatically transform processes of knowledge production, it is not clear how and to what extent this potential is realised. More research of real-world situations is needed. In this article, I investigate how and under what circumstances the potential that is inherent in ICT environments based on collective intelligence is, or is not, harnessed by traditional systems of knowledge production. This is done through a case study of Wikipedia and its relationship to the established scientific literature. Although – a user-generated online encyclopaedia that anyone can edit or contribute to – is an interesting object of study in its own right (Rosenzweig 2006; Kittur, Suh, Pendleton & Chi 2007; Fallis 2008; G. W. Lovink & Tkacz 2011; Sumi, Yasseri, Rung, Kornai & Kertész 2011), the main focus here is on the actual interaction between these types of bottom-up knowledge systems and traditional and established forms of knowledge systems. A unique dataset collected from the Scopus research database and processed with a combination of bibliometric techniques and qualitative analysis was used to address the following issues in quantitative terms:

1. To what extent are Wikipedia articles used as references in peer-reviewed academic research?
2. In which academic disciplines is Wikipedia most commonly used?
3. What types of Wikipedia articles are referenced?

After this general mapping, quantitative analysis was used to address the question of how knowledge that comes from Wikipedia is incorporated in academic discourses. This final and important question relates to the ways in which Wikipedia is used and whether or not it provides a contribution to scientific efforts that would not have been possible without a connection to collective intelligence. The overarching question has to do with whether the knowledge that can potentially flow from the social ICT platform to the academic community can be construed as merely listed information – stripped of inspiring or clarifying power – or as a powerful form of active information that can deepen and enrich the new context in which it is incorporated.

Wikipedia as a Source

One of the key characteristics of the current media landscape is the increased ability for users to create content of their own. Instead of a clear-cut division between producers and consumers, there is an increasing number of examples of ‘prosumption’ (Toffler 1980) and ‘produsage’ (Bruns 2008) as networked publics (Varnelis 2008) engage in participatory cultures (Jenkins 2006). As the cost and complexity of producing and circulating information has gone down following the development of so-called Web 2.0 technologies (Bell 2009), a much larger number of people have become involved in various forms of content creation compared to
just a few years ago. The crucial premise for much of the optimistic discourse surrounding this development (cf. Shirky 2008) is that the aggregated individual contributions will benefit the collective. As argued by Madden and Fox (2006), the new bottom-up forms can ‘replace the authoritative heft of traditional institutions with the surging wisdom of crowds’.

*Wikipedia* can be defined in terms of what Rheingold wrote in 1994 about ‘virtual communities’. It is based on the ‘power of cooperation’ and ‘a merger of knowledge capital, social capital, and communion’. Such communities attract ‘colonies of enthusiasts’ because the digital platforms enable them ‘to do things with each other in new ways, and to do altogether new kinds of things’ (Rheingold 1994: xxi). A key aspect of this is the development and application of collective intelligence. Power, according to Lévy, ‘is now conferred through the optimal management of knowledge whether it involves technology, science, communication, or our ‘ethical’ relationship with the other’ (Lévy 1999: 1).

User-generated content appears in a variety of forms that range from the mere pooling or aggregation of information (e.g. collaborative filtering on sites like Amazon.com) to different broadcast models (*Twitter* or blogs) to interactive spaces (discussion forums or other types of collaborative platforms) (Flanagin & Metzger 2011). An important venue for such collectively produced information and knowledge is online encyclopaedias, of which *Wikipedia* is the prime example. Established in 2001, this openly editable encyclopaedia can ‘rightfully claim to be the most successful example of online commons-based and oriented peer production’ (O’Neil 2011: 309). As O’Neil claims, *Wikipedia* can be considered to be a mass project that has taken on several features of ‘hacker’ culture, the most prominent of which is the idea that management structures should be decentralised.

*Wikipedia* is, as of January 2014, the 6th most visited site online (Alexa 2014) and has increasingly become an accepted source of information that is quoted online as well as in court cases, traditional media, and popular literature (Langlois & Elmer 2009). It is also increasingly referred to in academic books and papers.

This development has led to a debate over *Wikipedia’s* trustworthiness and validity. Through its model of peer-production (Benkler 2006), it aspires to produce neutral points of view ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Neutral_point_of_view](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Neutral_point_of_view)). The use of open source software and content further underscores *Wikipedia’s* attempt to exist as a forum for the creation and circulation of knowledge and information that is outside of the capitalist mode of production. Langlois and Elmer (2009: 775) argue that because it ‘relies on a collaborative process to produce knowledge rather than the credentials of experts, the *Wikipedia* model puts into question traditional processes for legitimizing truth claims, such as relying on expert knowledge rather than the wisdom of the crowd.’
While *Wikipedia*’s collaborative model for knowledge production through the use of a multitude of anonymous contributors has been praised, the same model has also been criticised and questioned. Researchers have repeatedly shown that a small core of dedicated individuals, rather than the alleged crowd of participants, has produced and controlled much of the content, especially during the first five years of *Wikipedia*’s existence (Niederer & van Dijck 2010). Because various groups of users have distinctly different levels of permission to edit content, the site has never been the ‘mythical egalitarian space’ (ibid.: 1384) that it is often described as. Graham (2011: 271) argues that *Wikipedia* is marked by ‘uneven geographies, uneven directions, and uneven politics’ and states that:

The Wikipedia project has had unimaginable success in making freely provided information available to potentially anyone. However, the project is less successful in showing users where the gaps in representation lie. Part of this problem can be traced to the wording of *Wikipedia*’s Neutral Point of View (NPOV) policy. The policy advises editors to ‘assert facts, including facts about opinions – but [not to] assert the opinions themselves’. While this rule may function as an effective policy for many articles (e.g., fish anatomy, coliform bacteria, or Manchester City Football Club), it does not necessar[ily] work for articles about place. The countless ways of interpreting economic, social and political landscapes mean that articles that contribute to the palimpsests of place necessarily must only represent selective aspects of place in selective ways (ibid.: 279).

In addition to this, the credibility and reliability of *Wikipedia* has also been scrutinized. Francke and Sundin (2012), for example, have shown how on-going discussions about the credibility of participatory media are changing notions of what sources are suitable to use. Flanagin and Metzger (2011) have argued that many users are still not ready to leave traditional models of acquiring knowledge behind and that many people, especially those of older generations, still value expert-generated content more than its user-generated counterpart. Biddix et al. (2011), and studies referred to therein, have shown that college students often use *Wikipedia* as a key tool for their research process, but the site is also increasingly used as a source of reference material in academic research.

**Wikipedia** in Academia: General Mapping

For the purpose of this study, a dataset was created consisting of around 13 000 journal articles collected from the Scopus bibliographic database. The entire database – covering 19 500 journal titles from 5 000 different publishers – was queried for papers with the author ‘*Wikipedia*’ cited in their reference lists. In order to exclude articles about *Wikipedia* itself from the dataset, papers with ‘*Wikipedia*’ in their title, abstract, or keyword field were filtered out. A search was made for each year from 2003 to 2011, and key data about frequencies, research disciplines, and research areas were entered into a spreadsheet. While caution is required
When interpreting results from such small numbers, a steady increase in the use of *Wikipedia* as a reference can be seen. In all scientific areas, only one indexed paper per year included *Wikipedia* in its reference list in 2001 and 2002. As *Wikipedia* turned five years old in 2006, 1,445 articles per year referenced material from the site, and five years later in 2011 this number had increased to more than 9,000. Figure 1 shows the percentages of papers per year in *Scopus* with one or more references to *Wikipedia*.

![Figure 1. Percentage of papers per year in Scopus with one or more reference to Wikipedia.](image)

The occurrence of references to *Wikipedia* in scholarly research raises questions about how the collaborative knowledge building that takes place on this relatively open platform ‘co-evolves’ (Kimmerle et al. 2010) with the knowledge building that is going on within more traditional structures in academia. Langlois and Elmer (2009) have suggested that more research is needed on how the content on *Wikipedia* is circulated within, and incorporated into, other settings and how such appropriations might change the role of such content. Figure 2 shows a comparison of the annual increase (%) in the share of papers citing *Wikipedia* (grey), with the annual increase in the share of papers citing any other encyclopaedia (black). While the pattern has been levelling out in recent years, the increase in *Wikipedia* citations was quite dramatic between 2003–2007.

![Figure 2. Annual increase (%) in share of papers citing Wikipedia (grey) compared to annual increase in share of papers citing any other encyclopaedia (black).](image)
The next question to be addressed concerns in which academic disciplines Wikipedia is most commonly used. Figure 3 shows the percentages of papers within every subject area in the Scopus database that make one or more references to Wikipedia. This excludes, once again, articles that have Wikipedia itself as their subject matter. The general impression, which must be considered in relation to the increase in Wikipedia references illustrated in Figure 1, is that articles that cite Wikipedia are still in a clear minority ranging from around 1 to 8 out of every 1 000 articles within the respective fields of research. In Figure 3, traditionally positivist sciences (Natural Sciences, Medicine, etc.) display the lowest degree of Wikipedia citations while more interpretive areas like Social Science and Arts and Humanities tend to be found at the other end of the spectrum. Mathematics and its sub-field Decision Sciences rely heavily on looking up theorems and equations that are abundant and easily accessed on Wikipedia, thus these fields have a relatively high occurrence of Wikipedia citations.

Computer Science sits at the far left of Figure 3 with 8 of every 1 000 articles citing Wikipedia. We can only speculate about the reason for this, but one reasonable explanation would be that this discipline, like Mathematics and Decision Sciences, builds on certain forms of knowledge – of hardware, coding languages, software, and technologies – that is sometimes better covered in Wikipedia than by traditional encyclopaedias. Another possible explanation could be that acceptance for looking up information on Wikipedia might be higher among scholars and reviewers within this inherently digital field of inquiry.

Turning to the question of what types of Wikipedia articles tend to be cited, the Wikipedia references in all articles were extracted. This was done by using regex filtering to produce a raw text list including nothing but the actual titles of cited Wikipedia articles. This list was then analysed using WordStat (Péladéau 2003). With this content analysis software, a list of standard English stop words were removed after which a stemming algorithm was applied to standardize the list of entries. The results of a straightforward frequency count on the resulting list, as...
visualized in Figure 4, show the most often occurring words in the titles of all articles citing Wikipedia. The categories that come to the fore largely reflect the most represented fields (cf. Figure 3), for example, terms from Computer Science and Mathematics citations are similar to those from citations in the field of Business and Management and so on. Looking closer at the words in this context provides more information about what lies behind the different bars in the figure. The bars have been grouped and colour coded based on a rough qualitative thematisation, and this gives a somewhat more structured image of the cited articles even though the categories are not clear-cut.

Figure 4. Top words in cited Wikipedia articles

The black at the top of the graph primarily represents the relatively large number of references to articles with words like ‘law’, ‘algorithm’, ‘theorem’, ‘coefficient’, and ‘equation’ in their titles. Examples of frequent Wikipedia articles are
‘Moore’s law’, ‘Zipf’s law’, ‘Metcalf’s law’, ‘Genetic algorithm’, ‘Greedy algorithm’, ‘Dijkstra’s algorithm’, ‘Central limit theorem’, ‘Dominated convergence theorem’, ‘Spearman’s rank correlation coefficient’, and ‘Hill equation’. This further strengthens the conclusion that Wikipedia tends to be used in disciplines like Mathematics and Decision Sciences for looking up and making reference to various types of principles and postulates. The third set of bars from the top, marked in white, illustrates that this type of citation behaviour extends into the field of Computer Science where top articles include ‘Mobile ad hoc network’, ‘List of social software’, and ‘Cloud computing’.

The second section from the top, marked with diagonal stripes, illustrates that Wikipedia also seems to be employed in academic research for obtaining updated data on nations, populations, and demographics. The articles on GDP (Gross Domestic Product) and HDI (Human Development Index) are often consulted as are articles like ‘List of countries by income equality’, ‘List of countries by military expenditures’, ‘List of countries by population density’, and so on. In the graph as a whole, other themes that stand out are ‘Management’, with top articles such as ‘Knowledge management’ and ‘Database management’, as well as ‘Language’ with entries on ‘Business execution language’ and ‘Swahili language’ being among the most often cited. The other rough categories are Business and Management (bold diagonal stripes), Biology, Chemistry, Physics (dotted), Medicine (light grey), Media (latticed), and Miscellaneous (dark grey). All in all, this overview shows that Wikipedia tends to be used in academic research as a complement to, and sometimes as a replacement for, other reference works. This is especially true when it comes to current statistics because Wikipedia has the advantage of being constantly updated.

**Wikipedia and Interdiscursivity**

A key question in this article has to do with how knowledge gathered from Wikipedia is incorporated into academic discourse – what Latour (1987: 35) calls ‘the context of citation’. This relates to the idea of interdiscursive flows, and in this case this refers to currents of discourse from a platform for user-generated content (Wikipedia) into a traditional context for knowledge production (scholarly research). Interdiscursive relationships are, in fact, one of the key themes in discourse studies. Assuming the social constructionist standpoint that reality can be represented in different ways entails recognising that connections between different discourses must be taken into account. Fairclough (2003: 124) writes:

> [D]ifferent discourses are one element of the relationship between different people – they may complement one another, compete with one another, one can dominate others, and so forth.

This article uses this perspective to study the points of intersection between Wikipedia discourse and scholarly discourse by identifying and analysing these inter-
sections in a sample of academic journal articles. What is of interest here is not the respective discourses as such, but rather the crossing points between the discourses (cf. Bjerke 2008).

The scholarly understandings that are conveyed through research papers are, in essence, a combination of elements from a number of specialised discourses that can be defined on the basis of authorship, discipline, type of source, etc. When the authors of a paper analyse their data, these discourses are brought together – they are articulated (Laclau & Mouffe 1985) – in various ways. This has to do with what Kristeva (1980) called ‘intertextuality’ or what Bachtin (1981) called ‘dialogism’. Texts are rendered meaningful through their interdiscursive relationships with other texts. They draw on them, refer to them, contest them, assume that the reader knows them, and so on (Bachtin 1986: 69). After performing the general mapping, as outlined in research questions 1 through 3 above, the fourth research question addressed in this article revolves around analysing how Wikipedia cuts into scholarly discourse.

The first step is the identification of those points where Wikipedia enters scholarly discourse by being called upon in peer-reviewed and published research papers. These are cases of ‘direct intertextuality’ (Fairclough 2003: 49; Leech & Short 2007). The analysis of these points of intersection will be taken further in a second step where the incorporation of knowledge from Wikipedia in the research articles is studied. This tells us how the ‘imported’ elements (Bjerke 2008: 7) are framed in their new context. A key concept is ‘recontextualisation’, which is a term from educational sociology (Bernstein 1990) that has been taken up by discourse analysis (e.g. Fairclough 2003: 33). The notion of recontextualisation highlights the fact that intertextuality always involves some sort of transformation of meanings. When a formulation, an idea, or a concept is taken out of one discursive context and put into another, certain ‘adjustments’ need to be made in order for the piece of content to become meaningful in the new setting:

\[\text{Intertextuality is a matter of recontextualization – a movement from one context to another, entailing particular transformations consequent upon how the material that is moved, recontextualized, figures within that new context (ibid.: 51).}\]

In this article, the recontextualisations are analysed qualitatively by focusing on how knowledge from Wikipedia is introduced and packaged in the scholarly texts. Particular attention is paid to what Fairclough calls ‘framing’. This has to do with the choices that are made about how to frame the voice of one text as it is incorporated into another.

The Framing of Wikipedia Knowledge in Academic Articles

Turning to the analysis of recontextualisations, a qualitative text analysis was performed on 1,799 articles. This sample included 4% of all peer-reviewed journal articles citing Wikipedia within each subject area indexed in Scopus. This thresh-
old was set quite roughly in order to select a reasonably sized portion of the dataset for qualitative analysis. For areas where 4% of the articles exceeded 200, the first 200 articles (sorted by ‘Relevance’, as defined in Scopus) were analysed.

The analysis entailed doing batch searches in the TextWrangler application (www.barebones.com/products/textwrangler/) to find those places in the articles where *Wikipedia* was mentioned and then reading and thematising these passages (Braun & Clarke 2006). The text segments were coded and gradually brought together into a thematic structure that ended up including the following four types of recontextualisation: (1) as a complement or example, (2) as a repository, (3) as an uncommented incorporation, or (4) as a modalised incorporation.

The first identified way of referring to *Wikipedia* articles is in the form of complementary information or examples. In these cases, pointers to various *Wikipedia* articles are included and framed as ‘extra’ information that goes outside of the regular references to other types of literature. This use of *Wikipedia* is illustrated in the following excerpts from research papers:


2. Tryon’s several language counts – 105, 110, 113 – have subsequently been cited by many authors of published and, nowadays, online overviews of Vanuatu. *Wikipedia*’s Vanuatu, for example, has 113 languages (Wikipedia nd); the CIA’s Factbook has “more than 100”; and Ethnologue lists 110

3. For details about this, as well as further information on TV Guide’s history, see the entry ‘TV Guide’ from Wikipedia (2006).

4. ‘Open source development’ is a term that was first coined in the world of software development for software whose source code was publicly available, and thus software that anyone could modify and then contribute back to the community. For more on this topic, please see: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Open source software

Excerpt number 1 is an example of a case where *Wikipedia* is used in a complementary fashion alongside another reference (in this case a movie) and framed using the wording ‘see also’. Similar use is illustrated in excerpt number 2 where a reference to *Wikipedia* is packaged together with other sources covering the same issue as one example among many of a certain type of knowledge. Excerpts 3 and 4 also express a related type of framing where, in both cases, *Wikipedia* entries are suggested as sources of further background information on a particular topic. Taken together, this category consists of examples in which citations of *Wikipedia* articles are used to provide additional information or knowledge in relation to the core frame of reference of the research paper in question. Related to this recontextualisation strategy, but a bit different, is the use of *Wikipedia* by
linking to it or pointing to it as a kind of a repository. This framing invokes the site as an online archive where useful bits and pieces of information are stored, hosted, and made accessible for reference. The following excerpts are examples of this:

5. Reverend Martin Niemoller’s (1946) words:
   First they came for the communists,
   and I did not speak out because I was not a communist.
   Then they came for the trade unionists,
   and I did not speak out because I was not a trade unionist.
   Then they came for the Jews,
   and I did not speak out because I was not a Jew.
   Then they came for me and there was no one left to speak out.


6. A critical mass of two-dimensional (2D) bar code users has recently emerged in Japan and it can be said that these 2D bar codes (see them illustrated in Wikipedia, 2007a) have enabled connections to be made between the mobile phone and publishing industries (see Fig. 2).


Excerpt number 5 refers to Wikipedia as a place where a famous quotation can be revisited, and excerpt number 6 points the reader to the online encyclopaedia in order to be able to see illustrations of (in this case) bar codes. Excerpt 7 refers to a map that is to be found on Wikipedia, and number 8 recommends Wikipedia as the source for looking at an image originally available in a printed book. The common denominator for this form of recontextualisation is that rather than pointing to other available – and more traditional – sources for these things, the authors have opted to make reference to Wikipedia. The third way of framing Wikipedia articles within academic publications is represented by an absence of explicit recontextualisation. In these cases, an uncommented reference is made to the encyclopaedia according to the standard conventions of scholarly writing. The following set of excerpts illustrate this:

9. Shariah covers not only religious ritual, but also many aspects of day-to-day life, politics, economics, banking, business or contract law, and social issues (Wikipedia, 2005).
10. The Bermuda triangle is a region in the Atlantic Ocean where some aircrafts and surface vessels have disappeared. Flight 19 is the designation of five American fighters which disappeared in this triangle on December 9, 1945 (Wikipedia 2008).

11. The shallowness of the focus and the density of population greatly increased the severity of the earthquake (Wikipedia 2008).

12. (C)riminals have historically used churches and temples as a hiding place in times of trouble (Wikipedia, 2008).

13. Courier 1B, built by Philco, also launched in 1960, was the world’s first active repeater satellite (Wikipedia, n.d.)

In addition to these three more or less straightforward ways of recontextualising Wikipedia knowledge in academic articles, the fourth identified type of framing involves various modalisations. In critical discourse analysis, modality refers to the relationship between the author and what they write. In functional grammar, modality ‘construes a region of uncertainty’ (Halliday & Matthiessen 2004: 116) and it reflects the position of a speaker or writer in relation to what they say (Hodge & Kress 1988). By using certain ‘markers of modalisation’, an author or speaker to varying degrees commits to, or expresses affinity with, the information given. By looking at markers of modality in relation to how Wikipedia is referred to in scholarly papers, one can analyse with what level of assertion authors put forth these citations. In the thematic analysis, two levels of modalisation were coded with regard to the degree of modalisation. The following extracts are examples of a softer form:

14. The concept of remix can refer to both material practices and ideas. Often associated exclusively with popular culture, as noted in Wikipedia, it is often understood as a ‘hybridizing’ practice in music

15. The Wikipedia entry for Unconferences is also a worthwhile resource as is the blog site on unconferences (www.unconference.net)

16. A recent Wikipedia entry reports that Christianity and Islam are the two largest religions in the world, with 2.1 billion and 1.5 billion followers, respectively (Wikipedia 2008).

17. In fact, Wikipedia maintains a list of free and paid statistical software (List of Statistical Packages, n.d.).

18. Since the boom of ‘Web 2.0’ early this century, Social Networking Sites have been on the rise. As of November 2009, Wikipedia lists 167 of them.
The distinguishing feature for this type of framing, as opposed to the previously discussed type, is that it explicitly says something about *Wikipedia* in the sentence where the citation is made. Excerpt number 14 makes it clear that the information referred to is ‘noted in *Wikipedia*’, number 15 states that *Wikipedia* provides a resource that is ‘worthwhile’, and excerpt 16 notes that the presented statistics come from a ‘recent *Wikipedia* entry’. Furthermore, extract 17 says that *Wikipedia* ‘in fact’ maintains the list used and number 18 emphasises that the number of social networking sites listed are ‘as of November 2009 [on] *Wikipedia*’. While this soft modalisation constitutes no essential difference compared to the more straightforward way of recontextualising knowledge from the online encyclopaedia, there is another type of framing that represents a harder form of modalisation:

19. In contrast to the other serials described, this series was very popular, *at least according to a web-based source* (*Wikipedia* [nd]), the producer (Tabloid Jelita/Dv/Idh [nd]) and some of my neighbors in Semarang where I recorded this show while carrying out fieldwork.

20. *Those who preside over* the Drizzt Wikipedia page have written how ‘Salvatore uses Drizzt to represent issues of racial prejudice’ (Drizzt, n.d.). Drizzt has somehow rejected his evil nature but is often judged as evil.

21. *Wikipedia*, written and edited collaboratively by volunteer authors in the general public, provides a peek at the lay perception of library history. The online article for Public Libraries claims, ‘The origins of the public library as a social institution have not been well explored or recorded. The institution may have been inspired by the libraries of European universities, which in turn attempted to imitate research libraries in antiquity.’

22. We used the ‘List of Smart Card’ directory in *Wikipedia* (2008) to identify relevant cases. We believe this list to be comprehensive and accurate for two reasons. First, we have followed smart card development over the past few years, and all the major initiatives that we are aware of are included. Second, we used alternative search methods (e.g., Google searches, and industry magazine listings) to identify possible missing cases and no additional cases were added.

This type of framing entails the use of different markers of modality that, in various ways, represent the above-mentioned ‘region of uncertainty’. The underlined sections of excerpts 19 through 22 explicitly show the degree of affinity authors have with the statements they are making. A common pattern in the majority of cases where this framing is used for recontextualising *Wikipedia* knowledge in scholarly discourse is connected to the issues of the credibility and legitimacy of the site. Excerpt number 19, for example, modalises the reference to *Wikipedia* by stating that ‘at least according to’ this source the point in question can be made. Obviously, this wording presumes that other more certain or reliable sources exist, the use of which would not require this type of modalisation.
Excerpt 20 emphasises the form of agency underlying Wikipedia. The author(s) do not simply refer to the entry in question, but also make it clear that this knowledge comes from ‘those who preside over’ this page. This framing entails a modalisation that would be much less expected if the information were coming from, say, Encyclopedia Britannica or any other source that is more established. By making it clear that Wikipedia entries are ‘written’ by a group ‘presiding over’ certain areas of knowledge, the author(s) modalise their reference to the site by implying that other things might have been ‘written’ if other people were ‘presiding’ over the entry. This is, of course, also the case with a source such as Encyclopedia Britannica, but this is less likely to be explicitly stated when referring to such sources. A similar recontextualisation is illustrated in excerpt 21 where a reference to a Wikipedia article is not only modalised as being an ‘online article’, but the author(s) of the research article also make it clear that the site is ‘written and edited by volunteer authors’ and that it can, therefore, be said to ‘provide a peek at the lay perception’ of the topic. While other encyclopaedias also provide ‘peeks’ at certain ‘perceptions’ of the world, the stronger legitimacy of these sources makes it less likely that references to them would be modalised in this way. Conversely, the use of these modalisations indicates that Wikipedia tends to be seen as a less reliable and potentially more biased source of information than many others. This impression is further strengthened by the observation that authors sometimes feel the need – as illustrated in excerpt 22 – to motivate why knowledge and information coming from Wikipedia can be ‘believed’ to be ‘comprehensive and accurate’. It is possible that the inclusions of these motivations are sometimes the product of requests from peer reviewers who are sceptical about Wikipedia as a source of information.

Conclusion

This article has analysed how content is moving from today’s much celebrated smart online knowledge systems – based on the wisdom of crowds (Surowiecki 2004) – into established processes of knowledge production. The case that has been highlighted here is the use of Wikipedia as a source of material in scholarly research papers. Beyond the hype of social media, actual studies such as the one presented here are needed to better understand the development of this phenomenon. Without this type of knowledge, we would be left with what Lovink (2002: 10) fittingly calls ‘vapor theory’. Assessing the actual circumstances under which crowdsourced knowledge benefits scholarly research can contribute to a better understanding of the potential role of user-generated information in science and innovation.

The empirical analysis presented in this article has shown that there has been an increase in the use of Wikipedia as a reference within all areas of science and scholarship. This development is clearly illustrated with the data from the Scopus
database showing that 14 papers cited Wikipedia in 2003, around 1,500 cited Wikipedia in 2006, and over 9,000 cited Wikipedia in 2011. It was further shown that Wikipedia is used to a larger extent within subject areas like Computer Science, Mathematics, Social Sciences, and Arts and Humanities than in the Natural Sciences, Medicine, and Psychology. Wikipedia is used as a source for a variety of knowledge and information and as a replacement for traditional reference works.

The thematic and qualitative analysis presented here showed that Wikipedia knowledge is recontextualised in different ways when it is incorporated into scholarly discourse. In general, one can identify both unmodalised and modalised forms of framing Wikipedia citations. The unmodalised uses include referring to Wikipedia as a complement, as an example, as a repository, and as an unproblematic source of information. The modalised use is characterised by the use of various markers that emphasise in different ways that Wikipedia cannot be automatically trusted. It is said to be ‘web-based’, ‘online’, and founded on a type of authorship that differs from the traditional form. Authors using a modalised framing appear to feel obligated to motivate why they have chosen to cite Wikipedia. This illustrates the following key conclusion of this study: Wikipedia is increasingly used as a reference in scholarly research, but it has not yet achieved full legitimacy as a primary source. Traditionally positivist sciences use it less than interpretive disciplines, and those citing it sometimes feel the need – or might have been urged – to explain why they have chosen Wikipedia rather than other sources. Looking at the modalisations used, it seems that the biggest issues with the site are the fact that it is ‘online’ and that its collective and volunteer authorship might lead it express ‘lay’ rather than ‘professional’ perceptions and might make it prone to bias when only some groups ‘preside’ over certain pages.

The increased use of crowdsourced knowledge for academic references is not limited to Wikipedia. Figure 5 provides an overview of the occurrence of the micro-blogging platform Twitter (launched in 2006), the social network site Facebook (launched in 2004), the social video site YouTube (launched in 2005), and the blogging platform WordPress (launched in 2003) in Scopus reference lists since 2006. This figure excludes articles that discuss or analyse these services in particular or social media in general. Even though the absolute numbers are still small, the increase is obvious.
These services, when used as sources of information and knowledge, can – like Wikipedia – be seen as platforms for crowdsourced knowledge. But in the cases of Twitter, Facebook, WordPress, and YouTube we are also dealing with potentially less structured and more diverse forms of content. As academia gradually embraces the wisdom of crowds – as enabled by collective intelligence through social content platforms – the ways in which this wisdom is used will have to be negotiated within the scholarly community. As this study of Wikipedia – maybe the most popular collaborative online platform – shows, the use of collective intelligence sources has not changed scholarly citation practices to any significant degree. The use of these sources is still marginal, and the ways in which they are used suggest that they are only incorporated in ways that sit well with established traditions for scholarly citations. The future will present two challenges. First, scholars will have to find ways to maintain rigour in the face of increasingly diverse sources of knowledge. Second, the academic community will have to find ways to benefit from the wisdom of crowds without being discouraged by the open and vernacular nature of such wisdom.

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**Store Norske Leksikon: Defining a New Role for an Edited Encyclopaedia**

Field report by Georg Kjøll & Anne Marit Godal

**Transparency in Production**

*Store norske leksikon (SNL)* [Great Norwegian Encyclopaedia] is an edited, online encyclopaedia that strives towards radical transparency. Our aim is for as many parts of text production as possible to be visible to everyone, much like in the model that *Wikipedia* has pioneered. Unlike *Wikipedia*, however, contributors to *SNL* are required to use their full name, and encouraged to supply biographies that explain their background and qualifications within a field or topic.

In *SNL*, it being an edited work, not all contributions by the public are published directly. Before a user’s article suggestion or proposed edit goes live online, it has to be assessed by one of the editors. But unlike a traditional encyclopaedia model, where everything had to pass through a central editorial board, *SNL* use assigned and vetted ‘department editors’ (in Norwegian: fagansvarlige), who submit content directly onto the web page, with editors reviewing submissions *post factum*. This gives readers access to a greater chunk of the publication process, providing insights into the workings behind creating the online encyclopaedia.

The revision history is easily accessible on every article page, and we are working towards developing a system that clearly shows who is behind which edits, and who has supplied which bits of texts. Combined with the requirement on contributors using their full name, this gives the reader greater opportunity to critically assess the content, and question the authority of the text.

We want to play into the hands of people who have constructive criticism and relevant objections to the text the encyclopaedia contains. Articles contain a comment section under the actual article content, and readers are encouraged to submit article changes directly into the text, prompting the editors to change or defend the content.

**Greater Responsibility**

Combining an emphasis on interaction with the public with the requirement on signed content, the experts who contribute to the encyclopaedia are made responsible for the work they produce. This sets *SNL* apart from traditional general knowledge encyclopaedias, where the majority of articles are unsigned, and direct interaction with the authors was all but impossible. But it also highlights a key difference between *SNL* and *Wikipedia*, where the responsibility behind a given article rests on an ineffable quantity: the greater, often nameless or pseudonymous, public that have contributed to that article.

The idea of maintaining an updated, general knowledge encyclopaedia in the internet age, where important events happen and are covered very fast, and information is available to with online access at the stroke of a key, strikes many as a Sisyphean task. We are aware of the massive challenge such a task presents, especially since we started out as recent as in 2011, working with a base of content that mostly stemmed from a paper encyclopaedia published between 2005 and 2007.

To deal with this task in the best way possible, we have adopted two strategies: 1) using the tools of the internet, such as social media and reader analytics, to pinpoint content that needs our attention, and 2) create articles that are concise yet accessible, about a limited range of subjects, with an eye towards what types of content are missing from other parts of the web.
Monitoring Reader Behaviour

With a daily readership of up to 145,000 people, the articles in SNL are discussed not only on our own web site. Through the monitoring of e.g. Twitter, Facebook and news sites, the encyclopaedia’s editors learn of mentions of and debates around our articles that take place on the wider web. This helps us understand what content people are interested in, what they like about a particular article, where we should have an article we don’t, or where we have an article that is weak or out-dated.

Though most of the editor’s work is long-term and systematic, it’s important for us to keep an eye on what the public are saying, engaging directly with our readers. Any content that people tell us needs improving, we review as quickly as we can.

Part of the same strategy is the monitoring and predicting of reader activity on our site. Using Google Analytics, we prioritise the articles that have performed well over time, encouraging each new department editor to start out with her field’s most popular articles. In addition, we try to find content that has fewer hits than it should have, and look at variables such as exit rate and average time on page to identify which articles do not read well.

Following the news and keeping track of the calendar also helps in this regard. If an important national holiday, such as Christmas, is coming up, we can predict that people will want to read about Christmas. If a celebrity has died of a rare disease, we can be sure that the readers will want to read about that disease in SNL.

Relevance of Content, Accessibility of Form

Despite the fact that some encyclopaedias have and have had as their goal to amass and/or disseminate the sum of human knowledge, not all facts and phenomena are relevant for all encyclopaedias. While the English language Wikipedia contains substantial entries on every single episode of the Simpsons, achieving this amount of coverage is not a viable goal for an edited encyclopaedia with a user base of 5 million people.

Not all species of animals merit an article in SNL, and we cannot reference every published author, touring musician or working architect. Consequently, we work with relatively specific guidelines on what should be considered relevant, with only people, places, phenomena and events that hold a special cultural or historical significance being prioritized. We’re conscious, however, of our catering to a Norwegian audience, and maintain a focus on what’s important in the national public sphere.

Our position as a national, Norwegian language project together with our publication model, also contribute greatly to the actual form of our articles. The quantity of information on the internet is vast and ever-expanding, and an advanced, linguistically skilled searcher has access to a goldmine of knowledge from every corner of the web. But most people use Google, or a similar type of all-purpose search engine, when they look for information. And few of these people rarely go beyond the first page, or even the first number, of hits when looking for an answer to a specific question. It is therefore important that there are open and accessible sources available for this type of use case.

Significantly, even though many Norwegians are competent users of English, finding information in one’s mother tongue is part of what it means for information to be accessible.

Helping Readers Digest the Web

The quantity of information now available through web search is both a powerful resource and a stumbling block for the average searcher. Googling 'pregnancy’ (or the Norwegian equivalent ‘graviditet’) will yield a massive number of info sites, news, blogs and forums that has pregnancy as its primary topic. While this can be incredible helpful for people interested in the topic, it can also
be overwhelming and hard to process. Often, what people need is someone who can digest a given, complex topic for them, helping to make sense of what is written and said about something that concerns them. Our vision is for SNL to occupy such a role.

Accessibility, by way of being a web site that’s open, free to use, highly ranked in search engines and in a not too advanced Norwegian, is one key to achieving such a vision. For a lot of content, concision is another.

For all the strengths of the wiki model of writing, what is often lacking from Wikipedia articles on important topics, is restraint. Many people coming together contributing with facts, helping telling a story, will often lead to an amassment of text. An editorial publishing model is able to practice concision more easily, since there will be one or two people who can determine the overall direction of a given entry, cutting down and leaving out bits, in order to better get the facts across.

Being able to say the important things, define a field and present key facts in a little amount of time and space, is a virtue, no matter the genre of text. A very large group of our readers end up on snl.no while googling something on their cell phone, wanting to check a fact or understand a difficult word, or figure out if a particular health issue might be serious or not. These people want their answers fast, without having to select among a thousand hits, and scroll through pages of text.

SNL wishes to help people navigate the web, and we form the content so that people can seek out and find the gist of an issue quickly. Where there are entries about complex phenomena and events, where the facts are not clear or determined, we want to supply solid, well-grounded analyses.

In our view, a modern encyclopaedia should take into account the cultural and technological context in which it finds itself, and actively use the possibilities that the internet presents. At the same time, it should strive to understand what its role with regards to both technology and society is.

SNL started anew, with a fresh editorial board, a mere three years ago. We are a young organisation, which learns new things about our own product and our readers every day. But we have built the encyclopaedia on a very clear and solid foundation, and we see that what we have to offer is needed and wanted, even though the internet sometimes can give the false impression of being a very crowded place.

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**Wikipedia**

A Field Report by Lennart Guldbrandsson

**Introduction**

Above my desk is a quote by Albert Einstein: “Do not worry about your difficulties in mathematics; I can assure you that mine are still greater.” One of Einstein’s problems, of course, was that since he was a pioneer, there were not many who could give him the correct answers.

*Wikipedia* is in some ways in the same position. It is presently the 6th most visited website in the world (Alexa 2014), it is the only donor-supported website in the top 50 list, and *Mozilla* is the only other non-profit in the top 25 list (Gardner 2013). Few other very large websites use only copyright-free material, written and maintained by anyone, with a decision system that has been described as consensus-driven. Even the five-year strategic plan for the *Wikimedia Foundation* was crowd-sourced (Wikimedia 2011b).

It is in this light, the challenges and plans for the future of *Wikipedia* should be viewed. Very few other web site owners, or even encyclopaedias, are in the same situation, with the same business model, or government system. For sure, there are some similarities with for instance traditional encyclopaedias or with social media. In common with the former is the tone of the language and overall goal. With social media, *Wikipedia* shares an increase in use on mobile and tablets. However, this means very little when it comes to *Wikipedia*’s challenges and plans for the future.

I will exemplify this with one challenge and one plan for the future.

**The Gendergap Challenge**

During my nine years as a contributor to *Wikipedia*, there has been an increase in almost all possible measures of quality. When I started in 2005, the Swedish-language *Wikipedia*, where I am mostly active, had around 60 000 articles, while the English-language *Wikipedia* had about 450 000 articles. Reference sections as well as images were not plentiful, to say the least. There were no schools that used *Wikipedia* as a teaching tool, and no museums put their images on *Wikipedia*. Media reports were few and often negative.

Through diligent work of several thousands of volunteers, all this changed: the number of articles is more than 20 times they were in 2005 for the Swedish-language *Wikipedia*, and 10 times more for the English-language *Wikipedia*. References to scholarly works as well as other reputable sources have become a standard. Images of increasingly higher quality are inserted into more and more articles. Partly this is due to collaborations with galleries, libraries, archives and museums around the world (Wikimedia 2014a). Many universities and places of higher education use *Wikipedia*, either as an examination form, or as a way to work with outreach to the lay community (Wikimedia 2013). Media reporting have also begun to change, albeit more slowly.

There have, naturally, also come up new measures of quality that were not on the map in 2005. The largest, by far, is the result of a series of surveys carried out around 2008-2010, most famously one by UNU-MERIT, which showed that only 13% of the editors of *Wikipedia* were female (Glott et al. 2009). This has led to a series of discussions on and near *Wikipedia* as well in the media, mainly about what the consequences and remedies might be. Wikipedians, including me, have started to focus on recruiting more female editors, through several initiatives. So-called “edit-a-thons” with a focus on female participants or what is generally considered to be female-oriented topics, are probably the most

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http://www.cultureunbound.ep.liu.se](http://www.cultureunbound.ep.liu.se)
common initiative. Another good example is the on-Wikipedia initiative, The Teahouse (English-Language Wikipedia 2014). Since 2013, interest in using statistics to determine the best methods for recruiting female editors has increased, not least with a view to getting women to continue contributing to Wikipedia. Recruiting people from all-female or predominantly female groups have also meant that common discussion topics and solutions to their problems enter the Wikipedia community.

However, this has also meant getting veteran Wikipedians to question themselves on how and why they started contributing to Wikipedia. The answers have been varied, but true altruism and an unwillingness to let one of the Internet’s most used sources for information contain errors, are two of the most common answers.

The challenge is far from over. Admittedly somewhat anecdotally, topics that are generally considered to be more interesting for women, still have worse articles than comparable subjects for men. Both The Teahouse project and the Education Program have been drawing more interest from females than from males, which point to a small but gradual increase in female editors (Wikimedia 2014b; El-Sharbaty 2013). As long as the majority of the most active Wikipedians are male, the gender-gap issue is difficult to resolve (Hale 2014).

However, there are still no major surveys to tell whether the numbers are changing or not. Even if there were, there may still be problems detecting any changes in surveying the Wikipedia community. First, the UNU-MERIT survey was shown to have been skewed (Hill & Shaw 2013). Secondly, many female editors prefer to stay anonymous, in fear of sexual harassments, degrading comments about women, and other repercussions (Gardner 2011). The discussions on Wikipedia are torn between positive and indifferent, but information about the gendergap and prominent Wikipedians speaking out about it, has in my experience made at least made some more volunteers support the issue.

My own estimation of this issue is that it may take some time to reverse the common misconceptions that experts are male, that contributing to Wikipedia is hard, and that you need to be an expert to contribute to Wikipedia. This is part of a cultural shift that not only exists on Wikipedia. A further examination of this topic can be found, in Swedish, on Wikimedia Sverige’s blog: http://wikimediassverige.wordpress.com/kvinnor-pa-wikipedia/).

The Redesign Plans

I have in other forums compared governing Wikipedia to steering an oil tanker. Every turn needs to be done in small steps. One of the most long-standing (if not well-known) examples is a series of proposals to re-design Wikipedia. Today, most of Wikipedia is white and grey, with thin blue lines as dividers between sections. The present look of Wikipedia was created around 2003-2004, when there were very few mobile phone users, and the internet in general looked quite different. Since then, only incremental changes have been made. (To be clear, I am not discussing the function here, with WYSIWYG-editing capabilities and so on, but the look and feel of the website.)

There have been some suggestions to totally redesign Wikipedia. Perhaps the most serious attempt began as a series of user interface tests circa 2010 (Wikimedia 2011a). It was discovered that most test subjects, who had never edited Wikipedia before, found the layout confusing and the workflow unintuitive. Compared with other websites, such as Facebook, the design appears antiquated and cluttered. A change to attract new users seemed inevitable.

However, with the consensus model, all large changes need to be discussed before implementation. In the case of the redesigns, the results of the surveys were largely ignored by the veteran Wikipedians, who had already learned to
navigate through the maze. Since it was mostly veteran Wikipedians discussing the issue, it became the consensus to keep the existing design.

New designs continue to be discussed. Wikimedia Foundation’s senior designer, Brandon Harris, has shown many interesting-looking tests and cases (Mediawiki 2014). The plans are there, and they would in some cases seriously help newcomers to understand and to be active on Wikipedia. While some of them have been implemented, there are some difficulties trying to lead the Wikipedia community through fiat or even by showing a good case. The results are not always what you would expect.

Why is this important? Wikipedia still mainly reaches countries in the US and Western Europe. In the rest of the world, mobile users and newcomers are the default. For them, a redesign is a necessary step in the on-ramp to editing. Here the consensus of the veterans stands in the way of an easy experience.

The changes are happening, as the veteran Wikipedians become more and more intermixed with newcomers in the discussions. In my experience, it takes a few years of lobbying inside the Wikipedia community to change attitudes, but there are exceptions, as we are beginning to see with the gendergap issue.

**Conclusion**

Many Wikipedians describe the experience of contributing to Wikipedia as a fulfilling hobby. However, the majority of Wikipedians tend to focus only on the articles they work on, and care very little for the large trends and challenges ahead. This is not only a weakness, though. The Wikipedians interested in the gendergap issue and the Wikipedians interested in redesigning the website are often more invested in their respective fields, and have more patience in proposing and re-proposing the necessary changes. This is especially true as more interested people from outside Wikipedia engage with the veteran Wikipedians.

So while Einstein’s quote may be fitting, it is not entirely true. Some solutions come from within the community, and some from without (newcomers and experts), but some come from the meeting of the two.

**Notes**

1 The survey website seems to have been shut down, but I have endeavoured to link to as much of the results as I could find in the list of references.

2 This is indeed the topic of many media reports on the gendergap, including by Digital Trends, The Huffington Post and The New York Times. See reference list.

3 There have been a very small number of incidents through the years, where the Wikimedia Foundation has acted before/without community input. The policy has almost always been that it is up to the respective language version communities. The most famous example is the Anti-SOPA protest, which included an open discussion between more than a thousand volunteers and the Wikimedia Foundation legal team.

**References**


Lennart Guldbrandsson is an author, lecturer, long-time Wikipedian and previous chair of Wikimedia Sverige. He wrote one of the first books about Wikipedia in 2007, and has been employed by the Wikimedia Foundation, Wikimedia Sverige and the National Heritage Board of Sweden. E-mail: lennart@wikimedia.se
Land of 10,000 Facts: Minnesota’s New Digital Encyclopedia

Field Report by Molly Huber

*MNopedia* is the recently created, born digital encyclopedia of the state of Minnesota. It is a project of the Minnesota Historical Society (MNHS), the state’s leading cultural heritage institution and one of the largest and oldest historical societies in the nation. The MNHS has been in existence since 1849 and tells the story of Minnesota’s past through exhibitions, extensive libraries and collections, twenty-six historic sites, educational programs, book publishing, and both financial and in-kind assistance to county and local historical societies throughout the state. It provides a strong base for an encyclopedia to grow from. *MNopedia* is unusual in being the product of a single organization. Most comparable encyclopedias are joint projects between local cultural organizations, sometimes a historical society, but also universities, humanities councils, state archives and the like. The MNHS has been able to fund the project so far with money available from Minnesota’s Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund, a special statewide fund established in 2008 by taxpayers to create new initiatives, projects that organizations would not be able to fund on their own. An encyclopedia seemed like a fitting and worthy project, something that would benefit Minnesotans statewide, and enrich their understanding of their shared heritage.

The decision to create a born-digital encyclopedia was a reflection of new technologies available. Although the idea of a print encyclopedia for Minnesota had been kicked around before, it had never been realized, so there was not a pre-existing text to work from, as is the case with many online encyclopedias. As this project was getting off the ground, print seemed increasingly irrelevant, however, with the popularity of resources like *Wikipedia* and the vast changes in how people look for and obtain information. The planning team wanted *MNopedia* to be easily accessible from a variety of platforms. Just as important, the team wanted it to be easily updatable, and to engage the audience directly.

*MNopedia* began in February 2010. We took a year to plan, both content and structure, before starting to build. To get an idea of what others were already doing, we conducted a comparative review of other United States and international encyclopedia efforts, both print and digital. The *MNopedia* team was assisted in this review by the Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media (CHNM) based in Washington DC. They were chosen as a partner because of their knowledge of the field. The first half of 2010 was spent on this review and in building a conceptual model of best practices. The *MNopedia* team connected with the Internet Digital Encyclopedia Alliance (IDEA) during the planning process as well because of their work defining common encyclopedia standards. IDEA is an affinity group of the American Association of State and Local History (AASLH), consisting of AASLH staff and staff from digital encyclopedias throughout the United States. The group received a National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) grant to create a white paper outlining best practices for the growing field of digital encyclopedias, which was published in 2012. In starting our project later than some of the others, we benefitted from their experience.

During our planning process, a great deal of serious thought was given to content and content development. An encyclopedia is a vehicle to communicate information, and content is our main product, which can be delivered in different ways. Our website, mnopeedia.org, is the primary delivery method and only one so far, but the content was designed to be portable and we may add...
other platforms as we grow and develop. Thinking about it from this perspective, we wanted to create a carefully curated, authoritative resource that was nevertheless vibrant and engaging, building upon the MNHS’s reputation as a respected historical organization whose work can be trusted.

At the same time, the team wanted to capture some of the community engagement seen around resources such as Wikipedia and similar projects. We purposefully connected with wikipedians involved in the GLAM (Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums) initiative to see where we might learn from them and where we might be a source of good information that could later be disseminated to Wikipedia’s global audience. This was part of the reason that all of our content created in-house, and the majority of it overall, is licensed under Creative Commons Attribution ShareAlike 3.0 Unported (CC by SA), making it easily shareable from a copyright perspective. We also built in the ability to comment on every article, set up a discussion forum where readers could answer our questions or propose some of their own, and encouraged site visitors to contact us directly. We also established a social media presence on Twitter and Facebook, with the links prominently displayed on the site.

To present the content, we created rich entry packages, going beyond text to include multimedia and extended bibliographic resources. These packages were designed to have many points of entry for users, and to be interconnected, creating a networked resource. It has been great to be able to take advantage of the different ways to present information that being digital affords. Each entry has a short body of text, providing a comprehensive overview of the topic at hand, as one would expect from the classic encyclopedia format. In addition to that, however, there is at least one image for each entry, and usually more. We often have relevant audio and video files as well. Each entry also has two bibliographic sections; one containing the sources used by the author in writing the article, and then a second, related resources section which contains primary and secondary sources, identified as such, for those wanting to learn more. These have direct links to the resource where available, such as digitized journal articles or newspapers. We wanted to capitalize on the richness and pure volume of information available over the internet, but still provide a guided experience by carefully selecting what is included and plugging it into a clearly defined structure that is the same for each article.

We also were very strategic in how we built MNopedia. The digital infrastructure was constructed in the first half of 2011. After evaluating other models, the decision was made to be open source, which the team felt would be easier to maintain and update as needed. We were fortunate enough to have an in-house team of developers and designers, who explored and evaluated many different modules with different functionalities to get at what we thought would work best for what we needed and what we wanted the site to do. With those pieces in place, and a starting core of thirty entries, MNopedia was launched in August 2011.

The August 2011 launch was a beta launch, and the site was clearly identified as such. We launched in a beta stage to benefit from public input and testing early on, so that aspects that did not work as well could more easily be changed, again taking advantage of the flexibility of being digital. We commissioned user tests, conducted focus groups, and more informally asked our readers to give us their feedback. Adjustments were made in the first six months after going public, but for the most part we found that we had a pretty strong structure. The most consistent feedback we received praised the resource but desired more content, so our focus shifted from construction to increasing content production, where it has largely remained since.
One of the biggest changes in our content production since launch has been the shift from primarily paid, in-house work to almost entirely outside, community-sourced volunteer contributions. This was a goal from the beginning, as MNopedia’s budget and paid staff are small, smaller than those of comparable encyclopedias, and the resource was not going to grow fast enough without more authors. We have benefitted from serendipity as much as calculated effort, however. Although there have been dedicated campaigns to reach out to writers through community organizations, speaking to interested groups and personal networking, many authors have approached our editors because they saw and liked the resource and wanted to contribute. Aside from helping us to grow our content base faster than otherwise possible, these authors also help us get at areas of expertise and local knowledge that it would be harder to tap into without them. Another expressed goal of MNopedia from the outset, due to the nature of our initial funding and the philosophy of the editorial team, was to lift up the often overlooked history held in smaller communities across the state. MNopedia provides a home for stories previously unknown and images undigitized, and brings them to a worldwide audience. The encyclopedia goes beyond the big stories everyone knows and provides something more nuanced, with more layers. Being digital makes this possible, as our space is limitless, unbound by a page count and printing costs.

We removed our beta designation in September of 2012, as our core structure seemed to be largely set, but MNopedia is still a young resource. We have a long road ahead, but are at a very exciting phase. The team is still exploring new ideas, for example, ways to make our home page timelier. For example, in spring 2012, we hired three web development firms from three different locations across the United States to brainstorm how they might deliver MNopedia content via an app or similar. Each firm had a distinctive proposal, some ge-located, some game-based, all intriguing. We spent the first half of 2013 refining parts of our infrastructure, to make the search function more robust for users and to make it easier for staff to publish the articles. Our work on the structure of the project will never be entirely complete, a responsibility and gift of being digital.

We also continue to explore new ways to enrich our content and deliver more of it. Volume is essential, and building that is on-going. Beyond volume, though, the team is thinking about what we deliver and how it is presented. Entries already include text blocks, chronologies, maps, and multimedia, but we regularly try out new tools for content delivery as they become available. We need to keep up with our audience and what they expect.

What do audiences look for and what can an encyclopedia provide now? With the sheer deluge of information available in the twenty-first century, people are looking for curation, to avoid being overwhelmed. Encyclopedias fill a needed role, as their function is to carefully collate and distill information down to its essential elements, and then communicate it back clearly and cohesively as a cohesive entity. At the same time, people expect to get answers to almost any question very quickly, and encyclopedias can provide that too. In MNopedia’s specific case, our association with the MNHS and its established brand predisposes people to trust us as a resource. We reinforce the initial trust granted by the quality of our work and rigorousness of our process.

Encyclopedias are changing and there are exciting new opportunities to serve, preserve, and to share knowledge. We can engage with our readers in ways not possible before. At the same time, we are the guardians of a certain type of authority, one that has historically been ascribed to this type of resource. It’s a balance, and a tricky one at times. However, there is room to change and grow, both for MNopedia specifically and for encyclopedias overall. From what I have
seen and experienced, I think things will keep moving, and the field will continue to transform. Our task as scholars, writers, editors, and people interested in information and its dissemination is to keep up.

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What Future for Traditional Encyclopedias in the Age of *Wikipedia*?

Field Report by Michael Upshall

The launch and rapid domination of *Wikipedia* as a reference tool for the Internet was as dramatic as it was unexpected. *Wikipedia* broke so many of the rules of reference publishing, which, even if not formally codified, had been widely accepted for many years: the use of (usually named) authorities as expert contributors, and the presence of moderating editors to ensure balanced structure. All this appeared to have been swept away with *Wikipedia*, and, not least because *Wikipedia* content is given away rather than sold, the competition between *Wikipedia* and most general-purpose encyclopedias was a sad and rather one-sided affair. One by one the existing commercial print general encyclopedias admitted defeat; among the latest is *Brockhaus*, the leading German encyclopedia brand, which ended publication early in 2013.

Of course, scholars and critics have commented on and frequently condemned the *Wikipedia* editorial model (many of them summarised in *Wikipedia*’s own article ‘Criticism of *Wikipedia*’ (Wikipedia 2014b), but paradoxically, the greatest threat to *Wikipedia* as the default reference source for general information is, I believe, the very technology that brought it into being: the Internet, in its latest incarnation as the Semantic Web. For those unfamiliar with the Semantic Web, it can be defined as ‘the exchange of information on the Web via machine-processable data’ (Cambridge Semantics 2014), although there are many other, more elaborate and often less precise definitions. What is described as a ‘Semantic Web’ below is simply the use of automatic tools to pull together content that is more or less related around a common topic. In this paper I examine some of the claimed strengths of *Wikipedia* compared to traditional print encyclopedias, and examine them in light of Semantic Web developments.

**What Advantages do Online Encyclopedias Have?**

**Range**

With a print encyclopedia, every page costs money to print. As a result, even the largest general print encyclopedias contained relatively few articles: the French *Encyclopédie* had 60,000 articles, and *Encyclopaedia Britannica* 65,000. With over four million articles (Wikipedia 2014d), the English language *Wikipedia* covers more subjects than any earlier encyclopedia; even so, the number of potential articles is many more than this. Although *Wikipedia* guidelines for editors state that only ‘notable’ topics should merit an entry (Wikipedia 2014e), there is little agreement on exactly what notable means. In practice, the all-embracing aims of *Wikipedia* mean it is difficult, if not impossible, to resist the inexorable inclusion of additional content. This indicates the impossible challenge that *Wikipedia* has set itself: in its aim to cover the entire spectrum of knowledge, it cannot set any limits to what is notable. *Wikipedia* is filled, as a result, with articles on topics of marginal interest or value.

The real issue here is quality. Range and quality are of course related. The larger the number of articles, the more difficult it is to curate them, and this seems to be what is happening with *Wikipedia*. *Wikipedia*’s own table of *Wikipedia* article quality ratings (Wikipedia 2014f) reveals that there are over 500,000 entries that have never been assessed by a *Wikipedia* editor. In other words, *Wikipedia* acknowledges it cannot keep up with its own content generation. At the same time, the number of volunteer editors is declining: *Wikipedia*
admitted in 2009 and again in 2012 (Meyer 2012) that the number of editors and administrators has been declining steadily since 2006.

Topicality
The Achilles’ heel of print encyclopedias is always topicality. The work of commissioning content from experts, followed by a critical review, meant that the process of creating and updating an encyclopedia always took several months if not years. The cost of printing means that it is uneconomic to replace an entire volume for the sake of a few updates. When Wikipedia was launched, it astonished users because it contained updates from the last few hours. It was as up to date as a newspaper – something unheard of in the slowly moving world of print encyclopedias. Yet Wikipedia continues to be updated via a curated model, which means there will always be a delay of several hours from an event occurring and its record in Wikipedia. Updates only take place when a user or editor goes into an article and makes a change. In contrast, the Semantic Web model, by publishing dynamically, ensures the most recent updates are immediately available. The Semantic Web will always be more current than a curated model.

Quality
Traditional encyclopedias usually start with a long list of contributors and their academic qualifications – the credentials are often as important as the names. Of course, anyone can edit Wikipedia, regardless of ability; the anonymity of contributors makes it impossible to determine who has edited any entry. One of the paradoxes of Wikipedia is that registration as a user ensures anonymity more than simply adding or editing content without registration – in the latter case the contributor’s identity can be traced. By ensuring anonymity, and not providing sufficient curation, Wikipedia is open to allegations of simply representing the views of interested parties; in other words, it may be no more objective than the rest of the Internet.

In the absence of named contributors, Wikipedia employs a visible team of editors to review its own content – in public. It is common to see a Wikipedia article that has a message attached to it, for example ‘This section may require clean-up to meet Wikipedia’s quality standards’. It has set up a ‘Cleanup Taskforce’ to deal with inadequate content (Wikipedia 2013). According to its own (not very widely disseminated) quality rating, only around 0.63% of the 4.3 million articles are ranked ‘good’ or better (Wikipedia 2014f). An academic study suggests that the quality of articles in Wikipedia correlates with the number of edits they have received (Wilkinson & Huberman 2007). However, while the authors of this study state ‘We also demonstrate a crucial correlation between article quality and number of edits, which validates Wikipedia as a successful collaborative effort’, I would argue in contrast that a high level of (voluntary) editorial input cannot be sustained, and an increasing proportion of Wikipedia articles will remain without independent editorial intervention. Wikipedia, in other words, is rapidly moving to an agglomeration of articles created and maintained by interested parties promoting a product, person or viewpoint.

Diderot’s Encyclopédie did not have signed articles (although the identity of the author has in most cases been identified). Similarly, Wikipedia articles are unsigned, and many are composite works by several authors. To compensate for the lack of authority by not having named authors, Wikipedia emphasises the importance of citations, and it would seem a valid methodology to try to compel editors to include citations for any claims.

What about quality with the Semantic Web? Intriguingly, the Semantic Web makes no attempt to differentiate content sources; in this sense it is truly democratic. The nature of the Internet means that curated models will become rarer.
with time. The Semantic Web is truly democratic, in that no attempt is made or can be made to the user is left to ascertain for him- or herself how reliable the sources are.

**Multimedia**

Print encyclopedia publishers know that visual material – photos, diagrams and tables – always attracts a disproportionately high attention from readers. Of course, since limitations of space disappear on the Web, an online encyclopedia should outclass any print-based product. Indeed, Wikipedia is probably one of the most illustrated encyclopedias available – yet it could be considerably better illustrated. Entries for painters contain at most a handful of their works. Wikipedia has a purist approach to content, and tries to keep dictionary definitions in Wiktionary, quotations in Wikiquote, source content (and many works of art) in Wikisource, and so on. For many readers, a valid appreciation of a subject comes via a combination of all of these. In contrast, a Semantic Web mash-up (a dynamically created combination of content from many sources) has no difficulty in including multimedia of many types, such as photos, videos, quotations, definitions, and chemical formulae, as for example in the Learn Chemistry website ([http://www.rsc.org/learn-chemistry](http://www.rsc.org/learn-chemistry)). Wikipedia would benefit from displaying its own resources in a mash-up, and by including selected third-party content sites.

**Balance and Bias**

Perhaps the biggest single problem faced by a traditional encyclopedia publisher is to ensure balance. Major topics should have the longest articles, and all the articles should follow a similar style. But equally, there should be no consistent political or cultural bias. Such a structure requires substantial editorial capability on the part of the publisher. While one of Wikipedia’s editorial signposts is the importance of balance, it is well-nigh impossible to create balance using thousands of volunteer editors and contributors, all of whom have access to change the content at any time. Even Wikipedia’s greatest admirers would admit that Wikipedia is more an agglomeration of content that will always lack balance, and the consequent lack of authority that this imbalance implies.

A further consequence of Wikipedia’s emphasis on anonymity for contributors is that without being able to track authorship of content, Wikipedia is open to abuse by interested parties writing articles that promote a product or company.

**Linking**

Traditional publishers have spent many hours attempting to provide cross-references to ensure users are taken as quickly as possible to where the editors have placed an entry: a publisher can place content under ‘sea’ or ‘ocean’, but it is impossible to ensure that users always go to the place where the editor chose to put the content. Many online encyclopaedias, including Wikipedia, attempt to solve the problem by converting every example of a word into a hyperlink. Thus, the Wikipedia entry for Johann Sebastian Bach states (Wikipedia 2014c) that he was a ‘composer, organist, harpsichordist’, with organist and harpsichordist as hyperlinks to their respective article. The article for Antonin Dvorak (Wikipedia 2014a) states he was a Czech composer, with ‘Czech’ being a link. Such a system is easy to implement, but of very limited value to the reader.

Linked data, the expression of relationships in a machine-readable way, is already flourishing in many subject areas, notably life sciences and medicine. One typical use of linked data is to present coverage of a single topic using automatic tools to generate the content. This enables a combination of different media types that Wikipedia seems reluctant to attempt. While Wikipedia content is available as linked data in the form of DBPedia, this is very different from the creation of a genuine linked reference work.
One idea for reference publishers is to take advantage of the multiplicity of viewpoints and interpretations; for example, Credo Reference (http://corp.credoreference.com/) do this very well with their topic maps, combining content from several publishers, as well as multimedia. Individual institutions can even create personalised compilations for their users. Of course, some of these treatments may be in disagreement, but the implied acknowledgement that the content is from different providers is, I believe, more sustainable than the Wikipedia model.

Wikipedia is not linked data, any more than traditional print encyclopaedias. Every 24 hours, an automatic process is run on Wikipedia to extract machine-readable parts of the content (for example, population figures, dates of birth and death). It is the resulting DBPedia that is machine-readable, not Wikipedia. The DBPedia project, carried out by researchers at the Free University of Berlin and the University of Leipzig, is independent of Wikipedia, and only uses a tiny fraction of the total information in Wikipedia – that part that can (almost by accident) be converted easily to linked data. It could be argued that the attempts by DBPedia to improve the quality of its information, for example DBPedia Spotlight (https://github.com/dbpedia-spotlight/dbpedia-spotlight), a tool for disambiguation of named entity references, are of more long-term value than all the Wikipedia editors.
Conclusion: Recommendations for Reference Publishers

In the age of linked data, there remains a vital role for the single-subject curated reference work. Reference publishers can provide these resources with credibility and their limitations of scale make them easier to maintain at a consistent level of editorial integrity that Wikipedia cannot achieve. Free but discredited is an improbable business plan.

At the same time, astute publishers will incorporate some (but not all) of Wikipedia's editorial model, for example involving the public in aspects of the content creation and updating, using crowd-sourcing models, for example to suggest updates.

Users will increasingly access reference works via multifaceted websites that take advantage of current technology to combine several different sources, often from different publishers. This linked-data model will increasingly reduce reliance on Wikipedia as the default source of reference content via the Internet.

References


Michael Upshall was the editor of the UK’s first online encyclopedia, The Hutchinson Encyclopedia. He was a co-founder of Helicon Publishing, an independent UK print and digital reference publisher, after having edited dictionaries for learners of English (Longman dictionaries), encyclopedias for Dorling Kindersley (the DK Children’s Encyclopedia) and for Random House. Today he advises publishers on digital publishing strategy and implementation. He blogs about reference publishing at http://consultmu.co.uk and http://withreference.wordpress.com/. E-mail: michael@consultmu.co.uk
Independent Articles
The Invisible City: Exploring the Third Something of Urban Life

By Francisco Martínez

Abstract

With this article I intend to contribute to the debate about how to study urban life. Firstly, I argue for the relevance of invisible and silent aspects of cities and in-between sutures, which I understand to mean a third ‘something’ beyond forms and flows. Secondly, I explore several examples and draw on arguments from Wittgenstein and Lefebvre to frame this hypothesis. Thirdly, I use the chess game as a metaphor to illustrate the multiplicity and unpredictability of engagements of urban life. Finally, I propose to approach cities in an open-ended and ordinary way, paying attention to dialectically interconnected processes and the particular conditions of possibility for knowledge.

Keywords: Calvino; Perec; Wenders; Wittgenstein; Complexity; Chess Game.
He thought: ‘if each city is like a game of chess, the day when I have learned the rules, I shall finally possess my empire’


**Urban Gambit**

In the study of urban life, colleagues and students often emphasize one of the multiple aspects of the city and from that they make further generalizations. Dimensions that commonly receive their attention are architectural forms and infrastructures, motions and flows, and human interactions and tactics. Concerned with this issue, I propose to approach cities as composed of inner grammars and made of dialectically interconnected processes. Like a language, or the game of chess, cities are rule-bound and with a diachronic (historic process) and synchronic order (simultaneity). The point that I want to argue is that the experience of a city is always open-ended and its very practice transcends the parts that compose it, its norms and elements, or if you prefer its forms and flows.

What might initially appear as separated ‘facts’ of urban life are presented here as part of the whole urbanity. Therefore, I argue for the relevance of approaches that attempt to show the invisible and silent aspects of urban life and explore the conditions of possibility for knowing the city. To do this, I propose, first, to focus on interactions and interconnected processes (the city as an experience, not as an object); second, to account for the grammars beyond rules and flows, the urban knots, sutures and social facts that make the city; third, to use the chess game as a metaphor.

One of my postulates is that the understanding of urban life is always limited and based on conditions of possibility. The totality of the city is something established by individuals, yet individuals are never able to see the city in its totality. In this line, I propose to study the grammars and in-between sutures as well as the limits for viable understandings. The conception and practice of the city lay in distinct constellations of meaning that cannot be separated from the emotions and situations. If I attempt to show how a square is inhabited in Lisbon, Tallinn, Havana or Alma Ata, I have to describe the encompassing emotions, awkward experiences, and unintended uses that I found as well as my own position. If I do not – if I rely only upon depictions of architectural forms, designs, or categories – I refer rather to a postcard than to a lived space.

Conjunctions and disjunctions, grammars and sutures, belong to the wholeness of the city, functioning as a third infrastructure between urban forms and flows. As Filip de Boeck argues, inhabiting the urban resists linear mapping and requires strategies of amalgamation. In de Boeck’s view, the city is a polymorphic form based on urban knots that simultaneously conduct and disjunct (2013). AbdouMaliq Simone describes them as ‘networks of concrete becoming’ (2002:
24) and ‘spectral order of things’ (2004: 92) that form the social infrastructures of the city.

The city contains many features and elements, and simply cataloguing them or their mobility is not enough to define the specific qualities of urban life or to understand their practices and inner grammars and regimes of knowledge. Hence, I find it necessary that any attempt to show the wholeness of a lived space must strive to transcend from the elements and norms that constitute it and do so in an open-ended way. After framing this hypothesis through a literature review, I expose several examples that illustrate such methodology and enable us to decipher the contradictions of urban life, often invisible and silent.

**Oasis versus Desert**

Cities are a never ending process, a constant fight between the oasis and the desert. They deploy an edge logic, a sort of ‘theatre of rise and fall’ (de Boeck 2013) unfolded by bringing dissimilar persons into proximity and, by doing so, conceding a second, third, an near infinity of possibilities of re-creation. As asserted by de Boeck, cities have a mounting and elusive quality (2002: 58) that provokes a need for sutures between discourses, representations, actions and structures.

Kinshasa cannot be understood without reflecting upon reflection, upon reflecting realities, mirrors, images, imitation, imagination, and (self) representation… a series of kaleidoscopic, multiple, but simultaneously existing, worlds. Each of these micro cities constantly reflects the others, though this reflection is not always symmetrical. (de Boeck 2002: 17-18)

A city does not exist ‘in itself’ - it is produced. A city is an abstraction that “becomes true” in economic, political, and cultural practices; a social fact (Stanek 2008: 62-63). As noted by Nigel Rapport (1987), the dwellers of a city, as members of a community, they share grammars, manifested in common turn-taking, speech distortions, etiquettes, use of silence, and space performativity. Their interaction is, therefore, a regular sequence of mutual interpretings; a shared language that provides a fund of forms and cases, which individuals adapt to their communicational purposes (Rapport 1993). In this sense, the study of urban life is not reducible to roads and maps, but depends also on the observation of utterances, the ways in which people and places are associated, even of fantasies and charms. If interconnected processes and their particular grammars are ignored, then neither knowledge of roads and houses, nor knowledge of mobilities are sufficient to understand the city.

People agree in the language they use: this is agreement in form of life not opinions. (Wittgenstein 1986: §241).

Data and technocratic studios help us to know the elements of the city, but not necessarily to understand urban life. Likewise, the knowledge of the rules and norms prevailing in the city implies nothing about the way in which they are
obeyed, ignored or distorted (similarly, knowledge of the movements of each figure in chess does not make one a good chess player). Discovering the conditions of possibility does not entail knowledge of meanings – just of the conditions. This knowledge is nonetheless relevant when complemented with the study of social practices and situated experiences.

In order to better express and show these ideas, I draw support from the literary works of Georges Perec and Italo Calvino; the cinema of Wim Wenders; the art of Flo Kasearu, Antti Laitinen, Jeremy Woods and Anne Vatén; and research done by Pille Runnel and Ehti Järv. These works explore both the in-between sutures of urban life and the conditions of possibility for knowing their city. While studying and representing a slippery, interactive, and contingent totality such as the city, I can merely produce limited forms of knowledge that are always conditioned by cultural reflections, psychological states, political relations, historical circumstances and physical surroundings.

As Doreen Massey suggests, it is more difficult to verbalise the social significance of the city than the physical one. For instance, the intangible qualities of the city vary depending on the area in which the person or group is located. They are, thus, inter-subjective and experiential (Massey et al. 1999: 6). By this she refers to a multiplicity of engagements, meaningful in their ordinary character. In this line, Henri Lefebvre remarked that the city is first and foremost determined by the actions taking place in this space, which led him to argue that urban life may be expressed, but cannot be explained by a discourse. Furthermore, the city is acted rather than read – it has texture rather than text (Lefebvre 1991; Laanemets 2002).

For Lefebvre, a space is a social product that includes not only materiality but also a thought concept and experience. In his influential *The Production of Space* (1974/1991), Lefebvre postulates a three-dimensional analysis of spatial production: 1. Spatial practice: the material dimension of social activity and interaction. 2. The representation of space: discursive interpretations, definitions and descriptions. 3. Spaces of representation: processes of sense making. These dimensions, or moments, exist in a state of uncertainty, as approximations that denote at once individual and social processes and are dialectically interconnected (Schmid 2008: 29-39).

Overall, the city is a space where interactions and encounters happen in an intense way. In this sense, Jennifer Robinson (2006) criticises the world cities literature for its emphasis upon the narrowing of concepts and models that entail hierarchical relations. Robinson argues that the binary of innovation-imitation must be broken down. Instead, all cities should be looked at as ‘ordinary’, with their own inner logics and local appropriations and distortions. In her view, all cities are places that have innovative and dynamic aspects as well as challenges and barriers. Hence, she proposes to compare the dynamics of multiple cities and see how the reasons for urban outcomes diverge significantly across different contexts.
This line of thought contradicts two widespread spatial theories, namely the ‘architectural Deluzism’ (Spencer 2011) that argues that the complexities and the dynamism of contemporary life cannot be cast into the simple forms, precludes the establishment of any fixed patterns of occupation, favours structures without a hierarchical structure and produces a space whereby the subject is compelled towards a nomadic and flexible disposition; and the postmodern ‘thirdspace’ (Soja 1996) that postulates the autonomous existence of three spaces (physical, mental and social) privileging the third as the one from where all space can be grasped and understood. On the contrary, the third ‘something’ explored in this article does not appear as separated from other dimensions of urban life, or distinct, but rather ordinary, mutually alterable and experiential.

Nowadays, urban planning and economic criteria dominate the scientific treatment of the city (Nawratek 2012; Krivý 2012; Martínez 2013). However, focusing only on global networks, city labelling, and attraction of the so called ‘creative class’ entails, as Amin and Thrift (2002) remark, a danger of underplaying the significance of other aspects of urban experience that help to define cities. Indeed the city is outside of anyone’s control. No-one is able to encapsulate urban life in any definitive form or label that might keep the rest of the people in line and turn-off world phenomena. In this line, Simone stresses the provisionality, heterogeneity and unpredictability of urban life. He characterizes cities as ‘huge intersections of bodies in need’ (2004: 3); ‘the conjunction of seemingly endless possibilities of remaking’ (2004: 9); ‘densities of stories, passions, hurts, revenge, aspiration, avoidance, deflection, and complicity’ (2004: 11) and ‘places of thickening connections’ (2004: 137).

**Philosophy in the City**

At this point Wittgenstein’s insights into the language use and the human production of meaning can prove helpful. Wittgenstein claims that intentions, wishes and desires do not belong to norms and perceptions, but to expression – they can be spoken and enacted but not specified in single terms. As he states:

> I can know what someone else is thinking, not what I am thinking. It is correct to say
> ‘I know what you are thinking’, and wrong to say ‘I know what I am thinking’. (A whole cloud of philosophy condensed into a drop of grammar).

(Wittgenstein 1986: IIxi 2*26)

Wittgenstein postulated that our capacity to communicate relies upon basic rules practiced between persons, rather than on the exactitude of our sentences. These rules and terms refer to an out-there ‘reality’, yet in contrast they freeze its becoming and complexity. From this, we can infer that anything that has meaning does not necessarily belong to language, and that language-games – actions in which the language is woven and played – approach contingent ‘realities’ in a more precise way, showing knowledge ‘within’ the real, rather than ‘of’ the real.
Indeed, the practice of human language does not fit exactly into any formal system and depends on many non-linguistic aspects.

Following these insights, Wittgenstein further argues that the limits of language can only be experienced, not taught or read, and that thoughts are not without context, which generates the need to attend carefully to the use of words and their placing. In this sense, he states: ‘the limits of my language mean the limits of my world’ (1974: 5.6). Here Wittgenstein confronts us with the idea that language limits our experience of the world, as well as making the world accessible and ordered. Thus, language imposes a constraint that is at once enabling and disabling. Forms are certainly restrictive, but they have the ability of representation, reproduction and combination.¹

With the aim of demonstrating the difference between a hypothesis and a rule, Wittgenstein asks the reader to consider all the situations in which we would accept the proposition that ‘there is a hippopotamus in our room’ (1982). His conclusion is that this depends on what we take to be the exact meaning of ‘hippopotamus’; in a metaphorical way it could refer to a fat individual, or to an awkward person; or it could be merely encapsulated in a picture of the ‘river horse’; or it could be named and then created in a maieutic way. In spite of their limitations, we need forms and contexts to give sense to our experiences. It is, however, the very existence of the world which escapes language.² Hence, I can say that words solidify urban life, whilst language games follow urban life. Language in general, and language games in particular, are situated in the middle of rules and flows, forms and contents.

After acknowledging these limitations, Wittgenstein urges that descriptions should be embedded in life by following the play of language. This move has several implications: first, the rejection of perfect representations, since all forms are grounded on resemblances and dissimilarities;³ second, the study of language games, since they focus on action rather than on falsehood; third, that language games should be understood as the very forms articulated in life, as the constitution of language in reality. Wittgenstein also draws a distinction between sense and nonsense, between what can be said and what can only be shown. Here he aspires to present what cannot be said by recognising the limits of what can be said, to conclude that silence is the only correct answer to certain questions. Eventually, this undermines any doctrine of ineffability, even for his own theory.

Since even the meanings of our words depend at many points on contingent empirical truths, to describe the city is also an activity of clarification and elucidation with limited tools.⁴ The circumstances in which words are used determine their sense as well as our access to the world. Our experiential knowledge is based on a puzzle between what is inside and outside us – a puzzle that people reconstruct in a mirroring and transcendental way by using language, the senses and embodied imagination. Wittgenstein suggests that what is needed in order to unfold the world is to trace out the connections between its elements. He considers
seeing connections as the crucial part of any process of understanding, where ‘Seeing’ is meant literally: the connection between word and meaning is made by pointing at reality and its context, rather than by grasping it (1986).5

The ultimate contingency of the world contrasts with the human tendency to solidify what is fluid. Words have a durability non-existent in the city, but insufficient, nonetheless, to describe the transcendence of its elements. For instance, the word ‘city’ and its utterance do not necessarily bring about what occurs in the urban space. One could pronounce ‘city’ 100 times and not indicate any existent phenomena in the urban space. Words solidify the swiftness and liquid quality of a city, but they remain an abstract representation and are not substitutes for it. Durability is a crucial matter here – words and categories (as with any socio-cultural convention) are able to solidify what is fluid, contingent, and flippant. Yet at the same time language and its categories, as a human creation, have far less durability than the material that they describe or denote.

Wittgenstein also employed the analogy of a chess game to illuminate what it means for language to be governed by rules. Both language and chess are regulated by norms that have no direct foundation; since they cannot be justified by reference to reality, they are autonomous and could be different (Wittgenstein 1986). Rules and their applications are varied, yet they provide a context in which they make sense. In response to the simple question ‘What are the constituent parts of a chessboard?’ we may suggest 32 black and 32 white squares; or say that it is composed of 32 rectangles, each containing two squares, one white and one black; alternatively, we could also say that it is composed of the colours black and white and the schema of squares and so on… (Wittgenstein 1986: §47). However, the division of the chessboard into simple constituent parts does not show any absolute truth, nor does it explain the intrinsic logics of chess. In this way, Wittgenstein reminds us that the practices of rule following are ultimately distinct from how those same rules are conceptualised – mastery in chess can only be achieved by dealing with constraints in practice, not by looking at separated representations (1986).

In most of his work, Wittgenstein is concerned with the implications of the ultimate absence of any meta-rule, and hence with the paradox of needing to assume rules, whilst it is impossible to provide them with sufficient foundation. Rules and forms are not sufficient to know the world, but they are necessary nevertheless. Consequently, rules are constitutive, but also contingent and without any guarantee.

Both knowledge within the city and the mastery the game of chess require an experiential understanding of the practice. The capacity to see the intercourse between rules and flows, thus becomes crucial to appreciate the reasoning that
they constitute. Furthermore, rules and flows cannot be totally conceived of in separation, their combination provide a position and a vector (Shields 1997: 3-5). Flows are inclusive, interactive and irreversible, entailing a strong power of erosion and variation. However, any categorisation of flows requires rules and forms, which simulate an abstract existence.6

**Soft and Hard City**

In *Soft City* (1974), Jonathan Raban describes how the city might estrange individuals from themselves, yet at the same time invite them to remake it consolidating it into a shape that they can live in. In this sense, to live in cities is an art of creation rather than discovery, an adaptation dependent upon soft conceptions and hard facts.

I cannot apprehend the city by studying the parts separately, in the same way that I cannot look at one piece of a puzzle for three months and think that I already know the colour and configuration of the whole. It is the possibility to relate this piece with others (and their circumstances) that creates sense and reveals what is common to them. As Wittgenstein argues, a fact is not a truth about the world, but just a part of the world and one of the atoms that create the totality by virtue of interactions (1974: 2.01). We find parts, and through the study of their interactions and situations we might figure out how the totality is, yet not demonstrate it as an ultimate truth.

Likewise, a knowledge of the order does not entail either the knowledge of the whole nor of its elements. In isolation no piece of a puzzle, or of Tetris game, or of chess game says anything. Here we can also refer to Borges’ essay on the bizarre taxonomy of animals belonging to a Chinese emperor, in which the boundaries of meaning are transgressed by an out of joint and playful re-categorisation of the elements.7

[Image][654]
The Storyteller, the void and the border – photo from Wim Wenders’ ‘Wings of Desire’
I find the films of Wim Wenders to offer a great example of transcendental knowledge and conditions of possibility in cities. Take for instance the film ‘Wings of Desire’ (1987, Der Himmel über Berlin), wherein the two angels, Damiel (Bruno Ganz) and Cassiel (Otto Sander), appear able to see what is invisible to mere mortals and to overhear every thought yet incapable of any sensual experience or physical contact with the world. These angels are onlookers, having a partial access to the whole, limited to the conscious world. Even if the angels have been watching and listening to people since the end of the war, they cannot understand and imagine many mundane things such as colours, smells, tastes, love, pain... These angels may guess what feelings are, but they cannot directly experience the sensations of living (Wenders 2001). Being that the angels transcend time, they cannot be in time and experience expectations, or nostalgia. It is only in the human condition that the sense to look after the future, to dream or to dwell in time and space arises.

Cassiel: Sunrise and 7:22 a.m. Sunset at 4:28 p.m. Moonrise at [...] Twenty years ago today a Soviet jet fighter crashed into the lake at Spandau. Fifty years ago there were the Olympic Games. Two-hundred years ago Blanchard flew over the city in a balloon.

Damiel: Like the fugitives the other day.

Cassiel: And today, on the Lilienthaler Chaussee, a man, walking, slowed down, and looked over his shoulder into space. At post office 44, a man who wants to end it all today pasted rare stamps on his farewell letters, a different one on each. He spoke English with an American soldier--the first time since his schooldays--and fluently.

In Wings of Desire, Wenders creates a documentary of West Berlin by exploring the articulations between sensations and pure forms and transcending into a same togetherness. Wenders has the ability to communicate the third something of urban life in an understandable way. Indeed, one of the main qualities of Wenders is how he fills ordinary spaces with iconic empathy, showing urban regimes of knowledge through bounded encounters. This iconicity comes from the way ordinary spaces are shown (through figurative movements, juxtapositions, superimpositions, framing, lightening, etc). The multiple engagements of the ordinary are thus shown through the recontextualisation of common things and in its sensation. This makes us not only look at the ordinary, but also access its knowledge through the perception (just as we know of colours or smells through their very experience).

Roads, streets, airports, vehicles, airplanes, neon lights, kiosks… ordinary spaces are presented in Wenders’ movies as instantaneous, yet strange; temporary, yet transcendental; foreign, yet familiar; faraway, so close. ‘Wings of Desire’ is a very porous film; by showing voids and pointing at invisibilities it invites the spectator to create its own articulations and reconstructions. ‘Only those films with gaps in between their imagery are telling stories… A story is first awakened in the mind of a viewer or listener’, Wender claims (1997: 99). Voids allow for the forging of new connections, but they also have a context and a location.
Wenders demonstrates a particular interest in capturing landscapes that are about to disappear: ‘The fact that something is due to go is always a good reason to include it in a scene. Wings of Desire is full of examples. Almost none of our locations exist any more’ (1997: 133). Berlin plays a crucial role in this movie, not just as static background wherein the narrative happens, but as a city that calls a story into being: ‘a place needing to be told’ (Wenders 2003). In Wenders’ films, the city constitutes a centre of gravity rather than a variable or category. As he acknowledges, this film ‘isn’t about Berlin because it’s set there, but because it could not be set anywhere else’ (Wenders 2003: 233). Something similar occurs with Lisbon Story, Tokyo-ga, The American Friend and Alice in the Cities. These films too evolve through the cities that they depict, showing the invisible aspects of the life happening there, rather than representing Lisbon, Tokyo, Hamburg or New York.

We live in the cities/And the cities live in us (Wenders 2001: 363)

In Les Fleurs du mal, for instance, Baudelaire describes neither the population nor the city of Paris (eg. ‘Le cygne’). It is precisely this renunciation of representing the evident that enables him to show the logic and regimes of knowledge within the city. Places speak for themselves through the presence of bounded figures and the meaning of the whole city emerges from that. Meaning exists beyond the city itself, in a speculative attempt conditioned by personal dispositions. In Wings of Desire, the city of Berlin appears not as a mere representation but opaque, as a non-transparent sequence of images and encounters. In this way I do not refer just to the aesthetics, but also to how actions occur in the film, as a search rather than as a cause. For instance, Marion, the artist, stays in Berlin when the circus leaves, looking for Damiel without knowing anything about him. Standing at a coffee imbiss, she meets the detective Columbo and asks his counsel: ‘Lieutenant, I bet you must know how to find people’. Columbo’s answer tells us of the unfinished searches and unfulfilled desires of urban life: ‘Well, I know how to look for them, but I don’t always find them’.8

Stories give people the feeling that there is meaning, that there is ultimately an order lurking behind the incredible confusion of appearances an phenomena that surrounds them […] I totally reject stories, because for me they only bring out lies, nothing but lies, and the biggest lie is that they show coherence where there is none (1991: 54, 59)

Cities are the product of dense and estranged relation of people. Meanings emerge from guesses and bounded contextualisations, not always visible. Flo Kasearu’s art-work ‘Riga Runaway’ (2010) is another a fantastic example of how to show in-between sutures in the city. In a car racing persecution of a pure form, the shape of the city is revealed behind the projected light. The artwork becomes a sort of phantom tour allowing the spectator to experience the transit from Riga’s city centre to the suburbs following the reflection of a white horse.
‘Riga Runaway’ (2010) is an artwork of Flo Kasearu. I want to express my gratitude to her for providing the material and encouraging the research.

The white horse is here a perennial repetition, mechanical, confusing, yet also desirable and with an illuminating and revealing quality. It is a window and lens to the city, which shows its shape by hiding and showing physical aspects, telling us about the character of urban life by merging formal aspects with sensual ones. The colour of the horse also varies depending on the background, finding bricks, concrete, cement, asphalt, and so on. Indeed, the horse-light is not always visible, but needs a background to run over: walls, roads, façades, gaps and voids from which to emerge.

Kasearu’s art-work involves a pure form, a physical surrounding, and also the presence of someone who observes and contextualises the scene from a car. The invisible aspects of Riga are shown and partially experienced after merging these three elements. Another great example of the same can see other great examples of that in the GPS self-portraits of Antti Laitinen and Jeremy Wood. In the case of Laitinen, he printed his portrait on various maps and tried to orientate in several cities following the lines of his face, carrying a GPS recorder to draw the path he walked.
Meanwhile, Wood has been creating maps from his GPS track recordings for years. For instance, in his project ‘Traverse Me’ (2010) Wood drew a 1:1 scale map on foot in the University of Warwick, creating 383 kilometres of traces over 17 days. For the presentation of the project in the Warwick Arts Centre’s Meade Gallery, he wrote: ‘I responded to the structure of each location and avoided walking along roads and paths when possible… Security was called on me twice on separate occasions and I lost count of how many times I happened to trigger an automatic sliding door’.

The project ‘Traverse Me’ (2010) was realized by Jeremy Wood. For more info see his website: http://www.gpsdrawing.com/maps/traverse-me.html

Another good example is Pille Runnel & Ehti Järv’s study of children depictions of the city (2014). The researchers asked more than 400 children to draw their conception of the urban space, to show what they dislike or are afraid of, what are their favourite shops and corners of freedom or why the major is doing a bad job. 10 years old, Helari, for instance, selected the garages as the best hiding place of her town:
Helari: ‘I have drawn my very good hiding place. This is my favorite and only hiding place, which is located between the garages. This is my hometown Pärnu, where I like to live very much’. Thanks to Pille Runnel and Ehti Järv for the pictures of the drawings.

Finally, Anne Vatén photo-exhibition ‘Some Places Where My Heart was Broken’ aptly shows the impossibility of disconnecting emotional experiences from the conception of the space. Over years, she has photographed the location where different partners broke up with her, writing down for each the alleged reason: ‘I wanted to talk about our relationship. He thought that we had broken up already a month ago’ (Vatén 2014).

Thanks to Anne Vatén for sharing the pictures and notes.
The City a User’s Manual

In Georges Perec’s book La vie mode d’emploi (1978) the description of everyday life resembles an enlarged chessboard wherein the author tells the histories of the room’s inhabitants by moving as the chess knight figure (traversing private rings and depicting a sort of jigsaw-puzzle after several self-imposed codes). In Perec’s depiction, the encountered elements do not pre-exist the whole, which is neither older nor more immediate. Likewise, the parts do not condition any totality, this is done rather by the interaction among the joined elements.

The street, try to observe the street, what it’s made of, what it’s used for. The people in the street. The cars… Decipher a bit of town… deduce the obvious facts: the obsession with ownership, for example… The people in the streets: where are they coming from? Where are they going to? Who are they?… Try to classify the people: those who live locally and those who don’t live locally. (Perec 1997: 50-53)

As the Oulipo literary group suggested, thinking through constraints provides the most efficient way of testing categories and given assumptions. Their texts are organised on the basis of random mathematical systems that, from word games, evolve as an epistemological process.9 More specifically, Perec unceasingly engaged with how categories are composed, taking raw public materials in order to return them enriched with personal interpretations and fresh interconnections. In this sense, most of Perec’s literary works are led by a solitary player who, almost disarmed, faces a challenging urban space – in other words, a city that constantly begs him for interpretation and interaction. As were many scholars in his generation (Lefebvre, Guy Debord, Foucault, etc), Perec was struck by the way space is ‘broken up and… diversified’ (1997: 6). He did so however through seemingly childish questions: What happens if nothing happens? How do I show the ‘endotic’ (that which opposes the exotic)?

The daily papers talk on everything except the daily. The papers annoy me, they teach me nothing. What they recount doesn’t concern me, doesn’t ask me questions, doesn’t answer the questions I ask or would like to ask… To question the habitual… we live it without thinking, as if it carried within it neither questions nor answers, as if it weren’t the bearer of any information. This is no longer even conditioning, it’s anaesthesia. We sleep through our lives in a dreamless sleep. But where is our life? Where is our body? Where is our space. (Perec 1997: 206)

Perec writes beyond the dialectic that refers to the everyday as marvellous or as banal, and describes the infra-ordinary as truly significant. Of course, he was not the first to do so. For instance, through the example of art forgery, Sigmund Freud argued that the most effective way to discover the authenticity of a painting is to focus on minor details, such as how fingernails and the slope of a thumb are depicted. Similarly for the father of psychoanalysis the core dispositions of the personality lay behind trivial elements of daily life.

Railway trains only begin to exist when they are derailed, and the more passengers that are killed, the more the train exists. Aeroplanes achieve existence only when they are hijacked… Behind the event there has to be a scandal, a fissure, a danger, as
if life reveals itself only by way of the spectacular, as if what speaks, what is significant, is always abnormal. (Perec 1997: 205)

Perec’s inquiries into the endotic prioritise the habitual despite the fact of being habituated to it. Aiming at documenting three kinds of vieillissement, ‘[t]he aging of places, the aging of my writing, and the aging of my memories’ (Perec 1993: 27), Perec explored how each location accumulates a history within the repeated experience of the same place, making each visit a culmination of those that came before it. One of the repeated leitmotivs in Perec’s work is the neo-ludic attempt to depict the interplay between city and person. For instance, in 1969 he published Lieux (Places), a project in which he selected twelve Parisian locations and described one of them each month in situ (réels), and once from memory (souvenirs). For that project, Perec imposed upon himself an algorithmic constraint, such that no place was described twice in the same month. Each of these writings was subsequently sealed in a dated envelope and titled either ‘réels’ or ‘souvenirs’. The intention was to open the archived writings upon completion of the project twelve years later, but it was never completed and Perec published some of the ‘réels’ in several journals, later collected in the posthumous L’infra-ordinaire (1989).

Space melts like sand running through one’s fingers. Time bears it away and leaves me only shapeless shreds. (Perec 1997: 91)

In a way, people select what they want to hear and see, yet not to the end, since vectors, restrictions and distortions always emerge, at least as far as we remain spatial and talkative bodies in societies. Thus the city is also made from different angles and trajectories. For instance, Perec recognizes the city after re-crossing its places. Rather than on the streets, he finds meaning on the journey, on the personal trajectory – a space infused with memory and expectations. In Les Choses, he writes words as signs of anchoring, roaming and erring, which ultimately may be understood as both: a continuous appropriation and a worldly distortion.

When moving through a city we are surrounded by places that encapsulate stories to be unfolded. Nevertheless, places and buildings do not reveal to us what used to be and, even less, what is about to become. Places don’t tell a story – people do. There is no city without an encounter as well as no story without the right distance. Stories and encounters both create a sense of belonging as far as they both talk about individuals’ memory, priorities, and imagination – thus collectivity. This is what Italo Calvino worldly describes in ‘Invisible Cities’. Places always contain traces and scars, as well as corners of freedom.

There is the city where you arrive for the first time, and there is another city which you leave never to return. Each deserves a different name. (Calvino 1974: 125)

In Calvino’s tale ‘Invisible Cities’, Marco Polo, the celebrated Venetian traveller in the Orient, offers the Mongolian emperor Kublai Khan an account of his supposed visits to a series of imaginary cities, each of which bears a woman’s name. As the story unfolds, Marco tells the emperor about the multiple urban sites he
visited during his numerous travels. In his descriptions, the city always appears bigger than the imagination of its dwellers and not subjected to their needs, appealing rather to the reader’s reconstruction. Likewise, the places cannot choose the story and the form in which they appear, they are told only through a strangers’ line of thought.

Calvino knits the text with three textures: figures of speech; sensory images and an addressed intellectual proposition. These three textures are not separate, but rather merged in a non-transparent way. The closest depictions of urban life are those combining personal trajectories and language games. This, however, does not overcome the ultimate paradox of urban representations: to write the city is the opposite of knowing it, yet at the same time, the only way to describe it. To name the parts of the city is to save them from the totality and obviate the articulations and the interplay among them. Finished stories about a city cannot be told – there are merely brave attempts to make sense of it. While being representations necessary to share thoughts and experiences as comprehensible symbols, these forms inevitably fail to tell the whole story. Indeed, any representation contains its own inherent distortion in which the whole is inevitably interpreted and reduced by language and figures. Nonetheless these forms are required in our attempts to learn and understand. The difficulty, then, is how to complement them with experience.

There is no language without deceit… falsehood is never in words; it is in things. (Calvino 1974: 48 / 61)

‘Invisible Cities’ can be also read as a literary game. The novel is organised into nine parts and the cities are grouped into eleven subtitles: cities and memory, cities and desire, cities and signs, thin cities, trading cities, cities and eyes, cities and names, cities and the dead, cities and the sky, continuous cities, and hidden cities. The experience of the city is not just visual, logical and dynamic, but also dependent on embodied imagination and unintended encounters and interactions. In this way I find a Sisyphean character at the core of the city, which is the never-ending attempt of many individuals to make sense of the ultimately variable and flippant. What may change the story of the city is not so much a new way of telling it, but rather any new attempt to understand it, to create connections, to redeem sites from the continuum of history.

Our city and the sky correspond so perfectly... that any change (in the city) involves some novelty among the stars. (Calvino 1974: 151)

While objective analysis of urban life might include scientifically accurate forms such as population size, industries, history, geography, and so on. Calvino’s cities are deliberately written as subjective and selective views of urban habits. The cities Marco Polo recounts appear, therefore, not only as imaginary, but described as intentional states. By expressing his mood, the narrator positions himself in the
surroundings and uses his ‘stati di animo’ (disposition, state of mind) as a cognitive aspect of a city (Dunster 2010: 64-69).

The city, however, does not tell its past, but contains it like the lines of a hand, written in the corners of the streets, the gratings of the windows, the banisters of the steps, the antennae of the lightning rods, the poles of the flags, every segment marked in turn with scratches, indentations, scrolls. (Calvino 1974: 10-11)

Nobody can find cities absent of past and future. If that were to happen, we would consider ourselves in a labyrinth rather than in an inhabited space. That is why cities slip away as the enemy of cartographers: there is no place in maps for ghosts or doubts. The cosmology of maps is purely physical, constellating a net of naked Kantian a prioris. They, cartographers, only see the whole of the city while dreaming.

Each city receives its form from the desert it opposes. (Calvino 1974: 18).

Kublai Khan, the Mongolian emperor of Calvino’s tale, aspires to master his land in an abstract way, solely by knowing its forms and names. In this illustration, the writer explores the tension between ‘system’ and ‘thing’, digging into the paradoxical way in which they mutually articulate each other. This is recognisable in one of the most brilliant passages of the book, wherein Polo begins to describe a bridge stone by stone and Kublai Khan asks: ‘But which is the stone that supports the bridge?’ ‘The bridge is not supported by one stone or another but by the line of the arch that they form’, Polo responds. The great Khan remains silent before asking: ‘why do you speak to me of the stones? It is only the arch that matters to me’… allowing Polo to conclude that ‘without stones there is no arch’.

**Before the Game is Over…**

In this article I argued that it is possible to learn more from tales about invisible cities than from configurations of the ideal ones. The city is much more than an assemblage of the possible (the unstable flows) and the prescribed (the imposition of structures that secure order). There is urbanity without architecture: also without commutes. However there is no city without dense and intense social sutures. Overall, the city emerges from inter-subjective experiences, personal trajectories, encounters, embodied imagination, memory and proximity. Hence, it cannot be represented just as a collection of buildings and streets, neither can it be fully located on a map.

As Rob Shields suggests, the empirically visible never exhausts the urban. Despite the omniscient ambition of technologies, the city is an example of phenomena too extensive in scale to be empirically visible (Shields 2004). Rather than a category, a fabric, or a system of actor-network, the city occurs as a result of encounters between bodies in need and spatial and temporary constrictions. Therefore, understanding the sutures between forms and flows is more relevant in urban studies than demonstrating and planning as such. The quality of the city is based
on the different encounters within. There might be only one city out-there, as
there is always one ‘reality’, but I cannot grasp it in its immediacy and wholeness.
I may aspire to measure it or to understand it but not both at the same time. Like-
wise, I cannot find the final form of the city, only how it looks like. Any attempt
to capture the city makes us aware of its infinite contingency and of the irreversi-
bility of the becomings. It is like Heraclitus’ river, I may know its chemical for-
mula and the composition of the elements (H2O), what is the course and lay of its
riverbed. Nonetheless, I will never know the river to its end, nor swim it in the
same way or water. Likewise, in crossing even the same street in the morning and
evening, I will surely discover different aspects in it.

Dispositions are altogether part of the city, thus, happiness or fear concerns ur-
ban studies as much as literature or psychology. This assumption involves
acknowledgement too of the importance of attention and interest. The city offers
passages of thought that wind to unexpected destinations, yet it also conditions
with squares, rules, and mechanical rhythms. The city might, as such, be experi-
enced at some times as a playground and at others as a battlefield. Thomas Han-
sen and Oskar Verkaik present the city as ‘charismatic’. For them, urban life rests
on special forms of knowledge, networks and connectedness, being heavily my-
thologized and enframed through circulating narratives that condition the empiri-
Urban life is in this sense Byzantine, full of rituals, betrayals, enigmas and new
beginnings; experienced as an avenue jutting off at sublime niches, astonishing
relics and murderous angles. In the city different actors explore between each oth-
er various scenarios and ways of collaborating, without always producing specific
outcomes – cultivating several levels of cooperation in a space that is regulated,
yet full of tricks and emotions. There is, as such, a multiplicity of open-ended
engagements – just as in chess.

In the city I imagine possible orders and tactics in time and space, from which
follow decisions led by logic and intuition simultaneously. Neither in urban life,
nor in the chess game, do we have all the suitable information to take decisions. In
addition, we are never sure about the consequences that will follow our move. At
least in 2014, the machine does not always beat the human mind in arranged chess
games. It’s impossible to freeze everything when one has to interpret streets and
explore conceivable trajectories. Here the ‘have to’ is relevant. In the city as in the
chess game, I am compelled by situations, urges, drives and various impulses to
do it.

I can never capture all the components in play in the city. Even if the figures of
the chess game are conditioned by pre-given rules, spatial forms and acting codes,
the unfolding process is also determined by uneven intentions, underway efforts,
fantasies, emotions and contingent strategies. From this starting position, the
game grows progressively, becoming increasingly engaging and complex until it
irremissibly ends (always in an unexpected way). Error is also certain in the game
of chess, and the player cannot blame the referee, the wind, or the quality of the pitch. Hence the loser has always something to learn about him/herself (Rasskin Gutman 2009). Players analyse a movement, discard 95% of options, imagine three alternatives and finally choose just one. Likewise, involvement into the multiplicity of urban life compels the researcher to escape from the solipsism of the forms, and to put into practice language games and embodied imagination.

In a similar way, the city engages us in a form of constellation of ramified judgements to be taken and mostly experienced as a personal journey with a beginning and end. But in the chess game, as in the city, the conception of possibilities is not just based upon the places which one can access or move to (i.e. the black ones), but by the forbidden ones too (i.e. the 32 white). This also informs the strategies and acts deployed, offering an almost infinite combination of moves that depend on the predisposition and ability of the player. Besides the squares that I physically cross, composed of façades, avenues and traffic lights, there is another city impossible to visit. This is the city in which I fancy and find mysterious beasts and myths. A place rather imaginary, invisible, and directly related to our personal disposition – the Lisbon of Fernando Pessoa or the Berlin of Alfred Döblin – places which are nonetheless real in the way they become experienced and understood.

Here the chess game is taken as a metaphor that helps to illustrate the multiplicity and unpredictability of engagements of urban life. On the one hand, the movement of the pieces, bounded by the rules and the squares of the board, escape any ultimate determinism; they are intentional but not teleological. It is, indeed, not enough to know the rules to become a good player of chess. On the other, the decisions taken for every move come from the organic need, position, experience and mental state of the player. In a way, it is like the chess match depicted in Bergman’s The Seventh Seal, in which the knight never has enough time, skills and knowledge to resist the contemptuous powers of world forces. Both the chess game and urban life are founded on figurative possibilities within a set of codes; rules and physical constrictions in spite of which its engagement is non-repeatable, entropic, adventurous, imagined, and with a beginning and an end.

In short, urban life is particularly unfolded in midway attempts and eventualities, in the bounded amalgam of practices. The increasing difficulty in the nodal fixings of flows complicates the analysing task, as meanings become more difficult to place and opaque. For just this reason, it is particularly meaningful to study trajectories, grammars and thickenings, beyond the obvious level of city’s material infrastructures (de Boeck 2013: 14). Simply by cataloguing the many features and elements of the city, or their motion, I cannot show the specific qualities of urban life and understand its dynamics. Instead, I propose to approach cities in an open-ended and ordinary way, paying attention to dialectically interconnected processes and the particular conditions of possibility for knowledge.
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Notes

1 Mladen Dolar asserts that language ‘enables our access to the world by providing its mapping, while limiting this access by its own configuration, and for whatever doesn’t fit this configuration there stands a warning “access denied”’ (2013).

2 In the Preface of the Tractatus, Wittgenstein asserts: ‘What can be said at all can be said clearly; and whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.’ It points, overall, at the existence of a beyond, mute, and indecipherable. Also it questions the possibility to endow the world with an ultimate sense and grasp it in its totality, meanwhile being situated from the inside of world and language (Dolar 2013).

3 This understanding of language games is not far from the Lacanian term ‘Lalangue’, in which the psychoanalyst addresses what there is of the real in language, for instance the sound of language alongside its meaning (Lacan 1998).

4 See Wittgenstein 1986: §142. For him, the world is wholly composed by mutually independent states of affairs (Wittgenstein 1974). Because words are uniform in appearance, we assume that they refer to uniform entities about which we can generalize, forgetting therefore that words are an application (Wittgenstein 1986). Therefore, he concludes that our uses of words must be studied case by case: even if uses and expressions appear as governed by rules, those rules do not create a monolithic system.

5 In his view, meaning depends on articulations rather than on bare representations. Objects and words are simple; they contribute to the stability of the proposition, furnishing meaning
The quality of existence and non-existence, combination or non-combination, pertain to the truth or falsehood of propositions. However, they do not imply understanding.

For instance, the term ‘water’ refers to a continuous fluid composed of millions of atoms, which might change in state and appearance so as to longer resemble water.

The list divides all animals into one of 14 categories: those belonging to the emperor; embalmed; tame; suckling pigs; mermaids; fabulous; stray dogs; included in this classification; frenzied; innumerable; drawn with a very fine camel hair brush; et cetera; having just broken the water pitcher; those that, at a distance, resemble flies. Borges presents the list as appearing in an ancient Chinese encyclopedia (The Celestial Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge) ‘discovered’ by the translator Franz Kuhn. Also Michel Foucault explored the implications of such (fictitious) taxonomy, noting that this classificatory scheme was possible only in language and not in the world. However, for the French philosopher, ‘what is impossible is not the propinquity of the things listed, but the very site on which their propinquity would be possible’ (Foucault 1970: XVI).


Another example of showing invisible aspects of urban life might be Handke’s ‘Song of Childhood’ (Lied vom Kindsein) repeated in the movie: ‘When the child was a child (…) it had, on every mountaintop, the longing for a greater mountain yet, and in every city, the longing for an even greater city, and that still is so (…)’.

Queneau 1986: ‘…the Ouvrier de Littérature Potentielle: Ouvroir because it intends to work. Littérature because it is a question of literature. Potentielle – the word must be taken to mean various things… In short: OU.LI.PO’.

For more on the topic see Morris 2008: 31-60. ‘If Lieux can be read as an archive, then it is one which remains open and is actively being compiled in the process’. (Morris 2008: 47).


Species of Spaces and Other Pieces (1997) in English.

Eventually, such a détournement of the city reduces any tradition, memory or place into nothing more than a rhetoric artifact. “Il faudra bien, un jour, que je commence à me servir des mots pour démasquer le reel, pour démasquer ma réalité” (Perec 1990: 73).

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The PST Project, Willie Herrón’s Street Mural Asco East of No West (2011) and the Mural Remix Tour: Power Relations on the Los Angeles Art Scene

By Eva Zetterman

Abstract
This article departs from the huge art-curating project Pacific Standard Time: Art in L.A., 1945–1980, a Getty funded initiative running in Southern California from October 2011 to April 2012 with a collaboration of more than sixty cultural institutions coming together to celebrate the birth of the L.A. art scene. One of the Pacific Standard Time (PST) exhibitions was Asco: Elite of the Obscure, A Retrospective, 1972–1987, running from September to December 2011 at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA). This was the first retrospective of a conceptual performance group of Chicanos from East Los Angeles, who from the early 1970s to the mid 1980s acted out critical interventions in the politically contested urban space of Los Angeles. In conjunction with the Asco retrospective at LACMA, the Getty Foundation co-sponsored a new street mural by the Chicano artist Willie Herrón, paying homage to his years in the performance group Asco. The PST exhibition program also included so-called Mural Remix Tours, taking fine art audiences from LACMA to Herrón’s place-specific new mural in City Terrace in East Los Angeles. This article analyze the inclusion in the PST project of Herrón’s site-specific mural in City Terrace and the Mural Remix Tours to East Los Angeles with regard to the power relations of fine art and critical subculture, center and periphery, the mainstream and the marginal. As a physical monument dependent on a heavy sense of the past, Herrón’s new mural, titled Asco: East of No West, transforms the physical and social environment of City Terrace, changing its public space into an official place of memory. At the same time, as an art historical monument officially added to the civic map of Los Angeles, the mural becomes a permanent reminder of the segregation patterns that still exist in the urban space of Los Angeles.

Keywords: Pacific Standard Time, Asco, Willie Herrón, Asco: East of No West, Mural Remix Tour, power relations, segregation patterns.
Introduction

This article centers on the huge art-curating project *Pacific Standard Time: Art in L.A., 1945–1980*, running from October 2011 to April 2012 in Southern California. The Pacific Standard Time (PST) was a massive Getty-funded curating project, initiated by the Getty Foundation and the Getty Research Institute in 2002 with a grant program of millions of dollars for research, exhibitions, programs and publications. Documenting the Los Angeles postwar art scene through the tumultuous decades of the 1960s and 70s, the PST was launched a decade later with a region-wide collaboration of more than sixty cultural institutions coming together “to tell the story of the birth of the L.A. art scene and how it became a major new force in the art world” (Getty webpage). Los Angeles is the nation’s second art scene after New York City, and in the PST exhibitions documenting “the birth” of the L.A. art scene, the curators included groups of artists traditionally marginalized in major mainstream venues, such as queer and feminist artists, African American, Mexican American and Chicana/o artists, many of whom had already made it into the canon of fine art.\(^1\) Los Angeles is the city with the highest percentage of Mexican descendants in the USA and six PST exhibitions were organized with Mexican American and Chicana/o artists.\(^2\) One of these exhibitions was *Asco: Elite of the Obscure, A Retrospective, 1972–1987*, running from September to December 2011 at the prestigious Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA). This retrospective exhibition was the first in a major mainstream museum of the conceptual performance group Asco in the USA. Asco was composed of various constellations of East Los Angeles Chicana and Chicano artists, who on the basis of the political framework of the Chicano Civil Rights Movement made statements of their urban experiences as Chicanas/os of racism, marginalization and discrimination, thus acting out critical interventions in the politically contested urban space of Los Angeles from the early 1970s to the mid 1980s through street performances.

In conjunction with the Asco retrospective at LACMA, the Getty Foundation and the nonprofit gallery space LAXART co-sponsored a new street mural in the East Los Angeles neighborhood of City Terrace by the Chicano artist Willie Herrón, paying homage to his years in the performance group Asco. As a physical monument dependent on a heavy sense of the past, the place-specific mural titled *Asco: East of No West* transforms the physical and social environment of City Terrace, changing its public space into an official place of memory. The PST exhibition program also included so-called Mural Remix Tours, taking fine art audiences from the Fowler Museum and LACMA to Herrón’s place-specific new mural in East L.A., an unincorporated, low-income and gang-related area east of the Los Angeles River, where Latinos, Mexican Americans, and Chicanas/os make up the majority of the population. A connection was thereby established between two socio-culturally and spatially segregated contexts in the urban landscape of Los
Angeles, which entailed a re-navigation of Los Angeles’ cultural geography along class and ethnic lines by bringing people to parts of Los Angeles they would normally never go.

Although the PST exhibitions of the post-World War II era through the 1960s and 70s included groups of artists traditionally marginalized in major mainstream venues, the curators did little to contextualize the art works to the specific social circumstances of their production. Instead of elaborating potentially progressive cross-referencing curatorial strategies, the art pieces by minority artists were contextualized within a traditional framework of fine art canons by Anglo American artists. By showing art works by artists from minority groups in separate exhibitions, the seemingly race-neutral exhibition program followed a pattern along ethnic and racial lines, dividing artists into racial and ethnic groups.

The curatorial pattern of the PST project illustrates the “ethnic turn” in the mainstream fine art scene, where ethnic affirmation, identity politics and representations of various social identity categories have become mandatory ingredients in art exhibitions all over the world. Identity politics and ethnic affirmation have gradually been recognized as important social issues since the Civil Rights Movements in the 1960s and 70s. The main reasons for the rise of the Civil Rights Movements were various kinds of inequalities, discriminations and social injustices. Today these questions have fallen into the background in favor of ethnic recognition and identity politics, not only of black, brown, red and yellow people, but white people as well. Mathew Frye Jacobson for example, claims in Roots Too: White Ethnic Revival in Post-Civil Rights America, that the rise of hyphenated identities in the USA has resulted in a hyphen-nationalism, “draped in a celebratory rhetoric of diversity and inclusion”, and that this mode of American nationalism, like previous kinds of nationalism in the U.S., “is founded in large part on white primacy” and also serves “to protect that primacy” (2008: 9). In his book The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit From Identity Politics, George Lipsitz analyzes the centrality of whiteness to U.S. culture, showing how whiteness works in respect to racialized minority groups such as Native Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans, Mexican Americans, and Chicanas/os. Lipsitz argues that racism is a matter of interest among white people and that their possessive investment in whiteness always affects the individual and collective life opportunities of non-white people:

Even in cases where minority groups secure political and economic power through collective mobilization, the terms and conditions of their collectivity and the logic of group solidarity are always influenced and intensified by the absolute value of whiteness in U.S. politics, economics, and culture. (2006: 22)

Giving examples of residential segregation and urban renewal in various areas such as East Los Angeles that make minority communities such as Mexican Americans and Chicanas/os disproportionately susceptible to health hazards, Lipsitz notes that “[e]nvironmental racism makes the possessive investment in...
whiteness literally a matter of life and death” (2006: 10). Another scholar, Walter Benn Michaels, has criticized the contemporary political debate on diversity in the USA for not dealing with the problem of economic inequality. In The Trouble With Diversity: How We Learned to Love Identity and Ignore Inequality, he argues that “the trouble with diversity… is not just that it won’t solve the problem of economic inequality; it’s that it makes it hard for us even to see the problem” (2007: 172). The debate on diversity according to Michaels, “obscures political difference as well as it does economic difference. It makes it hard not only to solve the problem of inequality but even to argue … about what its solution should be” (2007: 173). Lipsitz argues that “those of us who are ‘white’” can only become “part of the solution if we recognize the degree to which we are already part of the problem – not because of our race, but because of our possessive investment in it” (2006: 22). Other scholars like Nancy Fraser, claim that measures of both recognition of social categories and the redistribution of wealth are vital dimensions for reaching social justice, but that questions of identity politics and the reduction of economical gaps need to be combined. Fraser also claims that an added third dimension of equal representation is necessary for overcoming institutional obstacles in decision-making processes (Fraser 2009).

Given the present segregation patterns of the city of Los Angeles along sociocultural lines of class and ethnicity, the inclusion of Herrón’s street mural in City Terrace and the Mural Remix Tours to East Los Angeles into the exhibition program of PST highlights power relations on the Los Angeles art scene of fine art and critical subculture, the mainstream and the marginal, center and periphery. This article analyzes the inclusion of Herrón’s site-specific mural and one of the Mural Remix Tours in the PST project with regard to these power relations. I begin with the historical framework of the Chicano Civil Rights Movement with a focus on Los Angeles, a short presentation of the performance group Asco’s street interventions in Los Angeles in the early 1970s, and a brief exhibition history of Asco up to the retrospective at LACMA in 2011 – with which Herrón’s new street mural in City Terrace and the Mural Remix Tours are interconnected.

**The Chicano Civil Rights Movement**

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, with nation-wide political mobilization and social civil rights movements, Los Angeles became a major site for political upheavals. In 1965, racial and class tensions in southeast and central Los Angeles with growing African American communities fueled the Watts Riots, the most severe riots in the city’s history until the riots of 1992. In East Los Angeles, with the largest concentration of Mexican descendants in the country, the student boycotts took place in the spring of 1968. The walkouts, known as “blowouts”, in five East Los Angeles high schools (Roosevelt, Lincoln, Wilson, Belmont, and Garfield), mobilized over 10,000 students to leave their classes in March 1968 in pro-
test against Anglo American teachers discriminating against Mexican American students, overcrowded and run-down school buildings and the highest percentage of dropouts (over 50 percent) in the nation (Muñoz 2007: 79–80). The unequal educational opportunities of Mexican Americans and Chicanas/os were evidently reflected at higher educational levels. At the University of California, for example, only one percent of the 97,000 students enrolled in 1969 were Mexican Americans and Chicanas/os (Chávez 2002: 63). In April 1968, a month after the walkouts in East Los Angeles, Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee, giving rise to national race riots, and in June that same year the president candidate Robert F Kennedy was assassinated in the Los Angeles Ambassador Hotel.

East Los Angeles with its rapidly spreading politicizing atmosphere became a primal scene for Chicano nationalism and political mobilization in the Chicano Civil Rights Movement. Compared to identity politics of ethnic groups in the U.S. that are descendants of immigrants, the politics of recognition among Chicanas/os differs as they, annexed as a group in the mid-19th century, consider themselves indigenous and reclaim a heritage that goes back in time to pre-European colonial periods and the Nahuatl-speaking Aztecs in Tenochtitlán, buried beneath the present-day Mexico City. The Nahuatl-speaking Aztecs are believed to have migrated southward from their mythical “homeland” Aztlan, located to the geographical area of northern Mexico/the U.S. Southwest. Chicanas/os in the U.S. Southwest/Aztlan are thus living in the same geographical region as their “ancestors” the Aztecs came from.

The multifaceted Chicano Civil Rights Movement expanded from a disparity of different political organizations. Some were Alianza Federal de las Mercedes (Federal Alliance of Land Grants), which aimed to regain land lost with the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe; the Texas-based La Raza Unida Party, which mobilized Mexican American and Chicana/o voters on a national level; the California-based United Farm Workers, which unionized field-workers and organizing company boycotts; and Centro de Acción Social Autónomo (CASA), which was founded as a help-organization for Mexican immigrant workers. Others were the Crusade for Justice, a Denver-based nationwide student organization, promoting Chicano cultural nationalism; the Los Angeles-based Brown Berets, fighting for educational reform and initiating the student walkouts in Los Angeles; and the Los Angeles-based Chicano Moratorium Committee, protesting against the Vietnam War with draft-age Mexican Americans and Chicanos as its main concern (Chávez 2002).

The anti-war protests in the Chicano Civil Rights Movement against U.S. involvement in Vietnam began with statistics of war causalities. At a Chicano student conference in southern California in December 1967, it was reported that out of those eligible for draft and conscripted into the army, forty-five percent were Mexican Americans compared to nineteen percent Anglo Americans, and of those killed in the war from January 1961 to February 1967, twenty percent were Mexi-
can Americans, who made up only five percent of the total population (Rosales 1997: 179). The disproportionate number of young Mexican Americans and Chicanos dying in the war, at a 3-to-1 ratio compared to Anglo Americans, made the Brown Berets join with a group of college students to mount a major campaign against the Vietnam War. In 1969 they formalized their draft resistance and anti-war alliance by creating the Chicano Moratorium committee, with the UCLA-student Rosalío Muñoz and the Brown Beret David Sánchez as co-chairs (Chávez 2002: 55).

The Chicano Moratorium organized five anti-war demonstrations in Los Angeles, the first in December 1969 with 3000 protesters (Chávez 2002: 65). The largest demonstration took place in East Los Angeles on August 29, 1970, with a march from Belvedere Park to Whittier Boulevard with more than 20,000 protesters and a subsequent rally in Laguna Park with an additional 10,000 participants. The demonstration ended in a violent riot, initiated by the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) and the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department, resulting in 158 damaged buildings of which four were completely destroyed, four hundred people arrested, an uncertain number injured, and three killed (Chávez 2002: 70). One of the killed was Rubén Salazar, the Los Angeles Times reporter and new director of the Spanish-language television station KMEX, who in public media had been reporting on actions of law-enforcement agencies and police brutality by the LAPD in East Los Angeles (Rosales 1997: 203ff). After the Chicano Moratorium riot in August 1970, the Chicano Moratorium committee organized several demonstrations in 1970–1971 against unprovoked police abuse in Los Angeles (Chávez 2002: 72ff). In September 1970, one month after the Chicano Moratorium Riot, when the Los Angeles Times reporter Rubén Salazar was killed, the park outside which the riots had taken place was renamed the Rubén Salazar Park by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors (Chávez 2002: 137, note 48).

The Conceptual Performance Group Asco

The four original members of Asco – Willie Herrón III, Patssi Valdez, Harry Gamboa, Jr., and Gronk (Glugio Gronk Nicandro) – met in the late 1960s while students at Garfield High School, where 2000 students evacuated their classes during the walkouts in the spring of 1968. Gamboa later recalled that “the environment there was so violent that it was almost like absurdist theatre”, and that “the police came on campus and beat the shit out of kids” (Gamboa quoted in Noriega 2010: 3). The racist attitudes of the teachers at Garfield High School were later remembered by Valdez:

I had this homemaking class, and the teacher used to make the most ridiculous statements in class. She would say, “well you little Mexicans, you better do well in this class for one day you’ll all be cooking and cleaning for other people.” And I
used to think: What! This lady is nuts! I’m not going to cook for anybody! (Valdez 2010)

In the early 1970s they began collaborating on various kinds of visual art projects, taking Asco as a group name, the Spanish word for disgust or nausea with an impulse to vomit. This signification refers to a general feeling that the effects of the Vietnam War gave them. Gronk explains:

the serious side of it was that a lot of our friends were coming back in body bags and were dying, and we were seeing a whole generation come back that weren’t alive anymore. And in a sense that gave us nausea – or “nauseous.” And that is ASCO, in a way. It was like, God, our generation is getting wiped out. (Gronk quoted in Rangel 1997)

The signification of asco also refers to reactions by the audience in some of their early exhibitions, when they according to Herrón showed their “worst works” (Herrón 2010). Gamboa has said, “The name Asco … came from people’s reactions to us personally … [and] to the quality of the work which dealt with violence and themes of depression… . [E]veryone thought it was the name of the group, and we decided to adopt it” (quotation in Chavoya & Gonzalez 2011a: 41–42). Their main visual tool was their own bodies, using posture, body language, gestures, facial expressions, fashion, make-up, and attitude. With the inclusion of melodramatic, ironic and often humorous elements in carefully planned street performances, street actions and staged indoor and outdoor scenes, they made statements about their urban experiences of racism, discrimination, marginalization and visual stereotypes of Chicanas/os in mainstream media. As Valdez later recalled: “You would look at the television and you would never see yourself there, and if you did, you were a cholo or a chola, and you were like: Where am I in this picture? I don’t exist anywhere!” (Valdez 2010).3

Asco’s street interventions throughout the city of Los Angeles were partially documented in black-and-white and color photographs by Gamboa, who in 1972 decided to document their street performances and street actions to make sure that they could be presented elsewhere and reach a broader audience (Gamboa 2010). Some of their staged in-door and out-door scenes were explicitly performed for the camera, with the photographs distributed as correspondence pieces. This mail art include the No Mural-series, with photographs of street performances such as Walking Mural (1972), Instant Mural (1974) and Asshole Mural (1975), and their No Movies-series, with film stills from fictive Chicano Movies that were never intended to be produced, and that comprise No Movie awards, No Movie stars and No Movies scripts. About their choice of visual strategies, Gronk explains: “Coming out of a sense of poverty, we used whatever was available. … We went out and did things and we used hit-and-run tactics. We didn’t ask for permission to do any of our products” (Gronk 2010). With limited access to commercial galleries and mainstream museum exhibitions they turned to the streets, addressing their urban social circumstances with people in their immediate surrounding as their
main audience. As Valdez later explained: “No gallery was gonna call us up and say ‘we’re giving you a show.’ And we didn’t wait around for that. We didn’t sit around and complain. We took action. We made it happen” (Valdez 2010). From the early 1970s and up to the mid-1980s, more than forty-five other artists joined Asco in various collaborative activities, some for longer periods, others for one single project (Chavoya & Gonzalez 2011a: 39). The last Asco work with its four core members was a staged performance called Death of Fashion at Self Help Graphics & Art in East L.A. for Agnés Warda’s film Mur murs in 1980 (Gamboa 1998: 85). According to Gamboa, Asco ceased to exist as a “functioning” group during a “misperformance” at the Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (LACE) on March 28, 1987 (1998: 86).

Asco’s street art was executed from the political framework of the Chicano Civil Rights Movement, while maintaining a critical distance to essentialist notions of a Mexican heritage. On this ideological strategy, Marco Sanchez-Tranquilino notes:

They seemed at odds, therefore, not only with the agencies of a dominant Anglo culture, but also with those Chicano artists and historians whose sense of cultural identity sprang from the fountainhead of nationalist cultural metaphors – pre-Columbian themes, the iconography of the Mexican Revolution, and the relics of the imagery of an adapted Roman Catholicism – rather than from the exhilaration of cultural cross-dressing” (1996b, 105).

Herrón and Gronk also painted street murals in the 1970s, individually or in collaboration, adopting a hybrid aesthetic strategy for style, composition, figures and manner of execution (Benavidez 2007). As the street performances by Asco, the street murals by Herrón and Gronk were inspired by the political framework of the Chicano Civil Rights Movement, while maintaining a critical distance to both essentialist notions of a Mexican heritage and to visual stereotypes in Chicana/o muralism of the 1960s and 70s. Gronk has explained that instead of going back in Mexican history for subject matter, “we wanted to stay in the present and find our imagery as urban artists and produce a body of work out of our sense of displacement” (Gronk quoted in Burnham 1987: 408). In the street murals by Herrón, existing gang graffiti on the walls were always incorporated as part of the imagery. Herrón explains: “I embraced graffiti and graffiti became part of my work because I respected the voice of the community. And I added to their voice. I didn’t get rid of their voice and say, ‘My voice is superior.’” (Herrón quoted in Rangel 2000). By incorporating graffiti, Herrón initiated according to Sanchez-Tranquilino “a critical thinking of graffiti as solely signifying vandalism which in turn has led to a deeper understanding of the relationship between so-called Chicano graffiti and Chicano murals” (1996a: 97). Valdez on the other hand has said that during the time she was involved in Asco she didn’t feel connected to the visual work that came out of Los Angeles and her peers there (Rangel 1999). In the mid 1980s, she confessed: “I hated murals. I was sick of them. / ../I didn’t care what they were
trying to say politically. I just wanted to get rid of these terrible images” (Valdez quoted in Burnham 1987: 408).

Asco’s Street Interventions in the Early 1970s

The new mural by Willie Herron commissioned for the PST curating project pays homage to his years in the performance group Asco, who acted out five interrelated street interventions in Los Angeles in the early 1970s. Four of these were carried out on Whittier Boulevard in East L.A., and three on Christmas Eve when the streets were crowded with pedestrians and Christmas shoppers (Gamboa 1998: 76–80). The first, Stations of the Cross (1971), was carried out without Patssi Valdez as an anti-war statement and protest against the disproportionate number of Mexican Americans and Chicanos dying in the Vietnam War. Herrón, carrying a painted cardboard cross and with a skeleton makeup, represented Christ. Gamboa, with his face painted white, was a zombie/altar boy, and Gronk, carrying a bag of unbuttered popcorn, was a Pontius Pilate/Popcorn-figure. The last station in the procession along Whittier Boulevard was in front of the U.S. Marine induction center at Goodrich Boulevard, where they held a five-minute vigil, left the cross blocking the office’s door, and blessed everything with fistfuls of popcorn. Gamboa later stated in a videotaped interview: “So for that particular day, there would be no more Chicanos joining the Marines and going off to Vietnam” (Gamboa 2010). Gronk made a similar statement: “the end of the procession was an induction center for the Marines, and we put the cross up against the building and threw all of our objects that we carried with us, sort of blockading the entrance of the induction center so that no more Chicanos could be inducted that day at least” (Gronk quoted in Rangel 1997).

Their second street intervention Walking Mural (1972) was carried out as an action bringing back the Christmas parades on Whittier Boulevard, since the Christmas parades had been cancelled after the Chicano Moratorium riots in August 1970 by the civic leaders and business owners (Romo 2011: 276). Gronk, dressed in layers of green chiffon with the Christmas tree bulbs hanging on him, was a Christmas tree. Valdez, holding red roses in her hands and wearing a black glittered outfit with platform shoes, an open-mouthed tinfoil skull and two small angels wings on her back, represented the Mexican Virgen de Guadalupe (Valdez 2010). Herrón, who had decided to take muralism a step further and wear the mural himself as a “Walking Mural of lost/forgotten souls,” was carrying a mixed media piece with Mexican masks and pre-Columbian heads made of painted and sculpted paper (Herrón quoted in Knight 2011). Gamboa, who had decided to document the procession along Whittier Boulevard to make sure that it could be presented elsewhere and reach a broader audience, later described Herrón’s staging as “a mural that had become bored with its environment and left” (1998: 79).
The hit-and-run-action *Spray Paint at LACMA / Project Pie in De/Face* (1972) was the first Asco intervention staged outside East Los Angeles, executed as a protest against institutional discrimination at LACMA; forty years prior the Asco retrospective at LACMA. Its pre-history was a visit to LACMA by Gamboa in December 1972. As Gamboa later recalled, he had asked one of the curators why the museum never exhibited art by a Chicano artist, and the curator had replied: “Chicanos they don’t do art, you know, they’re in gangs” (Gamboa 2010). In response to this prejudiced and paternalistic answer, Gamboa returned with Herrón and Gronk after the museum had closed and tagged the museum entryways with their graffiti-styled names. Herrón further emphasized a gang-related affinity by applying a typeface typical of gang graffiti in East Los Angeles (see Chastanet 2009). Street graffiti is a social expression that at the time was primarily carried out by male youths, and Valdez later recalled that she was not included in the act of tagging LACMA since the male members in the group didn’t expect her to be able to run fast enough if they were to be chased by the police (Valdez 2010). Instead Gamboa and Valdez returned the next day before the museum walls were whitewashed and Gamboa documented Valdez standing beside the graffiti style signatures by the male members of Asco in photographs. Gamboa explains that with their signatures on the museum walls they “momentarily transformed the museum itself into the first conceptual work of Chicano art to be exhibited at LACMA”, claiming the museum and its contents as a signature ready-made (1998: 79). Sanchez-Tranquilino notes that their signatures on LACMA is a “calligraphic gesture that … mocked itself: marking, in the gap between signature and placa, its own impossibility, at the site of an institution that had already marked their work and that of contemporary Chicano artists as Other, ‘outside’” (1996b, 104). With the LACMA exhibition of the Chicano group Los Four two years later, art by Chicana/o artists were exhibited inside the museum for the first time. The Los Four exhibition at LACMA in 1974 has in retrospect has been declared “the fist Chicano art exhibition in a mainstream venue” (Museum of Latin American Art 2011: 126). Gronk later recalled that at this exhibition, they “crashed the opening reception of the Los Four exhibition at LACMA”, when each “member of Asco was victimized by anonymous gossip, and each experienced at least one episode of police abuse” (1998: 79). Gronk was the first Chicano artist to have a solo show at LACMA with the exhibition *¡Gronk! A Living Survey, 1973–1993*, organized by René Yañez. Gronk later reflected on this irony and his inclusion in the exhibition of a work referring to Asco’s hit-and-run-action *Spray Paint at LACMA / Project Pie in De/Face* (1972) twenty years earlier:

I think for me, I guess, the interesting thing is twenty years later to be on the inside of the L.A. County Museum and doing a piece, sort of a reference to it, called *Project Pie in Deface*, with using actually a defacement of a clay facial mask that’s slapped onto a wall that I paint. It’s sort of defacing on the inside of the museum, and I doubt very much if they understood or got it – or want to get it or understand it”. (Gronk quoted in Benavidez 2007: 48)
Of Asco’s five interrelated street interventions in Los Angeles in the early 1970s, the fourth, *First Supper (After a Major Riot)* (1974), was carried out on a traffic island at the corner of Whittier Boulevard and Arizona Street where a police shooting had taken place during the Chicano Moratorium in August 1970. Executed as a ritual sit-down meal in the midst of rush-hour-traffic on Christmas Eve and borrowing Catholic iconography from the Mexican celebration of Día de los Muertos (Gamboa 1998: 80), *First Supper* reclaimed the area in symbolic memorial of the Chicano Moratorium riot in August 1970 and in protest to police violence. With *Instant Mural* (1974), the fifth of these interrelated street interventions by Asco, Gronk took muralism a step further, just as Herrón had done with *Walking Mural* in 1972. *Instant Mural* refers back to their intervention in public space with *Spray Paint at LACMA / Project Pie in De/Face* (1972). In *Instant Mural*, Gronk ‘tagged’ Patssi Valdez and Humberto Sandoval on a wall by taping their bodies with crisscrossing strands of low-tack masking tape to the exterior wall of a liquor store at the corner of Whittier Boulevard and Arizona Avenue (Gamboa 1998: 80). After an hour of entrapment, when several passersby had offered Valdez and Sandoval help, they simply walked away from their visually locked position. According to Gamboa, Asco’s street intervention *Instant Mural* “challenged the fragility of social control” (1998: 80). With Valdez and Sandoval leaving the symbolic frame of the mural and simply walking away, *Instant Mural* at the same time deliver a message of ‘moving on’ and seeking change, both of static social patterns and Chicana/o muralism of the 1970s.

**Brief Exhibition History of Asco**

Parallel with their activities in Asco, the four original members were practicing their individual art, and after Asco dissolved in the mid-1980s they remained practicing artists and have developed their individual careers: Valdez with painting, drawing and prints, Gronk with sculpture, painting and scenography, Gamboa as photographer, writer and multimedia artist, and Herrón with mural painting, prints, lead singer in the punk band *Los Illegals*, and co-owner of a commercial design studio. Working in both the periphery of the city of Los Angeles and its art scene, the exhibition history of Asco record regular exhibitions in mainly Chicana/o- or Mexican American-related centers and galleries, sometimes several in one and the same year (Chavoya & Gonzalez 2011c). The first documented exhibition is *Ahora lo Veras* at the Mechicano Art Center in East L.A. in 1972, with mixed-media works by Herrón, Gamboa and Gronk. In 1973, the year they adopted Asco as their group name (Gamboa 1998: 79), they held an exhibition at the Student Union Gallery of California State University in Long Beach, titled *Da me Asco*, meaning ‘to me it gives disgust’ or ‘it makes me puke’. The following year (1974), they held an exhibition titled *Asco* at Self-Help Graphics in East L.A. In 1975 there was an exhibition titled *Chicanismo en el Arte* held at LACMA that
included individual works by Herrón and Valdez. In this exhibition, three years after Asco’s tagging of the exterior walls of LACMA, Valdez hung her aerosol sprayed paintings on the interior walls of the museum.

From the 1980s and on Chicana/o issues were gradually recognized by the mainstream Anglo American society. The first large Chicano exhibition, Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation, 1965–1985, organized by the Wight Art Gallery at UCLA, toured the country 1990–1993. Ten years later, a second large Chicano exhibition toured the country, Just Another Poster?: Chicano Graphic Arts in California (2000–2003), organized by the University Art Museum of the University of California in Santa Barbara. In both of these exhibitions, Asco as a group and its individual members were represented. In 2008 there was a third large touring exhibition, Phantom Sightings: Art after the Chicano Movement, organized by LACMA. This exhibition that also toured in Mexico, included several of Gamboa’s photographs of Asco’s street interventions, such as Walking Mural (1972), Instant Mural (1974), The Gores (1974), Asshole Mural (1975) and Decoy Gang War Victim (1975) (Gonzalez, Fox and Noriega 2008). Gamboa’s documentation of Asco’s hit-and-run-action at LACMA, however, known through the distribution of his photographs referred to as Spray Paint at LACMA / Project Pie in De/Face (1972), were not included in this exhibition organized by LACMA. In 1983, Gamboa’s photographs of Asco’s street performances had been included in the exhibitions A Través de la Frontera at UNAM (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México) in Mexico City. In 2006, Asco was represented in an exhibition at Centre Pompidou in Paris with a title reminiscent of the PST project, Los Angeles, 1955–1985: Birth of an Art Capital (Chavoya & Gonzalez 2011c: 424). In 2011, the same year as the Asco retrospective at LACMA, they were included in the exhibition Crisisss [sic] América Latina: Arte y Confrontación, 1910–2010 at the prestigious Bellas Artes in Mexico City.

The exhibition history of both Asco as a group and its individual members reveals a slow but successive inclusion in the mainstream fine art scenes nationally and abroad. The regularity by which the visual activity of Asco in Los Angeles has been exhibited in Chicana/o- and Mexican American-related galleries over the years justifies their presence in the PST exhibition program documenting the “birth of the L.A. art scene”. Asco and/or its individual members were represented in four thematic PST exhibitions. The presence of Asco in large Chicana/o exhibitions touring the country in combination with their presence in exhibitions at major art institutions in Mexico and France and at LACMA in 1975, 1993 and 2008, paved the way for the large retrospective at LACMA in 2011, the first solo exhibition of Asco at a mainstream art museum in the U.S. The Asco retrospective occupied six galleries on the second level of the Broad Contemporary Art Museum in the LACMA complex and was organized in a linear chronology, exhibiting Gamboa’s photographs of staged scenes and street performances by Asco, video recordings of interviews with its four original members, clothes and outfits from a
number of staged enactments, drawings, documentary photographs and various kinds of paraphernalia, such as gallery invitations.

Several reviews of the PST exhibitions were negative. The independent curator and writer Lucia Sanromán criticized the Mexican American and Chicano exhibitions in the PST program for being “a marketing campaign in which the city of Los Angeles, its culture and spirit of youthful insouciance, its previously consistently vilified urbanism, and even its minorities are celebrated and presented to the world for enjoyment and consumption” (2012: 79). Sanromán also questioned the presentation of documentary photographs as art objects and the problematic display of archival material in an art museum, which she claims “objectify the archive and consecrate Asco’s powerful, anarchic, and countercultural gestures, recasting them as ‘contemporary art’ and reducing their potency of embodying a radical alternative to accepted conventions in Chicano and Anglo society” (2012: 82). Connie Butler, chief curator at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, criticized the installation design of the Asco retrospect for being “too sprawling, with too many documentary photos spread too evenly through too large a space” (2012: 49).

To the Asco retrospect at LACMA the museum produced a 432-page catalogue with nineteen essays written by renowned scholars and critics, hundreds of reproduced photographs of works by Asco and its individual members, and seven reprinted articles about Asco from various magazines. Asco’s art activity is thoroughly investigated from a range of different angels in the impressive catalogue, which unfortunately lacks an index. Some of the essays are versions of previously published texts, and five were written by the co-curators and catalogue editors C. Ondine Chavoya and Rita Gonzalez, who note in the introduction essay that the ephemeral, immaterial and ‘live art’ of Asco “frustrates the archive and collecting practices of art institutions and the art market” (Chavoya & Gonzalez 2011b: 19).

In one essay written from an art historical perspective, Tere Romo declares the staging by Valdez’ of the Mexican Virgen de Guadalupe in Walking Mural (1972), as “the first significant artistic reinterpretation of the Virgin de Guadalupe in the United States and Latin America, as well as within Chicano art” (Romo 2011: 282). A general focus is the archival collections of Asco, their ‘science fiction fantasies’, and Asco’s avant-garde and glam-rock aesthetics in relation to the contemporary Anglo American fine art scene in the 1970s and 1980s. While attention is paid to the political framework of the Chicano Civil Rights Movement and the critical departures of Asco’s visual activity, the significance of their material, urban sociocultural circumstances as Chicanas/os in East Los Angeles, with poverty, police violence, racism and discrimination, have tended to fall into the background.
The New Street Mural by Willie Herrón

The new street mural *Asco: East of No West* by Willie Herrón was scheduled for completion in late October 2011 in the alley behind City Terrace Drive. Paying homage to his years in the performance group Asco, the subtitle of the mural refers to the early activities of the four original members of Asco in the alley behind City Terrace Drive, since it was here, in the garage of Herrón’s mother, when the garage was not occupied by gang members, that Herrón, Valdez, Gamboa and Gronk started working with their collaborative visual projects (Herrón 2010). In a videotaped presentation of the mural, Herrón explains: “for me it seemed as a good title to stick with because of where a lot of that energy came from, just always feeling like we only know the east side, and the west side doesn’t know of us” (LACMA webpage). The east-west relationship Herrón refers to in the mural’s title is further accentuated by the physical location of the mural, painted high up on an exterior wall in the alley behind City Terrace Drive and facing the freeway system, the inner city of Los Angeles, and further on, Hollywood. Thus, the mural creates a multi-layered vectored relationship between its geographical location in City Terrace and the inner city fine art region of its commission, referring to both (Figure 1).

![Image of the mural](image_url)

Figure 1. Willie Herrón’s mural *Asco: East of No West* (2011) in the alley behind City Terrace Drive.

Photo: Eva Zetterman. © Eva Zetterman.
The mural *Asco: East of No West* (2011) is painted in black-and-white and based on a black-and-white silver-gelatin photograph by Gamboa, not of the actual street performance *Walking Mural* (1972), as claimed in PST announcements, but from the performance with a staged group-portrait of Valdez, Herrón, and Gronk standing in frozen positions in front of an unidentified wall. Modeled on a photograph from a street performance by Asco in 1972, the mural triggers visual memory and establishes a contact with Asco’s interrelated street interventions from the early 1970s. On these references to Asco’s non-material ‘live’ artwork, Herrón explains: “It seemed proper and appropriate to bring that concept full circle and now actually create a mural from a photo of a non-mural, which was entitled at the time *Walking Mural* – and that was my character, I was the walking mural” (Herrón 2011). This ephemeral non-material character of Asco’s critical street interventions in the 1970s is with the mural *Asco: East of No West* given permanent visibility by being transformed into one single and materially permanent object. The transformation of the visual memory of Asco is an act of remembering that has been described in *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*, as “always in and of the present, while its referent is of the past and thus absent” (Huyssen 2003: 3).

The narrative and conceptual trajectories of the mural *Asco: East of No West* activate the immaterial and ephemeral character of Asco’s body of work. The medium on the other hand situates the new mural within the body of work by Willie Herrón as a mural artist. A direct visual connection between his new and previous murals is established with the *Moratorium: The Black and White Mural* (1973) that is also painted in black-and-white and based on black-and-white photographs. This mural was executed by Herrón together with Gronk in the housing projects of Estrada Courts and carried out as a memorial to the Chicano Moratorium riots in August 1970 that took place not far from the location of the mural. A general and specific quality of Chicana/o street murals is the engagement of the murals with their environment. This site specific quality with a dialectic dialogue between imagery, subject matter, representation and the locality of execution, creates a spatial connection between the new mural and Herrón’s previous murals throughout East Los Angeles in the neighborhoods of Estrada Courts, Boyle Heights, Ramona Gardens and City Terrace (for murals by Herrón see Dunitz 1998). The geographic location of Herrón’s new mural in the neighborhood of City Terrace brings about an immediate spatial connection to his previous murals around the same block, a point that became obvious during Herrón’s guided tour in the Mural Remix Tour.

**The Mural Remix Tour**

In October 2011, Willie Herrón toured a group of PST staff members to see his new mural in the alley behind City Terrace Drive. On this occasion, Herrón re-
ceived an announcement of his contribution to the Chicano community and to Chicana/o art in Los Angeles by the Los Angeles County Supervisor Gloria Molina, who was in the alley to dedicate the site (Heibel 2011). This tour was followed by two later free-of-charge Mural Remix Tours for art audiences to the PST exhibition program. A first Mural Remix Tour, co-sponsored by LACMA and the UCLA’s Chicano Studies Research Center, was organized in November 2011. To book a ticket to this Mural Remix Tour you had to sign up for a seat through the LACMA website and the tour was quickly booked. A second Mural Remix Tour was held in conjunction with a Performance and Public Art Festival in January 2012. This tour was co-organized by LACMA, the Chicano Studies Research Center at UCLA, and the Fowler Museum at UCLA, and co-sponsored by the Getty Foundation and the nonprofit gallery space LAXART.

I participated in the first Mural Remix Tour in November 2011, a one-day bus tour that according to the Fowler Museum webpage, “Cruise through history and journey through East Los Angeles… highlighting the influential Chicano Art Collective Asco”. This Mural Remix Tour started in the morning at the Fowler Museum on the UCLA north campus, where we were given a guided tour of the PST exhibition Mapping Another L.A.: The Chicano Art Movement by its co-curator Pilar Tompkins Rivas. After leaving the Fowler Museum, we were transported in a chartered air-conditioned bus from the UCLA north campus to LACMA in the Wilshire district. Several of the participants in this Mural Remix Tour, like the elegant woman sitting next to me in the bus, a former high fashion model now living in Malibu, were paying members of LACMA with first-hand access to these kinds of events through their membership. At LACMA, Ondine Chavoya, one of the co-curators to the PST exhibition Asco: Elite of the Obscure, gave us a guided tour of the Asco retrospective. After lunch in the LACMA restaurant, we entered the air-conditioned bus again for our final destination, City Terrace Drive in East L.A. The bus left the LACMA complex on Wilshire Boulevard and slowly cruised through the heavy traffic along Fairfax Avenue, heading towards Rosa Parks Freeway and further transportation along the freeway system through the East Los Angeles area to the neighborhood of City Terrace. Leaving the freeway system and driving along City Terrace Drive, the bus finally stopped in a narrow street beside the alley, where the PST commissioned new mural by Herrón is located. Herrón was standing in the alley awaiting our arrival. When the passengers in the chartered bus had gathered around him, he started explaining his family’s ties to the alley where he grew up and his connection to the building on which Asco: East of No West is painted (Figure 2).
After this brief introduction to the site-specific context of his personal background, Herrón gave us a guided tour of his previous street murals around the block, including *Quetzalcoatl: The Plumed Serpent* (1972), *The Wall that Cracked Open* (1972) and *The Sorrow of Hidalgo* (1976). The tour around the block also included a stop in front of a wall on which Herrón in 1971 had painted aerosol-sprayed portraits and incorporated existing gang graffiti, but that since had been white-washed and painted over with a non-political and neutral decorative pattern. Each mural around the block has a specific pre-history. The well-known *The Wall that Cracked Open* (1972) for example, was painted as a memorial of when Herrón’s brother was lethally stabbed in a gang-related attack but survived. During his guided tour around the block, standing in front of each mural and explaining its pre-history and subject matter, Herrón repeatedly held up the exhibition catalogue from the ongoing Asco retrospective at LACMA, showing the page with a reproduced photograph of each mural (Figure 3).
In the guided tour around the block in City Terrace, Herrón also incorporated a middle-aged man, who as a young local Chicano had been captured standing in front of the mural *The Sorrow of Hidalgo* (1976) in a black-and-white photograph from 1978 by Roger Minick, which was included in the exhibition catalogue. This man joined the group when the Mural Remix Tour arrived in the alley and during the stop in front of the Hidalgo mural, Herrón held up the catalogue, showing the photograph by Roger Minick with the man as a young Chicano while verbally referring to the physical presence of this man standing right next to him. The tour ended with a stop in front of the new mural *Asco: East of No West.* At street level, before climbing the construction set in front of the wall, Herrón held up the exhibition catalogue showing the reproduced photograph by Harry Gamboa from the Asco street performance *Walking Mural* (1972), with Patssi Valdez, Gronk, and himself, standing in front of an unidentified wall (Figure 4). Having climbed the construction set and standing beside the mural explaining its subject matter, he held up the exhibition catalogue again, showing Gamboa’s reproduced photograph that the new mural is based on (Figure 5).
Figure 4. Willie Herrón showing the reproduced black-and-white photograph by Harry Gamboa from the Asco performance *Walking Mural* (1972).
Photo: Eva Zetterman. © Eva Zetterman.

Figure 5. Willie Herrón showing the reproduced photograph from the Asco performance *Walking Mural* (1972) that the mural *Asco: East of No West* (2011) on the wall beside him is based.
Photo: Eva Zetterman. © Eva Zetterman.
During his guided tour around the block in City Terrace, Herrón maintained a position where he situated himself as a Chicano in the presence of an inner city Anglo American fine art audience visiting a Mexican American and Chicana/o neighborhood in East L.A, maybe for the first time. As an experienced performance artist with professional and pedagogical skills in collaborating with groups of listeners/spectators, he managed to create a mental bridge for the visiting group that opened up for interpretations of his murals that were based on understanding and sympathy with the specific sociocultural circumstances of being Chicanas/os. The key element that Herrón applied to enable Anglo American listeners/spectators to apprehend and even relate to the subject matter of his murals in their actual location in East L.A., was through the exhibition catalogue from the Asco retrospective at LACMA. By incorporating the exhibition catalogue in his guided tour, the reproduced murals by Herrón as art images in the exhibition catalogue from the fine art context of LACMA became contextualized as art images in their actual geographic location in City Terrace. A connection was thereby established between two socio-culturally and spatially segregated contexts in the urban landscape of Los Angeles, the economically affluent and Anglo American high-status midtown-area of the Wilshire District, and the economically disadvantaged and unincorporated low-status Chicana/o-Mexican American area of City Terrace in East L.A. The art historical significance of Herrón’s murals and the appearance of Asco in a mainstream museum art show, physically materialized by the LACMA catalogue, simultaneously opened up a re-navigation of Los Angeles’s cultural geography along class and ethnic lines by bringing the visitors in the Mural Remix Tour to parts of Los Angeles that they would normally never visit.

**Power Relations on the Los Angeles Art Scene**

The Los Angeles art scene is a structured social space where it is decided what is art and what is not; what sociologist Pierre Bourdieu has described as an autonomous field with its own rules (Bourdieu 1996). During the rise of Asco in the early 1970s, the art scene in Los Angeles had an identity that the historian Sarah Schrank describes as “white and male” and “without a historical context or an obviously critical perspective” (2009: 132, 134). Since the Civil Rights Movements in the 1960s, art monuments that represent a more diverse demographic pattern in the city of Los Angeles have been added to its official map of historical landmarks, such as the Watts Tower (1921–1954) in South East L.A., the over eighty murals in the Estrada Courts housing projects (1973–1978) in East L.A., of which the Moratorium: The Black and White Mural (1973) by Herrón and Gronk is one, and the huge mural project The Great Wall of Los Angeles (1974–1978) by Judy Baca in the San Fernando Valley (Schrank 2009). Even though the Chicano Movement has ceased as a Civil Rights Movement, its legacies have been de-
clared manifest in several different areas, such as identity politics, workplace defense, intellectual traditions, popular culture and visual arts (Rosales 1997: 250). The inclusion in the PST project of six exhibitions with Mexican American and Chicana/o artists of which the Asco retrospect was one, Herrón’s new street mural in City Terrace and the Mural Remix Tours are example of such legacies. Herrón’s site-specific new mural in City Terrace has, through the fine art authorization of the PST project, officially been added to the civic map of public art monument in Los Angeles. The inclusion of Herrón’s new mural and its interaction with Herrón’s previous murals around the same block, as well as other site-specific Chicana/o street murals throughout East Los Angeles, add to a symbolic remapping of the official L.A. map of historical landmarks.

In regard to site-specific artworks, art historian Miwon Kwon claims that “site-specific art can lead to the unearthing of repressed histories, provide support for greater visibility of marginalized groups and issues, and initiate the re(dis)covery of ‘minor’ places so far ignored by the dominant culture” (Kwon 2000: 55). But as Kwon also argues:

inasmuch as the current socioeconomic order thrives on the (artificial) production and (mass) consumption of difference (for difference’s sake), the siting of art in “real” places can also be a means to extract the social and historical dimensions out of places to variously serve the thematic drive of an artist, satisfy institutional demographic profiles, or fulfill the fiscal needs of a city. (Kwon 2000: 55)

Both these perspectives of site-specific art that Kwon reflects on apply to Herrón’s new mural in City Terrace. On one hand, the mural gives visibility to Herrón as a Chicano mural painter, to his previous murals around the same block, to Asco’s critical street interventions in the politically contested urban space of Los Angeles, to the Chicano Civil Rights Movement and to the unincorporated City Terrace area east of Los Angeles River, where Latinos, Mexican Americans and Chicanas/os make up the majority of the population. On the other hand, the ideological and political significations of the mural’s subject matter, representation, medium and physical location are reduced when commissioned, co-sponsored and executed within the Getty funded PST project. The political and social circumstances of Herrón’s previous murals throughout East Los Angeles and around the same block stand in contrast to the specific circumstances of the new mural. As aesthetic art objects they become a spectacle. The critical dimensions of Asco’s political street interventions referred to by the new mural are also extracted when relocated to the mainstream fine art context of the PST project. Through a change of context, the Mural Remix Tour with an inner city Anglo American fine art audience in the disadvantaged neighborhood of City Terrace is turned into a voyeuristic enterprise of ethnically based class differences. As Walter Benn Michaels claims, such changes of contexts “denies the relevance of class inequality” and “overcoming an obstacle, the obstacle of being working class or poor” (2007: 201). And this denial of socioeconomic circumstances leads accord-
ing to Michaels to a twisted reception: “Where you used to just distract yourself from economic difference by focusing on cultural difference, now you can celebrate economic difference by pretending that it is cultural difference” (2007: 201).

To summarize, the transformation through the PST curating project of critical and marginal Chicana/o subculture into mainstream fine art was brought about through radical changes of contexts. These changes of sociocultural, political and historical contexts neutralize the critical dimensions of both Herrón’s new street mural and the street interventions by Asco to which the mural refers. The Mural Remix Tour with the corporeal relocation of a fine art audience by a geographical transportation in the urban space of Los Angeles from west to east – from the Wilshire district in the center to East L.A. in the periphery – relied heavily on taking place within the fine art context of the PST event, since it is this mainstream fine art context that designates what is fine art and considered acceptable on the official map of public art monuments. The geographical relocation of an inner city fine art audience to the unincorporated, low-income and gang-related area of East L.A. was also highly dependent on the significance of the passing of time, thus creating a historical distance to the politically tense environment of East Los Angeles in the early 1970s, characterized by violence, police brutality, anti-war protests and political mobilization in the Chicano Civil Rights Movement. Herrón’s new street mural Asco: East of No West (2011) draws greatly on an Anglo American fine art context, and in this context, the mural becomes a complement to Anglo American fine art where it represents diversity. Situated on the civic map of Los Angeles as an officially accepted art historical monument, the mural Asco: East of No West in City Terrace is not only a lasting memory of Asco’s critical interventions in the 1970s against racism, marginalization and discrimination. By its geographic location on the urban map of Los Angeles it also becomes a permanent reminder of the segregation patterns in the geography of Los Angeles that still exist.

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Notes
1 Of different etymological explanations of the term Chicano, one is the reference chica patas by the Mexican American middle classes to lower classes or new arrivals from Mexico, another is the ancient Nahuatl word mexicano with the ‘x’ pronounced as a ‘shh’ sound (Rosales...
1997: 252, 261). When the term Chicano was taken up in the Chicano Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s it was to signify political awareness of and resistance to discriminating structures based on race and ethnicity, coupled with a struggle for affirmation, empowerment, and representation, the latter factual and corporeal as well as visual. An acclaimed self-identity as Chicana or Chicano is thereby an identity by choice, not by birth.


Cholo and chola refer to male and female participants in Chicana/o youth-gang culture.


References


Verlag; Williamstown: Williams College Museum of Art; Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 424–425.


Abstract

Through the integrated framework of participation theory and political economy, this article analyzes participatory opportunities in the virtual world Habbo Hotel, and how participation is constrained and framed by the producer’s commercial strategies, which are based on advertising and sales of virtual goods. The study also looks into the ways in which the producer Sulake Corporation discursively represents the virtual world, and how the users with various forms of tactics try to bypass the commercial constraints. The methods used include observations of the English and Swedish language versions of Habbo Hotel, document analysis, and an interview with one designer employed by Sulake. The results show how participation in this virtual world takes minimalist forms, and that it is foremost an arena for interaction and consumption. Users’ participation in the virtual world is constrained by the commercial strategies in numerous ways, and the producer strategically takes advantage of children’s need to gain status in their peer group, in order to get them to purchase on the site. Habbo Hotel is represented by the producer as a safe and creative environment with learning opportunities for the children. Observations of the virtual world instead reveal Habbo as a panopticon-like shopping mall where users, through the practice of begging and other tactics, try to resist the commercial strategies. Virtual worlds could be potential spaces for children’s participation and contribute to a democratization of the social; however, this study shows how participation in this virtual world is clearly structured and limited for commercial purposes.

Keywords: Participation, political economy, virtual worlds, children, Habbo Hotel, advertising, virtual goods, tactics
Introduction

Children’s internet usage has steadily increased during the last years (Findahl 2013: 40; Statens medieråd 2013: 19-20), and one popular activity on the internet is to engage in virtual worlds where children can adopt their own avatar, play games, and interact with other users (Statens medieråd 2013: 42). Virtual worlds function both as spaces for children’s socialization and entertainment, and as arenas where corporations try to make profits from children’s engagement online through advertising and sales of virtual goods. Virtual worlds aimed at children have been described as “the latest commercialization of children’s culture” (Wasko 2010), and are also seen as constituting one important part of “the new digital marketing ecosystem” (Montgomery 2012). Research on these online spaces is still under-developed (Buckingham 2013), and the focus has mainly been on literacy practices and learning (e.g. Marsh 2011; Marsh 2014; Black 2010; Merchant 2010). Little attention has been paid to political economy perspectives and commercial strategies employed in virtual worlds. Wasko (2010) states that: “the political economic factors involved in this area are often underplayed or ignored by academic researchers,” and continues: “it is necessary to incorporate forms of critical political economic analysis, especially for new products and media forms that have incorporated marketing and advertising strategies targeted at children” (ibid.: 113). In a study of the virtual worlds Neopets and Webkinz, Wasko (2010) concludes that these platforms are attractive due to their interactive and participatory characteristics, and that they, at the same time, reinforce consumer ideology and “naturalize the commercial process that is at the core of advanced capitalism” (ibid.: 127). Like Wasko (2010), Livingstone and Drotner (2011) maintain that children’s media needs to be analyzed from the perspective of political economy in order “to judge how far children’s culture is being transformed into promotional culture” (Livingstone & Drotner 2011: 409).

The present article argues, in line with Wasko (2010) and Livingstone and Drotner (2011), that research must pay more attention to the commercial dimensions of children’s media in general and virtual worlds in particular. In addition to this, the article also argues that it is important to analyze what participatory opportunities are provided in these online worlds, and how the producer’s commercial strategies frame and constrain participation. Consequently, this article combines a political economy perspective with participation theory in a case study of the virtual world Habbo Hotel, in order to better understand children’s virtual worlds both as (potential) sites for participatory opportunities, and as sites for marketing strategies which aim at steering participation towards purchases of virtual goods.

The main question posed is: What participatory opportunities are provided to users in Habbo Hotel, and how is participation constrained and framed by the producer’s commercial strategies? This is combined with a study of how the producer discursively represents Habbo Hotel, as a means to show the gap between the pro-
ducer’s discourse and actual practices. In relation to this producer-oriented focus, the analysis also directs its attention to the users and their tactics in relation to the commercial strategies.

In the following, research relevant for the present article is discussed in more detail. Subsequently, the article proceeds to the theoretical framework, which primarily builds on Carpentier (2011) and de Certeau (1984), and after this follows method, results and, discussion.

Mapping the Research Field

Focusing on participatory opportunities and constraints, this article also connects with larger debates within media and communication studies concerning the internet and how to understand the nature of users’ participation online. Some voices in this debate argue that the internet has increased opportunities for social, cultural, and civic participation (e.g. Jenkins 2006a; Jenkins 2006b). A substantial amount of criticism has been launched towards this discourse on participation and the internet (e.g. van Dijck & Nieborg 2009; Olsson 2010; Fuchs 2013), and researchers have started to direct their attention towards the producers and how they actively steer participation (Olsson & Svensson 2012). In research on children’s virtual worlds there are studies that write themselves into the more optimistic discourses on participatory affordances of online spaces. In a study of Habbo Hotel, Ruckenstein (2011) analyzes children as prosumers within creationist capitalism, and argues that children’s interactions “should be explored within a framework that identifies the intimate links between social aspirations and economic production” (Ruckenstein 2011: 1060). Although emphasizing that the business model is based on children’s user-generated content, Ruckenstein depicts Habbo Hotel as a site for empowering creative participation:

> [...] virtual worlds, in particular, open up innovative possibilities for prosumption by emphasizing playfulness, participation, and creative capacities of people. One of the key findings of this research is that Sulake has created a child-friendly environment [...] Such recognition raises further questions about children’s participation: if child-friendly environments are created by companies, are corporate agents, in fact, more readily claiming recognition and empathy with children than the rest of society? (Ruckenstein 2011: 1074)

Ruckenstein (2011) understands the producer’s commercial motives and children’s participation as a mutually enriching symbiosis. Buckingham and Rodríguez (2013) criticize Ruckenstein (2011) for uncritically accepting the rhetoric of the producers and challenge this optimistic view by analyzing how Habbo Hotel moderators exert their power over the users, and what users learn about citizenship in this context. Buckingham and Rodríguez conclude: “our analysis suggests that Habbo Hotel is very far from being the free, democratic, creative space proclaimed by the company [...] it certainly bears comparison with real-life authori-
tarian regimes and ‘total institutions’ such as prisons” (Buckingham & Rodriguez 2013: 56). They conclude that children, with regard to political lessons, “learn to function in a situation where the powerful enjoy absolute authority” (Buckingham & Rodriguez 2013: 57). While the main focus in this article concerns what users learn about power and citizenship in Habbo Hotel, the authors also reflect on the virtual world as primarily an arena for social interaction where the creative possibilities are restricted to the purchase of virtual goods (Buckingham & Rodriguez 2013: 55).

Also connecting to the more optimistic approaches to participation in online worlds, Lund (2013) argues that the virtual world Stallet.se offers young girls a space for civic participation. Similarly, Tuukkanen, Iqbal & Kankaanranta (2010) analyze children’s participatory practices in virtual worlds, but they come to a rather different conclusion. Based on a survey conducted in two Finnish schools, they conclude that virtual worlds are foremost arenas for social participation; socializing with friends through chat and engaging with the avatar were the most popular activities, while forms of civic participation were not very common.

As this overview shows, previous research has not systematically examined children’s virtual worlds from the integrated framework of political economy and participation theory. This paper, thus, aims at contributing to research on children’s virtual worlds in general, and a better understanding of participatory opportunities, constraints, and commercial strategies within these online spaces in particular. On a more general level, the article also leaves a contribution to research which deals with questions of participation in social media and Web 2.0.

The Case of Habbo Hotel

Produced by the Finnish company Sulake Corporation Oy, Habbo Hotel is available in 11 different language versions and has, according to the corporation, 273 million registered users in 150 countries and five million unique visitors every month (“Habbo Hotel – Where else?”). The main income comprises 85-90 percent from micropayments of virtual items, and the rest from advertising (Johnson, Hyysalo & Tamminen 2010: 625). Sulake estimates that 90 percent of the users are between 13-18 years old (“Habbo Hotel – Where else?”) with an average age of 13 years (“Habbo Adsales”). These numbers are, though, highly uncertain and research has shown that many users are younger than the required age of 13 years (Johnson, Hyysalo & Tamminen 2010: 626; Ruckenstein 2011: 1064). Sulake uses both the terms “children” and “teenagers” to describe the users (“Habbo Hotel – Where else?”; “Habbo.com Customer Support”). In the present article the term “children” is used throughout in order to include both younger children and teenagers.
Theoretical Framework

In *Media and Participation – A site of ideological-democratic struggle* (2011), Nico Carpentier carries out an exhaustive examination of the concept of participation in relation to the media sphere, and also in relation to other spheres where participation has been widely discussed: democracy, spatial planning, development, and arts and museums. Acknowledging the notion of participation as a “floating signifier” due to its ideological role within democratic-ideological struggles, he also states that “some form of discursive fixity is required in order to allow for this concept to be analysed” (Carpentier 2011: 128), and develops a framework for assessing participation and its enabling and limiting elements within the field of media. This framework serves as an important source of inspiration in the analysis of the empirical data and will therefore be introduced in more detail below and connected to the political economy perspective. Finally, de Certeau’s theory on practices in everyday life (1984) and particularly the concepts of strategies and tactics are introduced.

**Participation Theory and Political Economy**

In the “AIP (Access, Interaction, and Participation) model,” Carpentier (2011) distinguishes between the concepts of *access, interaction, and participation*, which are played out in relation to the four areas *technology, content, people, and organization*. Most important here is the distinction between interaction and participation (a distinction also made by Jenkins 2006b). Interaction is defined as socio-communicative relationships between humans, or between humans and technology, within the media. Carpentier argues that participation needs to be distinguished from interaction as it “helps to clarify the meaning(s) of participation and to prevent the link with the main defining component of participation, namely power, being obscured” (Carpentier 2011: 129). Participation is, thus, defined as co-deciding on/with technology, content, people, and organizational policy and, consequently, denotes more equal power relations (ibid.: 130-131).

Central in Carpentier’s theoretical framework is also the differentiation between minimalist and maximalist forms of participation. Using a broad definition of the political as inherent in all societal fields, Carpentier writes that: “the political nature of participation manifests itself in the struggles to minimize or to maximize the equal power positions of the actors involved in the decision-making processes that are omnipresent in all societal spheres” (ibid.: 11). Specifically related to the media, in minimalist forms of participation “media professionals retain strong control over process and outcome, restricting participation to access and interaction […] In the maximalist forms, (professional) control and (popular) participation become more balanced, and attempts are made to maximize participation” (ibid.: 69).
Carpentier identifies four structuring elements – *technology, organization, identity, and quality* – which “structurally can impede and facilitate participatory processes, and shift them towards more minimalist or maximalist versions” (ibid.: 358). For the specific purpose of the present study, a fifth structuring element can be added here, namely the producer’s *commercial strategies*. As shown in the results section, the micro-payment revenue model in different ways both structures and constrains participation. This element can be related to the element *organization* in Carpentier’s model:

The second structuring element relates to the nature of the organizational structures and to the existence of participatory organizations. We should not forget that many (mainstream) media organizations still function in capitalist logics, which impacts strongly on their objectives, and often works against a definition of media participation as a primary organizational objective. (ibid.: 356)

The element *commercial strategies* could be seen as a sub-category of the organizational element, and serves to connect participation theory with the political economy perspective.

Researchers in the field of political economy of communication have traditionally focused on the distribution of power on the macro-level, and the contexts surrounding media (Mosco 2009; Wasko, Murdock & Sousa 2011), but there are also examples of political economy research with a micro-level approach. Wasko (2010), for instance, positions herself within the field of political economy when analyzing commercial virtual worlds. Her study focuses on “the appeals of these sites to children, and how they define children as consumers” (Wasko 2010: 113). In McChesney’s (2000) definition of political economy of communication, content analysis is presented as a part of the field: “political economy of communication looks specifically at how ownership, support mechanisms (e.g. advertising) and government policies influence media behavior and content” (McChesney 2000: 110). This article looks specifically into what McChesney here refers to as support mechanisms, that is, sales of virtual goods and advertising, and how these constrain and frame participation in the online world.

**Strategies and Tactics**

One dimension of the analysis of Habbo Hotel is to also look for traces of how users respond to the commercial strategies. The theory of practices of everyday life of active audience theorist Michel de Certeau (1984), and particularly the concepts of *strategies and tactics*, is used here as a framework for understanding this user – producer relationship (see Jenkins 2006a and O’Brien 2009 for other studies inspired by de Certeau). In *The practice of everyday life* (1984), de Certeau focuses on how users/consumers in their everyday life relate to and appropriate cultural products, such as mass media representations, consumer products or the urban space: “These ‘ways of operating’ constitute the innumerable practices by means of which users reappropriate the space organized by techniques of soci-
ocultural production” (ibid.: xiv). De Certeau introduces the concept of tactics to capture the nature of these everyday practices of cultural consumers. Tactics are put in relation to strategies, which denote the calculative operations of the producers. Strategies are “actions which, thanks to the establishment of a place of power (the property of a proper), elaborate theoretical places […] capable of articulating an ensemble of physical places in which forces are distributed” (ibid.: 38). The core, defining element of a strategy is, thus, the possession of a “proper place.” In contrast to this, users lack these proper places and can with their tactics “only use, manipulate, and divert these spaces” (ibid.: 30).

Applying these concepts to the specific case of this article, it can be said that Habbo Hotel is the proper place of the producer Sulake. In this proper place the producer establishes a calculative relationship with the users, and one dimension of this relationship is the commercial strategies. The users of Habbo Hotel act within this place and relate to the commercial strategies with different forms of tactics. It could be argued that Habbo Hotel also constitutes a proper place for the users as they in various ways can contribute to the shaping of the virtual world; however, as will be discussed in the results section, the design of the virtual world and the rules of the game are to a large extent established by the producer and, not least, Habbo Hotel is the property of Sulake Corporation. De Certeau’s description of the relationship between tactics and strategies is, therefore, still useful: “The space of a tactic is the space of the other. Thus it must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of a foreign power” (ibid.: 37).

Despite being written before Web 2.0 and social media, de Certeau’s theoretical framework is still relevant when studying user practices, as there are important features of the sites that are controlled and determined by the producer and to which the users must relate. However, there are dimensions which need to be problematized in a changed media landscape. Most relevant to comment upon here are de Certeau’s descriptions of everyday tactics as “hidden” (ibid.: xii, xiii), “silent” (ibid.: xii) and “unsigned, unreadable, and unsymbolized” (ibid.: xvii). This may be the case regarding users’ tactics in relation to, for instance, television, but in relation to social media users’ tactics can be manifested in the virtual space, as shown in the present study.

**Method**

Multiple methods were used in the study, including observations, qualitative content analysis, document analysis, and an interview. These methods are connected to the three areas of research outlined in the introduction and for the sake of clarity the method section is organized in relation to these three areas. Initially, though, some general details concerning the whole study are described.

Habbo Hotel is available in 11 different language versions and in the present study the English and Swedish versions (habbo.com and habbo.se) were included
in the analysis. The selection of these two versions of the virtual world was made for practical reasons, but also to broaden the empirical material. Initial observations made it clear that there were differences between these two versions regarding the presence of advertising and, therefore, it was considered relevant not to restrict the analysis to, for example, only the Swedish version. Habbo.com and habbo.se were observed by the author of this paper during the months of February and March 2012 for approximately two hours a day. The observations were restricted to the actual virtual world and did not include observations of other arenas where users in different ways can engage in the Habbo universe, such as the Habbo Facebook page, fansites, or the Habbo homepages and forums which are related to Habbo Hotel. Documentation of the observations was made in a research journal and in screenshots. Permission to reproduce screenshots was given by Sulake Corporation.

In order to approach the main question posed in this paper on participatory opportunities and constraints, a form of “participatory” qualitative content analysis was undertaken of habbo.com and habbo.se (participatory in relation to technology). Two avatars were created and the initial phase of the research was rather unstructured and explorative. The different functions and features of the sites were explored, and the most popular rooms (as indicated in the “Navigator”) were visited. Special attention was paid to which functions were free of charge and which functions required payment, together with a study of the different strategies employed by the producer to make the user purchase on the site. Attention was paid to the information presented directly to the user by the producer. Such information as, for instance, a “Valentines Quest Calendar”, often appeared right after the log-in phase. Another category of information which was of particular interest was advertising. After the explorative phase, the analysis took a more structured form where the most popular rooms were visited and notice was taken of the producer’s direct communication in the form of messages shown on the screen. Screenshots were taken of these messages and other aspects that related to the focus of the research.

In order to approach the question on user tactics in relation to the commercial strategies, the chat, where the avatars communicate with each other, was observed. As there were no prior expectations of what would constitute these tactics, the observations were also exploratory and broad in character. In order to have some focus in these observations special notice was given to chat content which in some way connected to the micropayment model. Obviously, other interesting dimensions of the virtual world not relating to the subject of the present article, such as issues of gender and ethnicity, were not paid attention to in the observations (for research on these dimensions see Boellstorff et al. 2012: 26).

The observations were non-participatory as no interaction took place between the researcher and the users. Therefore, the method is not “ethnographic” in its fullest sense as participatory observation and interaction between the researcher
and the users are central here (e.g. Boellstorff et al. 2012: 65; Hine 2000: 63-64). The choice not to interact with other users was made for practical reasons, as interactions would have required informed consent (Boellstorff et al. 2012: 157; Kozinets 2010: 151), which can be a time-consuming process especially when involving children (e.g. Kozinets 2010: 152), and was beyond the scope of this research. Ethical questions are much debated in virtual ethnography (Hine 2000: 23). Some scholars consider it important to disclose the researcher’s identity even if the observations are non-participatory (Boellstorff et al. 2012: 142), and no interaction takes place between the researcher and the users, while other researchers chose to keep their identity hidden as disclosure could have an effect on the users’ behavior (e.g. Sanders 2005: 71). In line with this latter viewpoint, the researcher’s identity was not explicitly communicated during the observations in this study. Other actions were undertaken as a means to protect the integrity of the users. Generally, only the popular rooms with a more “public” character were observed, and if the conversations acquired a clearly private nature the room was abandoned (on virtual worlds as private or public spaces, see: Boellstorff et al. 2012: 134-135; Kozinets 2010: 140ff.). Avatar names have also been anonymized with the use of pseudonyms in order to protect users’ identities (Boellstorff et al. 2012: 136-137, Kozinets 2010: 144).

Data eliciting information on the producer’s representations of Habbo Hotel was found mainly in documents on the habbo.com and habbo.se websites, and the homepage of Sulake. The documents on habbo.se and habbo.com were identical, with the difference that there were additional documents on habbo.com. Because of this, and for language purposes, the analysis has been made based on the documents written in English. A commercial in the form of a YouTube video where Habbo Hotel is presented is also included in the analysis. During the research process, an interview was also made with a Habbo Hotel designer, employed by Sulake. This interview was made on Twitter between March 6-8, 2012 and revolved around questions relating to user-generated content versus content produced by the corporation.

Finally, some concluding remarks about data analysis. In this study, data collection and analysis was, at large, intertwined (e.g. Silverman 2010: 221; Boellstorff et al. 2012: 160-161). The observations of Habbo Hotel were analyzed in relation to the theoretical framework that, consequently, guided the analysis, but did not determine it (e.g. Olsson 2008: 97-98). Carpentier’s and de Certeau’s ideas served as starting points, but needed to be developed and understood in relation to the specific case and the specific media in focus.

The data used to discern the producer’s discursive representations of Habbo Hotel was, in contrast to this, analyzed after collecting the data. The analysis of the documents and the interview was inspired by the discourse analytical approach developed by Potter & Wetherell (1987). The basic assumption in this ap-
proach, as generally in discourse theory, is a view on language as action and constitutive of the social world:

social texts do not merely reflect or mirror objects, events and categories pre-existing in the social and natural world. Rather, they actively construct a version of those things. They do not just describe things; they do things. And being active, they have social and political implications. (Potter & Wetherell 1987: 6, emphasis in original)

Language is used for various purposes and has different functions depending on context and audience. There will, thus, be substantial variation in discourse. This has implications for analysis, which needs to focus on “the constructive and flexible ways in which language is used” (ibid.: 35). More specifically, in the first phase of the analysis there is a search for patterns of both variability and consistency regarding the content and form of language. In the second phase, the researcher tries to understand the different functions of language (ibid.: 168-169).

Results

The results section initially presents the analysis of the producer’s discourse, and then proceeds to discussing participatory opportunities and constraints in the virtual world. This is followed by a presentation of the observed advertising strategies, and finally, attention is directed towards the users and their tactics.

Habbo Hotel Represented in the Producer Discourse

The ways in which Habbo Hotel is represented is contingent upon the type of document and the intended audience. One group of data has the wider public as the main audience, where specifically parents constitute an important part. In these texts (also including the commercial and the interview) there are some common patterns in the way Habbo Hotel is described. Three main themes have been identified: Habbo as a social space, a creative space, and a space for economic transactions. Regarding Habbo Hotel as a social space, Habbo is represented as a space where users can meet friends: “Habbo Hotel is all about having fun in an inspiring and safe environment” (“Official Parents Guide”). In the quote we can see how the social dimension is also connected to safety, which can be viewed as an essential argument to gain the trust of parents.

Concerning Habbo as a creative space, Habbo is represented as a virtual world where users can “have fun through creativity and self-expression” (“Habbo Hotel – Where else?”), and “explore their creative side by building games to challenge their friends […] and by dressing up their avatars to reflect their personal style and values” (“Official Parents Guide”). Habbo Hotel is represented as a virtual world entirely built by user-generated content: “Currently there are over 120 million user-generated rooms in the different Habbo communities. User-generated content is king in Habbo Hotel! It is the Habbo users who make the virtual world
what it is” (“Habbo Hotel – Where else?”). In the commercial, which is built up as an interaction between a journalist and a visitor to Habbo, the users are put forward as the very producers of the virtual world:

   Journalist: Tonight we bring you an exclusive interview with the man who went undercover to seek out the mastermind behind the craziness and creativity of the world’s largest hotel […]

   Visitor: The answer was right there all along; there is no mastermind. Everything in Habbo is created by other Habbos just like you and me. We are what make Habbo Hotel so cool. (“Habbo YouTube - Special Report”)

In the research interview the same line of argument came up, where the producer actively downplayed their own role while emphasizing the role of the users. In the interview, when asked if any of the popular rooms are created by Sulake, the designer responded: “Some are, some not. I’d love to see the user-generated rooms being more popular than ours. It’s all about you – not us. :)” (Interview March 2012). From the quote we can understand that there are rooms made by the producer, and the quote also indicates that the rooms created by the producer are the more popular rooms in the hotel.

In the representation of Habbo as a creative space there are also uses of language which contrast to the very notion of creativity, particularly in the use of the word “decorate” in formulations such as: “it is the only hotel where everyone gets to decorate [author’s emphasis] their own room any way they want. There are millions of items to choose from and purchase in the Habbo catalogue” (“Habbo YouTube – Special Report”). Thus, in the theme Habbo as a creative space, users’ activities are understood in a wide variety of ways: as acts of creativity, the production of user-generated content, and as decoration and acts of consumption. In the last quote we can also see how the decoration of rooms is directly linked to the purchase of virtual items, which leads us to the last theme of Habbo as a space for economic transactions.

The commercial dimension of Habbo Hotel is represented as learning opportunities for the young users. Under the headline “Free to play – improve your trading skills” it reads:

   In addition to improving social skills and creativity, players learn the basics of economics such as marketplace functionality and trading of Habbo Hotel items, which is a very popular pass time amongst players. Habbo Hotel is free to play, but to get the most out of their experience, players can buy Habbo Credits, Habbo Hotel’s official currency. Credits are used to pay for virtual items that enable the creation of events and fancier rooms. (“Official Parents Guide”)

Learning and safety are core values connected to Habbo Hotel. The purchase of virtual items is also linked to the loaded word “self-expression”: “[v]irtual furniture /…/ are important factors in most Habbos’ lives within the community, allowing them to express themselves through the creation of theme-styled rooms” (“Habbo Hotel – Where else?”). The main function of this way of representing
Habbo Hotel is to portray Habbo as a good environment for children where they can socialize, be creative, and learn.

When the main audience is potential advertisers, Habbo Hotel is represented as a platform which makes available a potential site for interaction with young people: “Habbo Hotel provides for both international and local advertisers convincing audience numbers: 273 million registered Habbo avatars with 5 million teens visiting the site every month” (“Advertising in Habbo”). Here, Habbo is not represented as a space where users can socialize, be creative, and learn about economy; instead, the users themselves become a part of the economic transaction. Users are not portrayed as the content creators of Habbo; in their place, the corporations are put forward as potential content producers: “Habbo Hotel pushes traditional online marketing campaigns into a virtual, activity and identity driven world where brands have the opportunity to become content providers [author’s emphasis]” (“Advertising in Habbo”). To parents, self-expression was presented as a value in itself, but in relation to advertisers, users’ identity exploration becomes a valuable product that can be sold:

Habbo Hotel is a community where teens can explore their identities through self-expression. Brands can help to spark this creativity /…/ Brands can even create environments as a part of the virtual world, a form of advertising far more valuable than simply displaying an advertisement. (“Advertising in Habbo”)

These two ways of representing self-expression observed in the data, one aimed at parents and the other aimed at advertisers, reveal two conflicting views on children: children as social beings with rights and values of their own, and children as objects which can be sold on the market.

In documents establishing the legal conditions for engaging with the virtual world, there are representations which contrast to the way Habbo is described to the public in general and parents in particular. In the “Terms of Service” it is established that the content of Habbo Hotel – above described as created by the users – is Sulake’s property: “Accordingly, you have no other interest, including no property, proprietary, intellectual property, ownership, or monetary interest, in your Virtual Currency and Virtual Goods, which remain our content and property” [author’s emphasis] (“Terms of Service”). The corporation also states that they have the “absolute” right to modify or eliminate virtual goods (“Terms of Service”). When described to parents, Habbo was portrayed as built entirely out of user-generated content. In the Terms of Service, user-generated content is given a considerably narrower meaning, and refers here only to content which users bring with them into the virtual world and not what they build in the virtual world based on the virtual items. User-generated content refers to “content submitted by users” and includes “wall posts, messages, and actions with other end users” (“Terms of Service”). The infrastructure of the hotel, the rooms, and the virtual objects are not here included in the category of user-generated content.
The variation in discourse can be explained by the different contexts and intended audience (Potter & Wetherell 1987). The various purposes of the discourse – to gain credibility amongst the public and particularly parents, to attract advertisers, and to protect their intellectual property – affects the way Habbo is represented. The discourse, especially the part on Habbo as a creative space, can also be understood in its broader cultural context as it connects with a wider discourse on Web 2.0 found amongst business gurus and also amongst academics. Analyzing Web 2.0 business manifestos, van Dijck and Nieborg (2009) identify three buzzwords used in this discourse: “collaborative culture”, “mass creativity” and “co-creation”. The basic idea promoted in this discourse is that social platforms are created by crowds of (mostly) anonymous users who define their own informational, expressive and communicational needs, a process touted as ‘mass creativity or ‘peer production’ […] Mass creativity, peer-production and co-creation apparently warrant the erasure of the distinction between collective (non-market, public) and commercial (market, private) modes of production, as well as between producers and consumers […]. (van Dijck & Nieborg 2009: 856)

There are clear parallels here between Sulake’s discourse on Habbo where the focus is on users’ creativity. However, what van Dijck and Nieborg, in the quote above, call the erasure of the distinction between producers and consumers is in Sulake’s discourse not so much an eradication but rather a conversion where the users are put forward as the very producers of the virtual world.

### Participatory Opportunities and Constraints in the Virtual World

According to Carpentier (2010: 130-131), the notion of participation should be understood as co-deciding on/with technology, content, people, and organizational policy. The Habbo Hotel users have some, however limited, possibilities to participate in decision making regarding media content, while the power to decide on technology, people, and organizational policy remains within the sphere of the producer Sulake. The fact that the producer utilizes user feedback in the development of the virtual world (Johnson et al. 2010; Ruckenstein 2011) does not entail participation, but should rather be understood as consumer marketing research. On a general level, thus, participation in Habbo can be said to take on a more minimalist form. While there are some participatory opportunities in relation to media content production, there are also constraints put on participation. In the following, the article looks further into the participatory opportunities and constraints, and is organized in relation to two main categories which relate to media content production: 1) The chat and the avatar, and 2) Rooms, games, and virtual goods.

### The Chat and the Avatar

The main locus for participating in Habbo Hotel is in the chat where users communicate with each other in speech bubbles, and in this way engage in social ac-
tivities such as role-play and contests. The content is provided by the users and there are no commercial constraints on the chat, as it is free of charge (although the chat content is supervised by moderators, see Buckingham 2013). In Carpentier’s model, socio-communicative relationships between humans are considered a form of interaction. In the context of the virtual world, however, the content production in the chat can be seen as a form of social participation, as it is a space where the users can decide on the content and in this way contribute to the shaping of the symbolic environment.

In addition to this, the avatar also plays an important role in the social relations of the virtual world. However, there are more constraints on the use of the avatar than the chat. The avatars’ possibilities to communicate with body language are limited; the avatar can dance, sit, wave, and idle for free, but in order to blow kisses or laugh the user must purchase a VIP.¹ There are also spatial constraints on the avatars’ possibilities to move around in the virtual world connected to the VIP. The avatar can mostly move freely, but in some rooms there are restricted areas where only VIP members can enter (habbo.com, February 21, 2012). When observing other avatars that could not enter the VIP area, it seemed as if they were confused about their possibilities to participate in the activities going on. One avatar asked in the chat: “Do you have to be a VIP to join the game?” (habbo.com, February 21, 2012). Users are constantly reminded of the different limitations put on the avatar; limitations that serve as constant reminders of the fact that enhanced opportunities to participate in the virtual world must be bought in the shop.

In the producer’s discourse (see above), it is said that avatars can be dressed up in order to reflect a personal style and personal values, something which is linked to self-expression and identity. Yet, to dress up the avatar with a personal style the users have to purchase a VIP, since it is the VIP clothing which expresses a personal style; the VIP clothing has strong colors in contrast to the muted colors of the free clothing, and they have a trendier and more original style. The VIP Club is presented as follows: “Stand out from the crowd. Show off your style with exclusive clothing and hairstyles” (habbo.com, March 2, 2012). It is apparent that Sulake in this respect uses children’s need to gain status in their peer group through expressing a personal and “cooler” style (Buckingham 2011: 87), as a means to get them to purchase on the site. Communicative signals, such as color and style are, thus, used to clearly identify who has purchased a VIP. Research on the function of virtual items in virtual worlds has shown that virtual items function the same way as material items; they are used for self-expression and mark distinctions between low and high status (Lehdonvirta, Wilska & Johnson 2009: 1073; Animesh et al. 2011: 790).

During the period studied a “Valentines Quest Calendar” was presented to the user when logging in to both habbo.com and habbo.se. This calendar, and the different tasks presented each day, often had a social function where the user was
encouraged to contact other “Habbos” in order to find love. This calendar had, however, with its focus on the social, obvious economic motives: to raise awareness of VIP (see Figure 1) and to get traffic to the shop. These types of messages pop up on the screen and have the same function as advertising messages – to get users interested in certain products so as to prompt them to purchase on the site.

Several quests in the “Valentines Quest Calendar” had sections restricted to VIPs, in order get users interested in purchasing VIP membership. The messages shown in the calendar constantly reflected the constraints put on users not having a VIP, and highlighted the fact that VIP members have more possibilities to personalize their appearance. One “bonus” VIP users could get was to be able to dress all in black (see Figure 1). In another message appearing it said: “Love in the hair. Your hair looks a little ragged; time for a change. Hair extensions for VIP or short hair for everyone” (habbo.se, February 15, 2012).

Other quests served to raise awareness of VIP and augment the status of VIP members by encouraging non-VIP members to interact with VIPs. One quest stated: “Get a VIP to laugh next to you! Stand beside a VIP Habbo and tell a joke or a funny story. You can also just ask them to laugh – as simple as that” (habbo.se, February 18, 2012). The “Valentines Quest Calendar” often contained a section where featured “love furni” was shown with a button next to it that said Go to Shop. In the Valentines section of the shop, the user could trade hearts obtained
from completing the quests for a selection of furni. However, some furniture also required additional coins (virtual currency paid for with real money). The “Valentine’s Quest Calendar” can, consequently, be considered a strategy where Sulake with subtle methods uses social participation as a means to get the users engaged in economic activities.

Rooms, Games, and Virtual Goods

Another important dimension regarding co-deciding on content is engaging in the construction of rooms and games. In the producer’s discourse, room construction was described both as an act of creativity, and an act of decoration linked to purchasing virtual items. The observations of the virtual world make clear that the latter representation is closer to facts than the former. The user cannot create new objects but can select from a predefined set of goods found in the shop, or trade objects with other users. Engaging in room decoration is, consequently, limited if the user does not purchase virtual goods, even if there are other possibilities to obtain objects, for instance through gifts, winning competitions or through the pixel shop. There are, however, a few opportunities to engage more creatively, for instance, with a VIP the user can use a “black hole” in the floor, which can be used to build a more unique floor. The users can thus in a limited way co-decide on what content to fill the personal room with, but cannot in a more creative way decide on the content from the start. With respect to this, engagement in the virtual world can be seen either as interaction with media content or a minimalist form of participation.

The idea that Habbo Hotel is constructed solely by user-generated content, as put forward by the producer, is also misleading. The structure of the hotel, i.e. the different rooms, is produced by Sulake, and there are also rooms which are decorated by Sulake, such as rooms made especially for Valentine’s Day, the Habbo Research Lab, rooms made for ChildLine and Sims Showtime 3 (see below), and rooms for special events. These are obvious examples of rooms not generated by users. However, regarding the most popular rooms in the hotel, it is not possible to tell whether they are constructed by Sulake or ordinary users. In the interview with the designer employed by Sulake, one question revolved around how to tell the difference between rooms primarily decorated by the producers and rooms decorated by users. The designer did not seem to want to answer the question, but responded: “...made by us. Would you like that to be surfaced in the hotel?” (Interview March 2012). To keep this information hidden can be seen as a way to sustain the idea that Habbo is built solely by user-generated content.

In the producer’s discourse, building games is depicted as a creative activity that the user can engage in. In this case though, making games in Habbo Hotel is not about creativity in the sense of connecting objects together in order to create something new (Gauntlett 2011: 2). Creating games in Habbo Hotel is mainly about purchasing items from the shop, and putting together pre-defined games, as
can be read on the site: “These games are built by Habbos just like you. Are you ready to start up your very own game? Click on the Shop button to open the shop and find all sorts of gaming furni – from Puzzle Boxes to ice skating” (“Where are the games?”). Game construction, thus, can better be described as an act of consumption and following pre-defined instructions, than a creative act. It seems like few people actually create their own games; according to a text on habbo.com, which encourages users to create their own games, game creators are described as geniuses:

Show us how YOU make a game in Habbo! That’s right Habbos...we’re looking for those few genius developers who choose to make games in Habbo. Using Wired and other furniture in perfect tune, creating a masterful, easy to play and addictive game experience. (Get Your Game On, 2004-2012)

Additionally, to be able to play already-existing games on higher levels, users need to purchase VIP membership (habbo.se, February 11, 2012).

There is, finally, one important thing to comment upon in relation to co-deciding on media content. Co-deciding on content also concerns the possibility to decide on what to do with your creations. However, as described in the analysis of the producer’s discourse, the content of the rooms, i.e. the virtual items, is the property of Sulake. In this respect, engagement in the virtual world lends itself closer to interaction than participation.

Advertising Framing Participation in the Virtual World

The revenue model based on micropayments in different ways structures and constrains participation in Habbo Hotel. Advertising, which is also a part of the revenue model, does not limit participation but adds to the visualization of the virtual world as a commercial space. Regarding paid advertising there are major differences between the Swedish and English language versions; in habbo.se there is no paid advertising, while in habbo.com there is advertising for consumer products, non-commercial advertising for non-profit organizations, and events used to promote artists such as Cher Lloyd and Mindless Behaviour (on March 17 and 21). In habbo.se, as well as in habbo.com, Sulake’s own products, such as the games Niki and Lost Monkey are advertised. In addition to this, the virtual goods are also advertised in Habbo in messages appearing on the screen. This is done in the “Valentines Quest Calendar,” but also in squares appearing in the right-hand corner of the screen. In these squares there is a headline, a picture of the object, a selling argument, and at the bottom: “Buy from the shop.” The headline can be, for instance, “Executive carpet” and the selling argument: “Walk around like you own the place” (habbo.com, February 9, 2012).

In habbo.com, youth and charity organizations are prominent actors who promote their services. ChildLine (a free helpline dedicated to children and young people) had a featured room where an advertisement was shown, containing a telephone number and a text urging the user to watch a video. The video was
about self-harm and aimed at highlighting this question in connection to the Self-harm Awareness Day on March 1. During Valentines, habbo.com also collaborated with ReachOut.com, an Australian website dedicated to helping young people. ReachOut.Com had a room with an advertisement, which linked to the organization’s web page. The purpose of the room was described as follows: “So there can be a lot less lonely hearts this Valentine’s Day, Habbo Hotel has teamed up with ReachOut.com to create a community space for Habbos to share and support others who may be going through a tough time” (habbo.com, February 10, 2012). These examples show how Sulake in habbo.com promotes safety and support to children in different ways. However, in contrast to this stands the promotion of commercial products. Thus, Sulake both aims at helping children in their everyday lives, and at the same time tries to persuade children to buy specific products in order to profit from their participation in the media. This is another conflicting aspect of Habbo Hotel, which basically reflects the same contrast found in Sulake’s representation of children as important social actors versus objects that can be sold on the market. One screenshot from the habbo.com login page visualizes this two-faced side of the virtual world (see Figure 2); just below the ChildLine advertisement there was an advertisement for the game Sims 3 Showtime, which was going to be released on March 9.

Figure 2. Advertisements for ChildLine and Sims 3 on the habbo.com login page (March 5, 2012).

The Sims 3 Showtime campaign was made in collaboration with Habbo Hotel and was fully integrated in the virtual world, blurring the boundaries between advertising and entertainment. Sims 3 had its own featured room called “The Sims Showtime super-star lounge.” In this room an advertisement with the text “Make your
When clicking the ad the user was directed to a Habbo page with more information on the game, a video from the game, the release date, and a link to amazon.co.uk where the game could be pre-ordered. In “The Sims Showtime super-star lounge,” Sulake had created a game with the same theme as Sims. Next to a door was a note that said, “Welcome to the Sims 3 Showtime super-star lounge. Head through the tele to begin your rise to fame and discover the different roles you can play on the way” (habbo.com, March 3, 2012). Entering the teleport, different options were presented to the user, and in order to make it through questions related to Sims 3 had to be answered. The doors were colored light blue with a white star – the same colors used in Sims. When the user made it to the final room, featured as a stage, a note appeared saying, “Poll. Congrats! You have made your rise to fame; now all that’s left to do is chill in VIP as your adoring fans wait outside. Time for your first quick interview before you get your badge” (habbo.com, March 3, 2012). The poll asked exclusively for the user’s country, but that was presumably information which both Sulake and the advertiser were interested in.

Commercial surveillance (e.g. Fuchs 2013) was also observed in other contexts of the virtual world. For instance, in the room “Habbo Research Lab” the producer looked for users who were willing to give feedback on the hotel in small group chats. A poll was presented to the user where most questions revolved around purchase of virtual objects and VIP membership. Sulake also creates large surveys in the virtual world which, in the words of Sulake: “reveals teens’ current media usage, consumption behavior and brand preferences in order to better understand what compels youth around the world” (“Habbo’s second Global Youth Survey…”).

Users’ Tactics in Relation to the Commercial Strategies

The producer set the conditions for how the virtual world can be used, but the users in different ways try to resist these structures, and in the words of de Certeau (1984) they make “innumerable and infinitesimal transformations of and within the dominant cultural economy in order to adapt it to their own interests and their own rules” (de Certeau 1984: xiv). During the data collection period actions were observed in the chat that can be interpreted as tactics and forms of resistance towards the micro-payment model, and also towards promotional events organized by Sulake in Habbo.

As described above, the avatars’ possibilities for self-expression are constrained in order to get users to purchase VIP membership. However, users have invented new ways of self-expression with the use of the free chat function, and can in this way bypass the commercial strategies. In the chat, the users find an arena for self-expression beyond the avatar; users post links in their chat-comments that connect to personal blogs and YouTube videos. On these other media platforms young people show themselves playing the piano, playing the
guitar and singing. One example is a link to a blog owned by a Swedish girl. In the chat below the link, she wrote: “for some hot pictures and videos of me” (habbo.se, February 15, 2012). The blog contained personal photos and comments from everyday life. This shows that there are no clear boundaries between the virtual and the “real” life, and that users mix social interactions through the avatar with real life images.

Other tactics which challenge the commercial strategies concern attempts to obtain virtual objects without paying for them. While there are users engaged in purchasing and trading virtual objects, there are also users who try to go beyond the established channels for obtaining virtual objects; an often-observed activity is “a practice of begging” where users beg to receive objects from other users. An example of this can be found in the chat dialogue between the avatars Black and Rabbit (pseudonyms). Black says: “plz get me it” and Rabbit answers: “why dont you buy credits and not take other peoples money.” Black continues: “hey” and then whispers: “can u plz buy vip for me?” (habbo.com, February 16, 2012). In this dialogue we can, thus, see how a user asks another user to buy him/her VIP membership, and how the other user seems to get irritated by the question.

Similarly, inside habbo.se, in a room where trading activities took place, there were comments such as: “can I get free furniture from someone please,” and “selling an invisible pillow” (habbo.se, February 28, 2012). These begging practices can be seen as forms of resistance to the micropayment model of the virtual world, but they can also be viewed as less desirable social consequences of the revenue model. How the users experience these kinds of tactics, as either play or frustration, and if these tactics have their desired outcome, cannot be revealed from these observations. Interviews with children on their relationship with online advertising has shown that children feel frustrated when performing avoidance tactics (Martínez, Jarlbro & Sandberg 2013), something which contrasts to de Certeau’s depiction of tactics as exclusively enjoyable acts of resistance (de Certeau 1984: xxii, xxiv, 18). Future research should look further into how children experience their tactics in online virtual worlds.

There is clearly an interest in obtaining virtual objects and VIP membership without paying for them, and there are also many actors who promise to deliver free coins, VIP membership, and furniture. In the chat there often appear links to websites, such as “blunthotel”, “habzo”, “bobbahotel,” which have copied the design of Habbo, and Sulake has taken legal actions against these kinds of websites (“Sulake shuts down a pirate Habbo software distributor” 2012). There are also actors appearing in the chat claiming that they can deliver free furniture and VIP membership to other users. On habbofreecoins.net it reads: “Are you wondering how to get credits on Habbo? Do you want to be a Habbo VIP? Just follow the simple steps below” (habbofreecoinsnet.weebly.com). This phenomenon can be seen as ways to resist the micropayment model and the copyright of Sulake, but it could equally be actors trying to lure Habbo users. When these kinds of links ap-
peared in the chat there was often a mix of expectation and suspicion, and the users discussed the intentions behind these propositions. In one room where an avatar promised free furniture if they entered the website talkhabbo.com there were chat comments like: “do u for real give free furniture,” “scam,” “he doesn't give anything,” “THIS IS A SCAM,” “no it’s not,” “he-s a bot,” “EVERYONE THAT GETS THERE SAYS HE DIDN'T GIVE THEM ANYTHING” (habbo.com, February 14, 2012). When the avatar left the room the other users had been waiting for about an hour, and there were negative reactions when it was revealed to be a deception: “nooooooooooooo,” “he is gone,” “hes offline,” “fck,” “no giveaway,” “aww dam it,” “why r we still in this line,” “LMAO TOLD YOU IT WAS A SCAM!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!” (habbo.com, February 14, 2012). Like the “practice of begging,” these kinds of events can be seen as forms of resistance towards the micro-payment model, but also as negative social consequences of the model where users spending their time in the hotel are lured and disappointed.

Promotional events are organized in habbo.com, which serve both to promote various artists and their new albums, and to promote Habbo Hotel by creating entertaining experiences for the users. The ideal outcome for Sulake is, thus, satisfied users. However, based on the observations these events are not always successful for the producer, as users use the virtual space to launch their critique towards Habbo Hotel. The “live chat” with the artist Cher Lloyd is a clear example of how promotional events in Habbo can fail. The live chat took place in the “Cher Lloyd star lounge” at 4.30 pm UK time on February 17, 2012. When Cher Lloyd’s avatar entered the room she was bombarded with all sorts of questions, and many users asked her to follow them on Twitter. This was a scene that basically resembled a shouting, but in this case silent, fan-crowd. The chat progressed so fast that the artist’s answers drowned in all the questions. One question asked by Cher Lloyd was “Has anybody bought my last single?” – a question which clearly shows the live chat’s commercial intent. When receiving an affirmative answer she said: “good!! Who bought it?????? Wave ur hands if you have it!!!” (habbo.com, February 17, 2012). It was impossible for the users to maintain a dialogue with the artist, and many users afterwards blamed Habbo for the failure of the event. Some of the negative comments which could be spotted in the chat were: “Just cause HABBO is poo! Don’t mean we shouldn’t be grateful for Cher trying to do something for fans!” “Cer don’t go on Habbo again, go on twitter its so much easier,” “WASTE OF TIME,” “I cant see where shes responding this is pointless for me :(.” (habbo.com, February 17, 2012). These comments show how users utilize the participatory space given to them in the chat bubbles in order to symbolically shape the event as a failure, and in this way resist the strategies of the producers.
Discussion

Using the integrated framework of participation theory and political economy, the present study has shown how users’ possibilities to participate in Habbo Hotel are confined to minimalist forms of participation which foremost concerns social participation through content production in the chat, while other forms of engagement in the virtual world are better understood as interaction and acts of consumption. By offering opportunities for social participation for free, the corporation tries with various strategies to get users to purchase virtual goods. One recurring strategy used in, for instance, advertising messages is to actively play on children’s need to gain status in their peer group. These forms of advertising messages, together with other advertising formats in the virtual world, contribute to the shaping of Habbo as a commercial space. The user is constantly reminded of the commercial dimension of Habbo Hotel, and users with various tactics relate to the producer’s strategies and seem to experience both success and deception in their attempts to resist the power of the producers.

The results of the study are in line with Wasko’s (2010) conclusion that children’s virtual worlds reinforce consumer ideology, and the observation made by Buckingham and Rodriguez (2013) that Habbo primarily offers a space for social interaction while creative opportunities are limited to the purchase of virtual goods. The present study, though, advances the understanding of how the producer both enables and constrains participation in intricate ways so as to make children purchase on the site. While Buckingham and Rodriguez (2013) compare Habbo Hotel with authoritarian regimes and prisons, the present study identifies Habbo foremost as a panopticon-like shopping mall, where the producers observe and calculate how to steer participation towards purchases.

Ruckenstein’s (2011) view on Habbo Hotel can, in the light of the present study, be questioned in various aspects. First, the view of Habbo as a site for children’s creativity is problematic. Descriptions such as “user-generated theme rooms” (ibid.: 1065) are misleading, as children’s possibilities to create content in this respect involves solely the purchase of virtual goods from the shop. Second, to understand Habbo as a child-friendly environment where the ambitions and goals of the producers and users are without conflict, is also problematic. The present study has highlighted the gap between the discourse Sulake promotes to the public and the actual practices of the producer in Habbo Hotel. The study of the users’ tactics also indicates that users are not satisfied with the actions of the producers and the commercial constraints put on the various functions of the virtual world.

Individuals have a need to participate and gain control of their everyday lives, and struggle with the ways their participation is organized and limited (Carpentier 2011: 15). More maximalist forms of participation in the media can contribute to the democratization of the social (ibid.: 131). Children spend much of their leisure
time using the internet and virtual worlds could be one arena for participatory experiences. The present study is limited to one case and cannot, consequently, be generalized to other virtual worlds. However, this study shows how in Habbo Hotel participation is clearly organized and limited for commercial purposes and, therefore, restricted to minimalist forms of participation and interaction.

Participation can be structured in several ways, and Carpentier (2011) has identified some of these structuring elements. The present study has added the structuring element “commercial strategies” to Carpentier’s theoretical framework. Future research needs to look further into how commercial strategies in virtual worlds, as well as in other online spaces, shape, structure, and constrain participation. Research should also explore how children engaged in virtual worlds experience the strategies of the producers, and whether they experience their tactics as either forms of play or acts of frustration.

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Notes
1 In 2012, VIP membership could be bought for 4.99 US dollars per month.
2 “Pixels” is a kind of currency that can be traded for a limited set of furniture or special effects. The user obtains pixels after a certain login-time and for other activities such as confirming their e-mail account.
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Thematic Section:
Therapeutic Cultures

Edited by
Alan Apperley, Stephen Jacobs & Mark Jones
Introduction: Therapeutic Culture

By Alan Apperley, Stephen Jacobs & Mark Jones

An advertisement for the *Miruji Wellbeing Massage Chair* promises its users not only a personalised massage designed, amongst other things, to ‘reduce stress’, but also the possibility of transforming a ‘negative mindset’ into a ‘positive “can-do” mindset’. This is to be achieved through the simultaneous use of ‘exclusive’ audios which employ the techniques of Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP). One satisfied customer, cited on the website, testifies to the chair’s ability not only to produce a ‘feeling of total relaxation’, but also to boost its user’s ‘motivation and self-esteem’.

If, after your *Miruji* massage/NLP life-coaching session, your self-esteem is still languishing in the doldrums, you could do no worse than sign up to one of Anthony ‘Tony’ Robbins’ arena-scale motivational weekends such as his *Unleash the Power Within* (UPW) event, held at the San Jose Convention Centre (audience capacity: 3,900) in June this year (2014). Tickets for this event ranged from $995 for general admission, to $2,595 for a ‘Diamond Premiere’ ticket, which included seating in the front section of the arena (‘Close to Tony!’) and access to ‘Ultimate Edge’ – described (admittedly on Robbins’ own website) as ‘The World’s #1 Personal Development System’ and available to non-attenders for the sum of $299 (+ $14.99 pp).

Robbins’ motivational products – themselves based on a version of NLP – cover just about every aspect of life, from personal growth and development, through love, passion, health, energy, fitness (the Robbins brand includes a range of ‘Inner Balance’ health supplements) life and time management, and career advancement.

Robbins, of course, is merely one – albeit very successful – purveyor of what might be described variously as ‘self-help’, ‘self-actualization’, or ‘motivational’ products. The scope of such products is now bewildering, ranging from the specific – such as advertisements for *L’Oreal* hair products exhorting us to buy their products ‘because we’re worth it’ – to the general – whole sections of bookshops devoted to publications (including, of course, CDs and DVDs) now gathered under the catch-all label: ‘Mind, Body, Spirit.’

Bewildering as this may be, one thing seems utterly clear: this broad, diverse field comprises a highly lucrative industry. ‘Self-help’ books regularly appear on the non-fiction best-seller lists and, while statistical analyses of the value of the genre are made difficult by the sheer diversity of texts that might qualify, some commentators claim that ‘self-help remains the world’s bestselling genre’ (Gros-
kop 2013: online) with total revenue regularly estimated in terms of billions of dollars.

One of the more recent ‘classics’ of the genre – Stephen R. Covey’s *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, first published in 1989 – has to date sold around 15 million copies worldwide in its printed form alone (the audiobook has itself sold around 1.5 million copies) and has given rise to a veritable ‘Habits’ industry, with an eighth habit (*The 8th Habit: From Effectiveness to Greatness*) added to the portfolio in 2004. Other ‘classics’ of the genre such as Dale Carnegie’s *How To Win Friends And Influence People* (1936, revised and updated edition 1981) and Napoleon Hill’s *Think And Grow Rich* (1937) have rarely been out of print since their original publication.

But it is not solely as an industry that this phenomenon needs to be understood. As the following collection of papers shows, a broadly therapeutic ethos now pervades all facets of culture, from education (Apperley) and social policy (Simpson & Murr), through fashion (Pierce) and craft-working (Morton) to psychological and spiritual well-being (Vale; Wright; Jacobs) and on through TV content (El-Shall) to publishing (Collingsworth). Furthermore, the therapeutic ethos is now a thoroughly global phenomenon, as the international scope of this special edition attests. What all these papers share is a desire both to understand the character and to identify the implications – for the self and for society – of this therapeutic turn in our cultures.

What then, are we to make of this therapeutic ethos (or ‘ontosphere’, as Collingsworth suggests we should think of it)? Beyond this collection of papers – though acknowledged in various ways by the contributors – the therapeutic turn has often been read as a response to some kind of cultural crisis, though the nature of this crisis is itself the object of some dispute.

One of the earliest analyses of the emergence of a therapeutic culture – Rieff’s *The Triumph of the Therapeutic* (1966) – saw it as primarily a response to the collapse of religious authority. Other analyses such as Lasch’s *The Culture of Narcissism* (1979) saw it as a response to the collapse of authority structures more generally: religion, but also the family, the school and the community. What both of these writers shared was a belief that the therapeutic turn represented a turn inward, rooted in psychology, such that ‘self-absorption defines the moral climate of contemporary society’ (Lasch 1979: 25).

More recently, theorists have sought to locate the therapeutic turn in relation to debates concerning the fate of modernity. Authors such as Beck, Giddens and Bauman, for example, see in the therapeutic turn a response to the anxieties created by the collapse of the certainties with which modernity had come to be associated. This too has an inward, psychological dimension – a concern, that is, with the self. Bauman’s idea of ‘liquid’ modernity (2000), Beck’s idea of ‘risk society’ (1992) and Giddens’ notion of ‘late-’ or ‘reflexive modernity’ (1991) all, in their various ways, propose that, bereft of ‘solid’, ‘stable’ or ‘tradition-based’ struc-
tures, our identities are no longer given to us ready-made, so to speak, but must be constantly refashioned through the choices we make. Human identity has been transformed, in Bauman’s words, ‘from a “given” into a “task”’ (Bauman 2000: 31).

Moreover, this task – the fashioning of one’s own identity – is one to which we must constantly attend. As Giddens puts it, the question of how to live one’s life – of who we should be – ‘has to be answered in day-to-day decisions about how to behave, what to wear and what to eat, and many other things.’ (Giddens 1991: 14) In this ‘runaway world’ (Giddens 1999) anxiety in the face of such relentless choosing is surely an understandable response. At the end of yet another hard day’s identity construction, no wonder we collapse exhausted – physically, psychologically and spiritually – into our Miruji Wellbeing Massage Chairs.

One can see in this ongoing project of self-transformation, or self-fashioning, a partial fit with the notion of a therapeutic culture. Faced with such a welter of decisions, is it surprising that we seek advice and guidance from self-help ‘gurus’ such as Covey and Robbins, or movements such as the Art of Living (discussed below by Jacobs)? Rather than allow ourselves, in our ignorance and naivety, to be buffeted about by the confusing, unstable and unfamiliar, we can instead ‘empower’ ourselves with the advice of an expert.

But here we encounter one of several paradoxes which the therapeutic culture throws up, for placing oneself in the hands of an expert is not without its own risks. All too frequently, it seems, the discourses around self-help which trade on the idea of empowering the individual require a kind of surrender to the therapeutic expert. Robbins might exhort us to Awaken the Giant Within (subtitle: ‘How to Take Immediate Control of Your Mental, Emotional, Physical and Financial Life’) but he is the one to whom we turn for help in achieving this goal.

The quasi-religious nature of mass motivational events such as Robbins’ UPW weekends has not gone unnoticed by commentators, and in some cases – such as that of Art of Living – they are explicitly religious, albeit in a rather diffuse ‘New Age’ sort of way. Religion aside, several contributors to this collection discuss the nature of ‘expertise’ in therapeutic contexts such as the treatment of mental health (Vale), the psychoanalytic encounter (Wright), and even the TV studio (see, for example, El-Shall’s discussion of CBS TV’s The Dr. Phil Show below).

The paradoxical relationship between individual empowerment (or ‘autonomy’) and the potentially manipulative role of the therapeutic expert is one focus of concern here; but so too is the potential for a therapeutic ethos to recruit supposedly empowered individuals to the social order. As long ago as 1979, Lasch was warning us that the narcissistic personality, for all its desire to achieve ‘authenticity and [self-]awareness,’ nevertheless ‘depends on others to validate [its] self-esteem’ (Lasch 1979: 5,10).

Several contributors to this collection (Wright; El-Shall; Vale) see, in the inward – and individualising – trajectory of the therapeutic worldview, a shift in the
relationship between the individual (or citizen) and the state, and in the kinds of politics that have come to characterise this relationship. Foucault’s work around ‘bio-politics’, ‘governmentality’ and ‘disciplinary power’ problematises the dominant liberal-democratic contractual or consensual relationship between the state and the citizen. Similarly, in the therapeutic insistence on the individual’s responsibility for itself, we can identify a form of disciplinary power that collapses or undermines the traditional role of both state and citizen.

Other contributors see in the therapeutic turn a potential for recruiting the individual, not only to the political order, but also to the economic order (Apperley; Simpson & Murr). Here the therapeutic turn is read primarily in terms of a shift in the nature of global capitalism – a move away from ‘Fordist’ mass production techniques and ‘Taylorist’ production principles, to ‘flexible specialization’, ‘niche marketing’ and ‘just-in-time’ production. This shift requires not only a re-organisation of the global workforce, but also a change in the nature of that workforce, with ‘individual autonomy’ reworked as ‘flexibility’ and ‘adaptability’, and ‘personal responsibility’ as ‘lifelong learning’ or ‘continuing professional development’.

Yet the association between the therapeutic ethos and the trajectory of modernity – or capitalism – is not as straightforward as it seems. As Morton points out in her study of craft work in mid-twentieth century Nova Scotia, the therapeutic project can be critical of the stresses induced by the frantic pace of modernity. It can even be described as ‘antimodern’ in its romanticisation of traditional rural skills and associated lifestyles.

Nor should we underestimate the potential benefits of the therapeutic turn – as Pearce reminds us in her study of the use of clothing as a means to forging a strong – or stronger – post-colonial Caribbean identity. Similarly, Jacobs argues that the teachings of the Art of Living movement, although open to critical reading, might also have the potential to stimulate participants to help others who are less fortunate. We might respond cynically to the rise of ‘happiness studies’ – the increasing legitimacy of which is exemplified by the UK Government’s appointment of economist Richard Layard as ‘Happiness Tsar’ in 2007 – and be dubious of the claims of ‘Positive Psychology’ which Layard champions (see Wright’s discussion of this below) but, as several of the authors here acknowledge, there are resources available with which to resist the many potential dangers which the therapeutic turn throws up. A properly critical reading of this complex phenomenon will surely seek to acknowledge the potential strengths inherent in the discourse, as well as the many dangers which it might be said to present.

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References
Revisiting Dearing: Higher Education and the Construction of the ‘Belabored’ Self

By Alan Apperley

Abstract
Several authors have identified a ‘therapeutic turn’ in education in the UK, at all levels of the system. In this paper I focus on and develop this claim, specifically in relation to the Higher Education sector. I seek to do two things: First, I argue that the ‘self’ which is identified by commentators on the therapeutic turn needs to be reworked in the direction of McGee’s idea of the ‘belabored’ self. This is because the therapeutic turn serves, I argue, a set of wider economic goals arising from the restructuring of capitalism which followed in the wake of the oil crisis of 1973 and the subsequent breakdown of the post-war (1939-1945) consensus around the purpose of public policy, of which education is an important part. Second, I revisit an important document in the history of the UK Higher Education sector: the National Committee of Inquiry Into Higher Education’s 1997 report *Higher Education In The Learning Society* (known popularly as the Dearing Report, after its chair, Sir Ron Dearing). I argue that that the committee’s ambition to bring about a learning society characterised by lifelong learning played an important and neglected part in bringing about the therapeutic turn in higher education in the UK. The project of creating a learning society characterised by lifelong learning, advocated by the Dearing Report, should properly be recognised as an exhortation to embark upon a lifetime of labouring upon the self.

Keywords: Higher education, lifelong learning, learning society, Dearing Report, therapeutic education, belabored self, diminished self.
Introduction

In a relatively short period of time – a period lasting little more than two decades – the Higher Education [HE] sector in the UK has undergone a process of restructuring. Driven by successive governments, and by successive policies and initiatives, universities in the UK have seen themselves recruited to, and reconstructed as agents of, an advanced form of capitalism. In this paper I hope to show that this restructuring of the HE sector has been achieved primarily by means of a therapeutic turn in the conceptualisation of education as such. I am not going to argue that the therapeutic turn has been used to mask the restructuring of education; on the contrary, successive policy documents have explicitly justified developments on the grounds that they are necessary to, for example, the future economic success of the UK. If we do not adapt to the demands of the knowledge economy or the information age, the argument runs, we will fall behind our competitors in the global marketplace and ultimately face economic ruin. If there is hegemony here, then, it is, as we shall see, in the insistence that such things as the knowledge economy or the information age have concrete existence, and as such that we must of necessity develop policies that meet their demands. My argument, in its broadest sense, concerns the ways in which the emergence of a therapeutic culture has shaped the strategies employed by successive governments as they have attempted to reconstitute Higher Education in the direction of the knowledge economy in the so-called information age.

In what follows, I will argue that the restructuring of the HE sector has involved primarily a reconceptualization of the student and his or her role in education. Moreover, this reconceptualization has been achieved in part through the therapeutic turn which has seen an increased emphasis on the student experience, signalled in part by the rhetoric of student-centred education, but also by the forced emphasis on universities as ‘learning institutions’ as opposed to teaching institutions. The idea that universities might be educational institutions involving both learning and teaching has increasingly been suppressed by these rhetorical strategies.

What has also been suppressed by these rhetorical strategies is the academic voice – increasingly constructed, not as a critical voice as such, but as oppositional to the student voice. As Ecclestone and Hayes note – and as we shall see below – ‘learning’ is a much more general activity than education, and one that ‘does not require a teacher’ at all (2009: 143). At the very least, professional educators have been increasingly encouraged to retreat into the background, not to teach but rather to facilitate student learning. In turn, these strategies have themselves been legitimised by an appeal to the existence of – or more usually the imperative to create – a learning society characterised by lifelong learning.

In this respect, I intend to argue in this paper that a pivotal role in establishing the therapeutic dimensions of Higher Education was played by the 1997 report of
the National Committee Of Inquiry Into Higher Education under the chairmanship of Sir Ron Dearing, and published under the title Higher Education in a Learning Society [a.k.a. The Dearing Report]. This report is mostly remembered now for its willingness to challenge the principle of state funding of higher education, and for introducing the notion that students themselves should, at least in part, be responsible for funding their own education, via the introduction of student fees. What is all-too-frequently overlooked about this report is the extent to which it opened the way for the therapeutic turn in higher education.

Several commentators have written on the idea of a therapeutic turn in education (most notably Furedi 2009, and Ecclestone & Hayes 2009) and in this paper I wish to build on their work. However, I will argue that their conception of the ‘self’ which is the subject of this therapeutic turn is lacking in one important dimension, in that they fail to take sufficient account of the economic imperative which the therapeutic turn in higher education (as in education more generally) might be said to serve. I will argue that McGee’s conception of the ‘belabored’ self is a more potent idea in relation to developments in education than is the ‘emotional deficit’ model favoured by these writers. Before I turn to my discussion of the Dearing Report, therefore, I want to say something about the notion of the therapeutic society and of the ‘self’ which it both assumes and seeks to construct.

The Therapeutic Society

The development of the idea of a ‘therapeutic society’, or ‘therapy culture’ (Furedi 2004) or even of a ‘therapeutic state’ (Nolan 1998) is relatively recent. One of the first to use the term ‘therapeutic’ in this way was Christopher Lasch in his 1979 book The Culture of Narcissism. (Rieff’s sociological work The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith after Freud – originally published in 1966 – predates Lasch’s work by over a decade although, as Ecclestone and Hayes (2009: 125) point out, unlike Lasch and other writers concerned with the therapeutic society such as Nolan, Furedi, and McGee, Rieff does not attempt to discuss the impact of therapeutic culture on conceptions of the self). In this book, Lasch argued that the collapse in traditional frameworks of authority, such as religion, had left individuals bereft of stabilising moral frameworks, and had driven them inwards in a narcissistic search for self-realisation. As Lasch argues:

The contemporary climate is therapeutic, not religious. People today hunger not for personal salvation... but for the feeling, a momentary illusion, of personal well-being, health, and psychic security’ (Lasch 1979: 7).

One does not need to accept Lasch’s psychoanalytic framing of the topic to accept that therapeutic vocabularies and interventions have continued, exponentially, to invade aspects not only of personal identity, but also popular culture. This latter is manifested by the explosion of lifestyle, confessional and reality TV programmes,
the burgeoning (and lucrative) self-help industry, and publishing phenomena such as that of the ‘misery memoir’ (or ‘cryography’) and the ‘Mind, Body, Spirit’ sections which now occupy substantial shelf-space in any bookshop. Therapeutic vocabularies and interventions have also invaded almost all aspects of public policy, including that of education (Furedi 2004; Ecclestone & Hayes 2009).

In an important sense, the therapeutic turn can be understood as a heightening of concern with the emotional aspects of the self. As Furedi notes:

These days, we live in a culture that takes emotions very seriously. In fact it takes them so seriously that virtually every challenge or misfortune that confronts people is represented as a direct threat to their emotional well-being. (Furedi 2004: 1)

Underpinning the therapeutic ethos, Furedi argues, is a deficit model of the emotions which assumes the vulnerability of the individual to ‘a bewildering variety of conditions and psychological illnesses’ (Furedi 2004: 4). This deficit model of the emotions leads to a conceptualisation of the self as ‘diminished’, which is to say that it is characterised by a ‘permanent consciousness of [its own] vulnerability’ which the individual is incapable of managing without ‘the continuous intervention of therapeutic expertise’ (Furedi 2004: 21). Therapeutic culture, Furedi argues, views the project of managing one’s emotions ‘as far too important to be left to the efforts of ordinary people’ (Furedi 2004: 34). On the contrary, ‘the management of life requires the continuous intervention of therapeutic expertise’ (Furedi 2004: 21).

Against this background, public policy – including that of education – must be redirected towards shoring up the emotional deficit of the individual. In broad education terms, this policy direction could be seen operating through such initiatives as the UK Government’s Personal, Social, Health and Economic [PSHE] programme, launched in 2000 and re-incarnated in 2005 by the Department for Education and Skills [DfES – subsequently the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF)] as the ‘Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning’ [SEAL] programme (Ecclestone 2007). Based largely on the work of psychologist Daniel Goleman, best-selling author of popular psychological works such as Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ (Goleman 1995), the SEAL programme proposed:

... a comprehensive, whole-school approach to promoting the social and emotional skills that underpin effective learning, positive behaviour, regular attendance, staff effectiveness and the emotional health and well-being of all who learn and work in schools’ (DCSF 2007: 4).

However, as critics have pointed out, rather than leading to self-fulfilment or self-realization, as is popularly thought to be the goal of therapeutic intervention, the therapeutic imperative instead cultivates ‘a permanent consciousness of vulnerability’ (Furedi 2004: 21). Rather than promoting self-fulfilment, the therapeutic imperative instead promotes ‘self-limitation’.
Building on the ideas put forward by Lasch, Nolan, Furedi and others, Ecclestone and Hayes argue that although there are both ethical and philosophical aspects underpinning the rise of the therapeutic ethos, the most important explanation of this rise is political. The diminished self, they argue, may represent a loss of human agency in its increased dependence upon emotional support, but the loss of human agency itself ‘reflects a historically specific end to any idea of the possibility of political change’ (Ecclestone & Hayes 2009: 140). The rise of the therapeutic ethos, they argue, is premised upon ‘the collapse of the human subject that occurred as a result of the end of the collective forms of working class organisation, in the form of the trade union movement, as well as of more radical projects’ (ibid.: 140). They conclude that, with the collapse of politics – especially following the collapse, in 1989, of the only real alternative to capitalism – therapeutic culture is given free rein to achieve its ‘strongest fulfilment’ (ibid: 141).

As an explanation of the rise of the therapeutic ethos, this is an interesting and important argument. But I would go further, in arguing that the political shift has its roots in wider economic developments. Indeed, I would argue that the therapeutic ethos is boosted, not so much by the collapse of communism and the alleged ‘triumph’ of capitalism – announced in such works as Fukuyama’s influential essay ‘The End of History?’ (1989) – but in the earlier restructuring of capitalism following the 1973 oil crisis. In the next section, I seek to develop this argument further, and specifically in relation to the fate of education in this process of restructuring. I will also seek to establish that this restructuring has implications for both the therapeutic turn in education, and the nature of the self that this turn assumes.

The Therapeutic Society: The Educational Context

It has been suggested that, at the turn of the millennium, lifelong learning in the context of a ‘learning society’ (or ‘knowledge society’) was ‘the dominant and organizing discourse in education and training policy’ in the UK (Green 2002: 612). However, the roots of this discourse go back much further, at least as far as 1976 when James Callaghan, then Prime Minister of a Labour Government, delivered a speech at Ruskin College, Oxford, designed to spark a ‘National Debate’ on the future of education in the UK. In this speech, Callaghan made it clear that education policy would henceforth be viewed in some sense as part of the government’s wider economic policy. Education was no longer to be construed as simply equipping children ‘for a lively, constructive, place in society’ but would also now clearly serve another purpose: ‘to fit them to do a job of work’ (Callaghan 1976). For Callaghan, the education system fails if it produces ‘socially well-adjusted members of society who are unemployed because they do not have the skills’ required by prospective employers. These skills do not only comprise the basic tools of literacy, numeracy, respect for others, and so on, but also in-
clude developing ‘an appetite for further knowledge that will last a lifetime.’ Since 1976, these two key ideas – that education should, in some more-or-less explicit way, serve the interests of the economy and that the requirement for learning should be lifelong – have both moved to the centre-stage in debates and discussions concerning the meaning, function and purpose of higher education. As we shall see, they were also placed centre-stage in the Dearing Report.

That Callaghan should seek to open up a nationwide debate at precisely this point in time can be seen as a preliminary move in a wider process following the 1973 oil crisis and the perceived need on the part of Western governments generally to re-assess the post-war social-democratic consensus, and in particular the welfare state which was, in many respects, the object of that consensus. It has become something of an orthodoxy to point out that the oil crisis of 1973 (preceded, as it was, by the collapse of fixed exchange rates in 1971/1972 which led to currency destabilisation) did not just lead to the breakdown of the post-war consensus around the welfare state, but also engendered a fundamental restructuring of capitalism itself. We need not rehearse here all the various facets of this restructuring, but it is widely recognised (as in, say, Gamble 1988 and Castells 1996) that key features included a shift away from ‘Fordist’ mass production techniques characterised by a ‘one size fits all’ attitude to production, towards ‘flexible specialization’ targeted at niche rather than mass markets, and characterised by ‘just-in-time’ production processes and devolved, networked (i.e. ‘flexible’ and ‘adaptable’) organisational structures.

The argument runs that these processes, when coupled with rapidly developing and constantly changing information and communications technologies (ICTs), created the need for an educated workforce skilled in the use of ICTs, and exhibiting the key traits of flexibility and adaptability. This kind of thinking can clearly be seen informing education policy some twenty-odd years after Callaghan’s Ruskin College speech. As the UK’s Department of Education and Employment [DfEE] Green Paper – The Learning Age – noted in 1998: in order to ‘cope with rapid change’ initiated by ‘the challenge of the information and communication age’, the UK would need ‘a well-educated, well-equipped and adaptable labour force’ in which ‘lifelong learning’ and the ‘continuous development of skills, knowledge and understanding’ would be ‘essential for employability’ (DfEE 1998: 7, 11). This position was starkly restated in 2001 by the UK’s Chancellor of the Exchequer, Gordon Brown:

We want every young person to hear about business and enterprise in school, every college student to be made aware of the opportunities in business – and to start a business, every teacher to be able to communicate the virtues and potential of business and enterprise (Brown, cited in Mayr 2008: 27).

The closer alignment between education and the economy envisaged by Callaghan in 1976 had clearly become something of an orthodoxy by this time.
From the ‘Diminished Self’ to the ‘Belabored Self’

The self that is implied by this narrative is not obviously the diminished self as outlined by Furedi, Ecclestone and Hayes. There is, for example, no obvious place in the account of the educational subject implied by *The Learning Age* for the emotional deficit which Furedi, Ecclestone and Hayes argue is characteristic of the conception of the diminished self. But there is clearly a notion of the self as vulnerable in the face of rapid and relentless change. Consider the following passage from *The Learning Age*:

We are in a new age – the age of information and of global competition. Familiar certainties and old ways of doing things are disappearing. The types of jobs we do have changed as have the industries in which we work and the skills they need. We have no choice but to prepare for this new age in which the key to success will be the continuous education and development of the human mind and imagination (DfEE 1998: 9).

We see in this passage the presentation of a state of affairs – which presumably has come about as a result of the contingent policy decisions of governments, banks, corporations and so on – as necessary and therefore inescapable (Fairclough 2003). ‘We have no choice’ – both as individuals and, collectively, as a society – but to shape our attitudes and behaviour to this state of affairs. We cannot change the circumstances, and so we must change ourselves (Williams & Apperley 2009). The problem is that the circumstances themselves are understood, in the manner of the Greek philosopher Heraclitus, to be in a state of constant flux (Furedi 2009: 25-26). Change is no longer conceptualised as a moment of upheaval between two relatively stable states of affairs, with the individual undergoing a no doubt stressful period of adjustment before settling down to the new normality. Instead, change itself now characterises the state of affairs, and individuals must constantly adapt themselves to the ceaselessly changing circumstances in which they find themselves, or risk losing out.

There is no doubt that such an environment, if it were actually to exist, would lead to heightened levels of stress and anxiety and therefore feed the demand for therapeutic intervention. But the rhetoric of government policy – as we shall see in our discussion of the Dearing Report below – is about empowering individuals to cope with the ‘new age’ of constant flux, via ‘continuous education’ (or ‘life-long learning’) and the promotion of a regime of constant retraining and updating of skills in the form of ‘continuing professional development’ (Williams & Apperley 2009). Furedi claims that the self is progressively undermined (‘diminished’) by the recasting of ‘the ordinary troubles of life’ as forms of illness (Furedi 2004: 108) but the discourses around education work upon the conception of the self in a different way. To help us see how this works, it is useful to consider McGee’s idea of the ‘belabored’ self.

McGee’s starting point is the seemingly unstoppable growth of the ‘literatures of self-improvement’ amongst which she includes such works as Stephen R. Cov-
ey’s *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, a book pitched not only at the self-help/self-improvement/self-actualization markets, but also at the business management (or business leadership) market. Covey’s book – and others like it – link success in business (or, more generally, attaining one’s ‘goals’) to the ability to change oneself for the better. In other words, success in one’s professional and personal life depends upon the work that one does upon one’s own character. The popularity of books such as Covey’s (*Seven Habits* alone has sold over 15 million copies and has been translated into 38 languages) is, McGee suggests, in part to be explained by changes both in the nature of work and to patterns of employment in the wake of the restructuring of capitalism following the 1973 oil crisis. With rising unemployment, falling wages and the weakening of trade unions, amongst other developments, work has become less secure and more competitive and this, McGee suggests, has led to a state of affairs in which ‘a sense of personal security is anomalous, while anxiety is the norm’ (McGee 2005: 12).

The response to this anxiety has led individuals ‘to invest in themselves, manage themselves, and constantly improve themselves.’ As employment prospects become ever more precarious, workers feel ‘compelled to constantly work on themselves to remain competitive in the labour market’ (McGee 2005: 12). The self is, in this respect, ‘belabored’, which is to say that the work that is done upon the self is as important, and perhaps even more so, as the job one does (McGee 2005: 16). There is then Furedi’s ‘permanent sense of vulnerability’ but rather than emphasising the importance of surrendering to the embrace of the therapeutic expert, McGee rather emphasises the way in which the management of vulnerability is made the responsibility of the individual, in whose own hands lies the ability to keep anxiety at bay. The individual can of course turn to therapeutic experts (such as Covey) for advice in dealing with the ‘trauma’ of vulnerability, but the decision to do so remains with the individual and not, in the first instance, with the therapeutic expert. It is in this respect that the illusion of ‘self-help’ resides, for as George Carlin has pointed out, if you turn to books for advice in dealing with vulnerability ‘[t]hat’s not self-help, that’s help’ (Carlin, cited in McGee 2005: 11).

In emphasising the responsibility of the individual in managing his or her vulnerability, I do not mean to suggest that McGee’s argument is incompatible with Furedi’s. On the contrary, I would suggest that McGee’s argument develops Furedi’s in two important respects. First, in locating the expansion of the self-help industry in relation to the economic developments McGee provides an explanatory framework for the rise of Furedi’s ‘therapy culture.’ As I have argued above, in relation to Ecclestone and Hayes’ suggestive comments concerning the political context of therapeutic education, the ‘belabored self’ can be read as the economic face of therapy culture, its rise explicable in terms of the demands of capitalism in its post-1973 reconstruction.
This leads me to the second respect in which McGee’s argument can be said to usefully elaborate on Furedi’s: for the ‘belabored self’ is not only diminished emotionally, as Furedi suggests (though emotional problems might still arise) but also in terms of its social, cultural, and intellectual horizons. The belabored self is increasingly – and narcissistically – driven inward, not by Lasch’s psychological forces, but by the material forces bearing on individuals under an advanced form of capitalism (McGee 2005: 16). The belabored self must ceaselessly, restlessly attend to itself, since the world it inhabits does not stand still. In this respect, the more appropriate Greek forebear is not Heraclitus, as Furedi claims, but rather the mythical character Sysiphus, doomed never to realise the full extent of his potential because every day he must start the previous day’s task over again from scratch.

It is against this background that we might ask questions about the role of education in relation to the rise in therapeutic culture. The changing demands of capital, articulated in political terms via successive governments of whatever political complexion, will at some point be translated into policy. Governments will produce and seek to implement policies that serve the perceived needs of capital in order to sustain the economic fortunes of the country as a whole and in this task education policy is no exception. As we saw above, the ‘key to success’ in this ‘new age... of information and global competition’ will be ‘the continuous education and development of the human mind’ (DfEE 1998:9). The purpose of education must surely be to fit individuals for their roles as ‘flexible’ and ‘adaptable’ workers. In this context, the destabilising of the self identified by McGee, can be seen as a potential goal of the education system itself. The ‘therapeutic turn’ in education policy can be seen as part of this project.

In the following sections I want to explore this claim further via an examination of a key document – the Dearing Report of 1997 – in the shaping of current Higher Education policy in the United Kingdom.

When Prime Minister James Callaghan called for a ‘National Debate’ on education in 1976, there had been no substantial review of the HE sector in the UK since the Robbins Report in 1963. Meanwhile, the number of students attending university in the UK, which had been steadily increasing since the late 1960s, had begun to accelerate following the election, in 1979, of a Conservative government (under Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher) who saw an expansion in Higher Education as one potential means of tackling increased levels of unemployment. For example, between 1980 and 1990, students obtaining first degrees at UK universities increased from 68,150 to 77,163 (approximately a 13% increase). Between 1990 and 2000 the number rose from 77,163 to 243,246 (approximately a 215% increase) (House of Commons Library 2012).
This expansion in numbers, however, brought its own problems, not just in terms of the funding – at that time by the State – of increased numbers of students taking up the opportunity to study, but also of the running costs of the universities themselves, in terms of both staff, infrastructure and the introduction of the information and communications technologies (ICTs) increasingly required to deliver content. These problems became even more urgent following the Further and Higher Education Act of 1992 which saw around sixty degree-granting HE institutions (polytechnics, colleges and institutes) formally chartered as universities. With a dramatically expanded HE sector, it was inevitable that issues of cost would have to be addressed. It was also perhaps inevitable that Callaghan’s call for a national debate over the purposes of HE would finally be taken up: what were these universities – and higher education more generally – now for? What was not inevitable was the extent to which the HE sector would be aligned with the developing therapeutic culture, nor was it inevitable that this alignment would be driven through on the basis of the need to create a learning society characterised by lifelong learning.

In May of 1996 the then Conservative Secretary of State for Education and Employment, Gillian Shepherd, commissioned – with the full support of the main opposition parties – the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education [NCIHE], which was to be chaired by Sir Ron Dearing. The Dearing committee was asked to ‘make recommendations on how the purposes, shape, size and structure of higher education, including support for students, should develop to meet the needs of the United Kingdom over the next twenty years’ (NCIHE 1997: 3). The Dearing Report was published in July 1997, by which time the UK had undergone (in May 1997) a general election which had delivered a new Labour government under the stewardship of Anthony ‘Tony’ Blair. It has been pointed out that, unlike Robbins in 1963, Dearing’s key preoccupation was with the financing of higher education (Bennett 1997: 28) and it is true that the Dearing Report established the principle, which has since been entrenched even further, that as students are the main beneficiaries from their university education (for example, in terms of the higher wages that graduates command in the employment marketplace) it is right that they should contribute directly to that education, rather than indirectly via general taxation.

Of course, Dearing is not only remembered for introducing the idea that students should contribute financially to their own education and Dearing’s preoccupations were not solely financial. Reviewing the impact of the Dearing Report ten years after its publication, one commentator remarked that it had left ‘an enduring legacy, not only in terms of tuition fees, but also in terms of ‘access’ and ‘quality’ (Tysome 2007). At the time of its publication in 1997, the BBC identified five key themes which it claimed Dearing addressed. Apart from the issue of the funding of higher education, the BBC noted, the other four key themes included the widening of access to HE; the professionalization of teaching; the improvement of
quality and standards; and the impact of ‘the future’ (as in the increasing importance of information and communication technologies to the delivery of content) (BBC, 1997). Subsequent commentators have largely endorsed this assessment, more or less critically (e.g. Shattock, 1999). Although Dearing certainly addressed these various issues, one aspect of the Dearing Report – an aspect ironically flagged up in the title of the report: Higher Education in a Learning Society – is rarely discussed, or even mentioned. This is the Dearing committee’s attitude to the learning society, and to the associated idea of lifelong learning. I want to argue that it is this neglected aspect of the Dearing Report that has subsequently played a crucial role in facilitating the therapeutic turn in higher education in the UK.

Dearing, of course, did not invent the idea of the learning society, or that of lifelong learning. For example, the year prior to the publication of the Dearing Report – 1996 – had been designated the ‘European Year of Lifelong Learning’. In fact, it has been suggested that the idea of lifelong learning can be traced back some 70 years prior to Dearing (Green 2002: 612). By the 1970s a range of terms were in use (e.g. ‘recurrent education’, ‘continuing education’ and ‘lifelong education’) all of which would be decisively superseded by the term ‘lifelong learning’ during the early 1990s, following the publication of texts such as Van der Zee’s The Learning Society (1991), Ranson’s Towards the Learning Society (1994), the European Commission’s 1995 report Teaching and Learning: Towards the Learning Society, and initiatives such as the UK’s Economic and Social Research Council’s Learning Society Research Programme, launched in 1996.

Green also notes the importance of the shift, at this time, from a focus on education and its context (i.e. educational institutions such as school, college, or university) to a focus on learning and its context (i.e. society as such) (Green 2002: 612). An important influence on the Conservative government’s thinking at this time was the Confederation of British Industry’s call for a ‘skills revolution’, initially proposed in 1989 and subsequently enshrined in the National Education and Training Targets for Foundation and Lifetime Learning, published in 1991 (CBI 1989, 1991). This document in turn underpinned the UK’s then Conservative government’s own proposal to turn the UK into ‘a learning society’ by 2000.

In the same year in which the Dearing committee began its deliberations two other key reports had been initiated, both of which identified the learning society and lifelong learning as key ideas. The first of these was the National Advisory Group for Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning [Chair: Bob Fryer] which published its report on Learning for the Twenty-First Century for the Department of Education and Employment [DfEE] in 1997. The second was the Committee on Widening Participation in Further Education [Chair: Helena Kennedy QC] whose report – Learning Works – was also published in 1997. Both reports had argued for the necessity for education policies at Further and Higher levels to take account of the existence of, or the need to create, a learning society. The Fryer re-
port, for example, had argued that if the UK was going to maintain its competitive edge in the global marketplace, it would need ‘to develop a new learning culture, a culture of lifelong learning.’ The recommendations of the Dearing committee were not therefore produced in a vacuum, but were formulated in the context of a wider legitimisation of the idea of a learning society, characterised by lifelong learning.

The Dearing Report is clear concerning its ambition, not merely to respond to the demands of an already existing state of affairs, but instead to actively bring this state of affairs about. As the Introduction to the Report states:

> Central to our vision of the future is a judgement that the United Kingdom (UK) will need to develop as a learning society. In that learning society, higher education will make a distinctive contribution [...] through its contribution to lifelong learning (Para 1.3, emphasis added).

This idea is stated even more succinctly in the Summary Report:

> Over the next 20 years, the United Kingdom must create a society committed to learning throughout life (Paragraph 2).

In these quotations the Report makes clear the Committee’s ambitions, not simply to respond to an already existing state of affairs (though it does do this insofar as it sought, at that time, to address both the skills deficit identified by graduate employers and the crisis developing among universities over the funding of mass higher education) but also to engineer a state of affairs; to bring about nothing less than a change in the culture of higher education. The learning society – the key to future economic success – is not the ground upon which the Report was produced; it is the goal at which the Report aims. The learning society is a vision of the future, and restructuring higher education is the means by which this vision is to be made concrete.

Admittedly, the Report is not wholly consistent on this point. For example, paragraph 1.10 states that ‘the expansion of higher education in the last ten years has contributed greatly to the creation of a learning society’ suggesting that some progress had already been made. But the report also notes that this progress had been slow and partial, and that therefore ‘the UK must progress further and faster in the creation of such a society to sustain a competitive advantage’ (ibid.). As Hughes and Tight point out, discussions about the learning society have often been marked by a slippage between description and aspiration (cited in Ranson 1998: 184).

This restructuring of HE was largely to be achieved, I will argue, through two key ideas: (a) that HE should be student centred; and (b) that in a student centred educational environment learning should be prioritised over teaching, because learning is what students do. The unargued assumption that HE has traditionally been tutor centred, and that consequently teaching (which is supposedly what tutors do) has been prioritised over learning, haunts the entire report.
Engineering the Learning Society

The idea that there is a need to develop – or create – a learning society is interesting in itself. But what is even more interesting is that the Dearing Report contains a strategy for achieving this goal. Moreover, this strategy appears to make reflective practice – a key therapeutic idea – central to achieving this goal. This strategy for bringing about the learning society can clearly be seen in relation to Dearing’s recommendation that higher education should equip all students with four ‘Key Skills.’ Dearing reports that when consulted about which skills were most commonly lacking amongst graduates, and were therefore most urgently sought after by prospective employers, the Committee ‘did not find a consensus from employers on where the main deficiencies in skills lie’ (9.16). Nevertheless, the report sets out four ‘Key Skills’ which, in its judgement, ‘are relevant throughout life’ (9.18) and therefore should be common objectives of all HE programmes.

The first three skills – communication, numeracy, and the ability to use communications and information technology – are perhaps to be expected. It is the fourth ‘skill’ – ‘learning how to learn’ – that appears, at first glance, to be the oddity: are (or were) employers really crying out for graduates who have an understanding of, and an abiding interest in, their own individual pedagogies? This fourth ‘skill’ only really makes sense in the context of the assumptions underpinning the idea of a ‘learning society’ which frame the Terms of Reference of the report. Certainly, it is the only one of the four key skills whose presence the Dearing committee felt a need to explain, and this explanation is squarely couched in terms of the demands on individuals which the ‘learning society’ is supposedly going to make:

> We include ‘learning how to learn’ as a key skill because of the importance we place on creating a learning society at a time when much specific knowledge will quickly become obsolete. Those leaving higher education will need to understand how to learn and how to manage their own learning, and recognise that the process continues throughout life (9.18, emphasis added).

[Note the phrase ‘those leaving higher education’, clearly pitching the learning society beyond HE itself, a point I will return to below.]

Learning how to learn is to be achieved, in part, by means of the student’s Progress File. (Dearing, Recommendation #20) As Dearing envisaged it, the Progress File was to comprise of ‘two major elements’:

- an official record of achievement or transcript, provided by institutions [known as the ‘academic transcript’]
- a means by which students can monitor, build and reflect upon their own personal development [known as the ‘record of achievement’]

These two elements of the progress file – the academic transcript and the record of achievement (the latter now more commonly known as the personal development portfolio) – can be understood in terms of the product versus process distinc-
tion: the academic transcript was to represent the product or results of a student’s studies, and was to be supplied by the student’s university (albeit in a ‘common format devised by institutions collectively’). The record of achievement on the other hand was to record the process of learning. However, it is worth exploring in a bit more detail the function of these documents, and the relationship between them.

The academic transcript, as Dearing envisages it, is to record the students’ performance on the courses they take, and also what it is that their individual performances have earned for them: their degree title, for example, and the classification appropriate to the various grades they have earned in the course of their studies. It is, in essence, the document that records the student’s engagement with their chosen academic subject, but also more generally with the university as an academic institution. Insofar as the student has demonstrated an ability to progress through the various levels of study, demonstrating a more-or-less successful grasp of subject-based knowledge along the way, the academic transcript acts as proof of that achievement, underpinned by the authority of the degree-granting institution of which the student is, or has been, a member. The document, and the achievement it records, is located squarely within the institutional confines of the higher education system, and it reflects and records academic achievement.

The record of achievement, on the other hand, is not about the student’s academic achievements, but rather their personal development. This file ‘would include material which demonstrated progress and achievement in key and other skills and recorded informal and work-based learning’ (9.50). Whereas the scope of the academic transcript is clearly the period during which the student is studying at university and is concerned with the institutional context alone, the scope of the record of achievement is much broader: it is potentially the student’s whole life:

The contents of the [record of achievement] would help students to review and record their past achievement, and encourage them to set targets and plan future development (9.48).

The focus here on the student’s whole life rather than merely the three or so years spent within the institutional confines of the HE system is, I want to argue, crucial in opening the way for the introduction of therapeutic practices and therapeutic values – of self-help and personal empowerment – which have continued to shape the approach of universities to issues such as recruitment, retention and progression. It is in terms of the ‘whole life’ approach that McGee’s idea of the belabored self becomes important, as we shall see.

To see how this works, we need first of all to acknowledge another of the ambitions at which Dearing aimed, for the progress file and its reflective element – the record of achievement – was conceived of by Dearing as part of a wider ‘vision’ of putting ‘students at the centre of the process of learning and teaching’ (NCIHE 1997: Summary, Para. 35). It is, I want to suggest, this student-centred...
focus of the Dearing Report, coupled with the self-diagnostic nature of the record of achievement, which provides an important rationale for the subsequent introduction of therapeutic practices and policies within higher education as such.

Students at the Heart of the System

The title of this section is, in fact, the subtitle of the current UK coalition government’s 2011 White Paper *Higher Education: Students at the Heart of the System* (Department of Business, Innovation and Skills [BIS] 2011). Although not all aspects of the Dearing Report were successfully implemented, this is nevertheless clear evidence of its continuing importance in framing the approach of subsequent governments towards higher education. In what follows, we will consider the implications for higher education policy of Dearing’s vision of putting students at the centre of learning and teaching. Putting students at the heart of the system (specifically in order to ‘drive up the quality of higher education’) was also a key principle of the influential ‘Browne Report’ (Browne 2010: 28).

Elaborating on the Dearing committee’s recommendations in 2001, the UK’s Quality Assurance Agency [QAA] produced its *Guidelines for HE Progress Files* (QAA 2001). This document, which was intended to provide information and advice to those institutions seeking to roll out a version of the progress file, established ‘Personal Development Portfolio’ [PDP] (Dearing’s ‘record of achievement’) as the preferred term for the student-driven element of the progress file, and set out a timescale for the implementation of the Dearing recommendation. HE institutions were to have agreed a common format for the presentation of data in the academic transcript element of the PF by the start of the 2002/2003 academic year, while the PDP element was to be implemented ‘across the whole HE system and all HE awards by 2005/2006’ (QAA 2001: Para 41). The QAA document suggested that, for the individual student, the PDP element of the PF would result in ‘enhanced self-awareness of strengths and weaknesses and directions for change’ (QAA 2001: Para 32). Moreover:

> The process is intended to help individuals understand the value added through learning that is above and beyond attainment in the subjects they have studied. Crucially, it relates to their development as a whole person (QAA 2001: Para 32, emphases added).

As we have seen, the Dearing committee’s ‘vision’ of a learning society underpinned by lifelong learning ‘puts students at the centre of the learning and teaching process’ (Para 8.4, emphasis added). The restructuring of HE in part takes its cue from this position. For example, the committee’s ‘vision’ of a learning society ‘places a premium on wider support and guidance for students’ enabling them ‘to focus their attention fully on their learning’ (ibid.).

One might be tempted to interpret the previous quotation as meaning that students will be supported and guided so that they might better focus on learning
about their chosen subject, which is to say the subject (or subjects) they have opted to study whilst at university. But that is not what the quotation actually claims, for the support and guidance to be offered by their HE institution is not focussed on what they are learning, but rather on the activity of learning itself. Recall that ‘learning how to learn’ is included by the Committee as one of the four key skills which HE must ensure all students have upon graduation. Recall also that, in Dearing’s own words, ‘those leaving higher education will need to understand how to learn and how to manage their own learning’ if the learning society is to become a reality (1.18). This will be more important, the report declares, than subject-based knowledge, whether academic or vocational:

The pace of change in the work-place will require people to re-equip themselves, as new knowledge and new skills are needed for economies to compete, survive and prosper (1.12, emphases added).

Although subject-based knowledge is important, given ‘the pace of change’ it is increasingly redundant. As the report states: ‘In a period of discontinuous change, the future cannot be forecast from the past’ (Para 1.20). This is why ‘learning how to learn’ is so important. What students need is not increasingly redundant subject-based knowledge but rather ‘the knowledge and skills to control and manage their own working lives’ (ibid.). Students need self-knowledge – knowledge about their own strengths and weaknesses; knowledge about the various strategies for learning available to them and which suit them as individuals. It is this kind of knowledge – knowledge about the self – that the PDP element of the Progress File is intended to elicit. It is this kind of knowledge – and not subject-based knowledge – that the Dearing Report insists will help them to survive and prosper in the learning society (which, incidentally, these strategies, in the manner of a self-fulfilling prophecy, are designed to bring about). If we accept the terms of this account of the relationship of students to their tutors, courses and universities, then what follows?

Centering Subjectivity; Decentering Subjects

One implication concerns the relative status of academics and students. Within the HE sector, academics may be understood as bearers of subject knowledge and as representatives of their respective subjects/disciplines. Academics retain, both as individuals (tutors, teachers, researchers) and collectively (as in a faculty, or a discipline), a great deal of subject-based knowledge – the kind of knowledge which the Dearing Report implies is increasingly marginal in a rapidly changing world. For some commentators, this ‘traditional’ conception of the academic/student relationship sees teaching ‘as a process which transmits pearls of wisdom from old scholars to new apprentices’, a process which is both pernicious and authoritarian (Elliot 1999: 13). For commentators such as Elliot, teaching should not be about transmitting ‘pearls of wisdom’ but should instead be about ‘support-
ing student learning’, a role that ‘is best carried out by directing the student’s attention to how they learn’ and not, presumably, to the academic subjects they wish to learn about (Elliot, 1999: 13). The student-as-learner is not conceived of as an institutional role, but rather as an existential state of being. As Elliot puts it:

> Privileging teaching contexts over other forms of learning experience is a consequence of a formalised view of education that understates the extent to which students may take responsibility for their own learning and equally how much of that learning may take place outside of formal academic contexts (12).

In the learning society one does not become a learner upon entry to a HE institution, and one does not cease to be a learner upon graduation: one is always and everywhere a learner. Moreover, if the ‘traditional’ teacher-led model of education is (potentially, at any rate) authoritarian, then it must surely follow that shifting to a student-led model is both democratic (or at least anti-elitist) and empowering for the individual student. This empowering aspect of the student-led model is clearly signalled in the UK Labour Party’s contribution to Stewart Ranson’s 1998 collection *Inside the Learning Society*:

> Individuals [in a learning society] need to be empowered to make their own decisions about their own lives. This requires not only a broad and balanced education but, even more importantly, that individuals are equipped with self-confidence and self-esteem (Labour Party, in Ranson 1998: 134).

It is not only in the emphasis on personal empowerment (one decides about one’s own life…) but also in the assumption that the goals of education cannot be achieved without first bolstering the individual learner’s self-confidence and self-esteem that we encounter, albeit in a gestural way, the ‘therapeutic turn’ in education.

As we noted earlier, this creates a potential problem for HE institutions, for if learning is a ‘life wide’ activity the need to actually attend a university might well diminish in importance. As Green points out, the European Commission’s 2001 *Memorandum on Lifelong Learning* made precisely this point, arguing that lifelong learning should be ‘life wide’ in that it should be ‘embedded in all life contexts from the school to the workplace, the home and the community’ (Green 2002: 613). In the context of the UK, the point was made as early as 1994 by the Economic and Social Research Council [ESRC] prior to launching its *Learning Society Research Programme* (in 1996). The ESRC described the learning society as ‘one in which all citizens acquire a high quality general education’ (ESRC 1994: 2, emphasis added).

A similar point was made in *Learning Works*, the 1997 report of the Committee on Widening Participation in Further Education [Chair: Helena Kennedy QC]. In this report – a direct influence on the incoming Labour Government’s FE and HE policies, and on Dearing’s committee – states that:

> Many of the skills and qualities required for success at work are the same as those required for success in personal, social and community terms... The capabilities are
learned and developed *in a wide variety of ways over a lifetime*’ and the point is summarised in the phrase ‘*we believe that all types of learning* are valuable (Kennedy, in Ranson 1998: 164, emphases added).

It is against this background that we might chart the increasing importance to HE institutions of attending to the student experience.

The student-centred approach of the Dearing Report, with its implication that the knowledge gained about his- or herself by an individual student is much more important to their long-term interests than any subject-based knowledge they might gain during their time in HE, has the potential effect of undermining, in the long run, the authority of the academic enterprise itself. After all, self-knowledge is something anyone can gain, whether or not they attend a university. Moreover, the very idea of lifelong learning implies that learning takes place continuously – in the workplace, on the street, in the home, in the pub – and higher education is just one more environment among these many others. Where, one might ask, does learning not take place in a learning society? And if learning does take place anywhere and everywhere and all of the time, what’s so important about entering HE in order to do it? The status and authority of universities, and, of course, of teaching itself is thereby weakened by the general undermining of formal education in the face of informal and non-formal sources of knowledge, and by the emphasis on experiential learning over the acquisition of subject-knowledge (Furedi 2009: 157).

One way in which universities responded to this student-centred discourse was to bend in the direction of student experience. (In this can be seen one source of HE’s current obsession with ‘the student experience’, as exemplified by such developments as the National Student Survey). An example drawn from my own university will illustrate the pervasiveness of this way of conceptualizing higher education. The Institute for Learning Enhancement [ILE] at the University of Wolverhampton has its origins in the Dearing Report’s desire to enhance the quality of HE via the ‘professionalization’ of the sector. Part of this project involved the setting up of an independent body charged with maintaining and improving standards in HE. This body was the Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education [ILTHE] which, in 2004, became the Higher Education Academy [HEA]. The role of the HEA in promoting a therapeutic culture in universities has been noted by Ecclestone and Hayes (2009: 99).

The ILE – formerly known as the Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching [CELT] – describes itself as ‘a strategic department established to lead developments in learning and teaching across the University.’ However, in spite of this reference to learning *and* teaching, it is significant that the renamed body dropped the original reference to teaching altogether in favour of the student-centred formulation ‘learning enhancement.’ This emphasis is reinforced in the ILE’s Mission Statement, which makes no reference to teaching at all:
We are committed to promoting independence in our learners, developing their intellectual capacities, enhancing their key and research skills, and improving their subject knowledge (ILE n.d.).

The ILE provides a series of guides to lecturers including, amongst others, ‘How to harness the students’ experience to their learning,’ the purpose of which is to make their learning ‘meaningful and relevant’ to their lives, and ‘How to raise attainment with a good assignment brief.’ This latter contains the following statement:

Research shows that attainment levels can be associated with the quality of the assignment brief; students report that unclear and unwieldy briefs produce learner anxiety; students spend days trying to decode the brief rather than getting down to the assignment (ILE n.d.).

Here we encounter the therapeutic turn in advice on constructing an assignment brief, for the point of producing a clear brief is the reduction of learner anxiety. Not only is no evidence supplied for this claim (in spite of the claims that ‘research shows’ or that ‘students report’) but one is also led to wonder how a tutor should respond to this advice more generally. For example, asking students to read complex and difficult texts would no doubt have the effect of increasing ‘learner anxiety’. Should tutors, therefore, find simpler, less complex texts?

Elsewhere in the University, the therapeutic orthodoxy promoted by, at the national level, the HEA and, at the local level, by the ILE is endorsed and promoted. In the University’s School of Education, for example, researchers focus on ‘emotional reactions to learning and assessment’ and explore the ‘corrosive emotional reactions’ suffered by students faced with challenging assessments which pervade their personal and working lives ‘like an illness’ (Cramp et al. 2011: 519). As I have sought to demonstrate, Dearing’s emphasis on the student experience, and the elevation of process (via the record of achievement – or personal development portfolio – element of the Progress File) over product (the academic transcript) sets this process in train.

From Personal Development to Working on the Self

We have seen that the Dearing Report identified the creation of a culture of lifelong learning as a key goal to which higher education might be recruited. We have also considered the role which the personal development portfolio, with its emphasis on the importance to students of reflecting upon their whole lives, was to play in establishing a culture of lifelong learning. But as critics of this policy have pointed out, reflection is not a simple thing and the students’ ability to do it might be affected by their gender, race, or class, and might to some extent even be affected by the academic subjects which they choose to study. Clegg and Bradley, for example, point out that students taking ‘hard’ subjects such as engineering see technical matters or the ‘facticity’ of their subjects as much more germane to their
studies than ‘soft’ practices such as reflection, whereas in ‘soft’ subjects, such as one finds in the humanities, reflection is already part of what students do. Ironically, downplaying the subject-knowledge in these latter subjects in favour of ‘directing the student’s attention to how they learn’ (Elliot 1999: 13) might well undermine a more sophisticated ability to reflect (Clegg & Bradley 2006: 70-71).

If the personal growth of the student were genuinely the goal of the personal development portfolio, such considerations might be cause for concern. But as we have already seen, the purpose of the reflective element of Dearing’s Progress File is not the personal growth of the individual student: it is the creation of a culture of lifelong learning. Couched in the language of therapy – education will produce ‘socially well-adjusted members of society’ [Callaghan] – students will be ‘empowered to make their own decisions about their own lives’ and to ‘manage their own learning’ [Labour Party; Dearing]; they will be encouraged to ‘reflect upon their own personal development’ [Dearing]; the process of reflection will help students to develop ‘as a whole person’ [QAA]; students must be enabled to ‘take responsibility for their own learning’ [Elliot]; students must be ‘equipped with self-confidence and self-esteem’ [Labour Party]) the goal of creating a culture of lifelong learning is to align more closely the system of higher education (and education more generally) to the needs of the economy, and in particular the demands on the part of business for a more flexible and adaptable workforce.

Although Dearing acknowledges – in the very first line of the very first paragraph of the report – that ‘education is life-enhancing’ in that ‘it contributes to the whole quality of life’ this is mere lip-service, for in the very next line of the report the dominant tone is set: ‘In the next century, the economically successful nations will be those that become learning societies: where all are committed, through effective education and training, to lifelong learning’ (Para 1.1, emphasis added). Education generally, and higher education in particular, is yoked to the goal of economic success at the outset. The task of education thus shifts from the enlightenment goal of enlarging the human being in its understanding of the world, to shrinking its understanding to a set of narrow economic goals, chief amongst which is the work one must do upon one’s self. In this new post-Fordist world, labouring upon oneself is ‘the key to success’ and is ‘essential to employability’ (DEE 1998: 9, 7). As Clegg, writing in the wake of the Dearing Report, has pointed out, the subjectivities of students have been reconstructed in that they have been encouraged to see themselves, not primarily as learners interested in their subjects, but as learners interested in themselves as learners – via the ‘learning-to-learn’ discourse – or as employable subjects oriented towards work – via the currently fashionable ‘employability’ discourse (Clegg 2004; Ball 2009; Browne 2010).
Conclusion

In this paper I have argued that, in terms of the therapeutic turn in the UK higher education sector, the Dearing Report has played a crucial but often overlooked role. It’s ambition to bring about a learning society characterised by lifelong learning, necessitating as this did a cultural shift in our understanding of the purpose and point of higher education, framed the committee’s approach in ways that decisively shifted the centre of gravity towards the student-as-learner, a role no longer constrained by the limited institutional confines of the university characterised by a focus on academic subjects. This new role, cut loose from the institutional constraints of the university, implies a self that must constantly labour upon itself if it is to succeed in the new speeded-up, flexible labour market. The project of reflexivity which Dearing establishes via the record of achievement element of the Progress File is ‘characterised by the constant need to invent the self in the face of risk [and] the lack of old certainties and stable social relations’ which this new capitalist order demands (Clegg & David 2006: 155). This ‘belabored’ self is the product of the therapeutic turn set in train by the Dearing Report, and subsequently refined and consolidated across the HE sector in the UK.

Of course, I do not claim that Dearing was solely the agent of this therapeutic turn in HE – it was a symptom just as much as a cause, as I hope I have gone some way towards demonstrating. Nor do I claim that it is solely the student-centred aspects of the report that led to this therapeutic turn. Ecclestone and Hayes, for example, point out that Dearing’s ambition to ‘professionalise’ teaching in the HE sector via the establishment of a professional body (Dearing led to the setting up of the Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education which has since been superseded by the Higher Education Academy) has also had an important impact on entrenching the therapeutic culture in academia via its role in teacher training (Ecclestone & Hayes 2009: 99). But I do think that Dearing’s role in bringing about the therapeutic turn ought to be properly recognised and understood. The project of creating a learning society characterised by lifelong learning, advocated by the Dearing Report, should properly be recognised as an exhortation to embark upon a lifetime of labouring upon the self.

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References


The Self-Help Book in the Therapeutic Ontosphere: A Postmodern Paradox

By Jean Collingsworth

Abstract

The self-help book is a prominent cultural and commercial phenomenon in the therapeutic ontosphere which permeates contemporary life. The generic term ‘ontosphere’ is here co-opted from IT to describe a notional social space in which influential conceptualisations and shared assumptions about personal values and entitlements operate without interrogation in the demotic apprehension of ‘reality’. It thus complements the established critical terms ‘discourse’ and ‘episteme’. In the therapeutic ontosphere the normal vicissitudes of life are increasingly interpreted as personal catastrophes. As new issues of concern are defined, it is assumed that an individual will need help to deal with them and live successfully. Advice-giving has become big business and the self-help book is now an important postmodern commodity. However a paradox emerges when the content and ideology of this apparently postmodern artifact is examined. In its topical eclecticism the genre is indeed unaligned with those traditional ‘grand narratives’ and collective value systems which the postmodern critical project has sought to discredit. It endorses relativism, celebrates reflexivity and valorizes many kinds of ‘personal truth’. Moreover readers are encouraged towards self-renovation through a process of ‘bricolage’ which involves selecting advice from a diverse ethical menu alongside which many ‘little narratives’ of localized lived experience are presented as supportive exemplars. However in asserting the pragmatic power of individual instrumentality in an episteme which has seen the critical decentering of the human subject, the self-help book perpetuates the liberal-humanist notion of an essential personal identity whose stable core is axiomatic in traditional ethical advice. And the heroic journey of self-actualization is surely the grandest of grand narratives: the monomyth. Thus the telic self-help book presents the critical theorist with something of a paradox.

Keywords: Self-help book, ontosphere, therapeutic discourse, postmodern paradox, metanarrative
A Fearful Society

Since the phrase ‘risk society’ was coined by Ulrich Beck (1992: 21) to describe increasing public concern about hazards such as pollution, crime and emergent diseases, other commentators have documented a widespread sense of fearfulness in society (cf. Bourke 2006; Furedi 2006; Gardner 2009; Glassner 2010) whilst also noting that most individuals in the west have never been healthier, wealthier or safer. Lasch (1979) famously identifies a therapeutically-nuanced culture of narcissism which encourages anxious self-scrutiny. Sykes (1992: 38-45) observes ‘the marketing of the therapeutic’ and calls America a nation of ‘victims’ who increasingly lack the inner strength needed to fight personal adversity without external support (cf. Peele 1999; Playfair 2004). Furedi (2004: 8-12; 17-21; 95-105) considers that the normal vicissitudes of life have become increasingly interpreted as personal catastrophes so that universal experiences such as child-rearing, sexual relations, loss and ageing have been ‘pathologized’ into crises requiring professional advice. Salerno (2005: 26-32) thinks that the self-help movement has created ‘a world of victims’; Hoff Somers and Satel (2006: 5-6) deplore the American ‘intervention ethic’; and Fassin et al. (2009) trace how the ‘trauma narrative’ has become culturally and politically respectable.

Meanwhile each edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), which was originally published by the American Psychiatric Association (APA) in 1952 to provide a shared diagnostic lexicon for health practitioners, has described and named additional psychological disorders and problematic behaviours; most recently in DSM-5 (APA 2013). This has led some practitioners to question what they see as the over-medicalization of mental health issues (cf. Szasz 2007; Greenberg 2013; NHS Choices 2013). However the constant revision and expansion of this publication make it of significant value to certain groups who operate beyond institution-based medicine. This is because its concise descriptors enable researchers, educators, publishers, drug companies, health insurers, lawyers, therapists of all kinds, those who produce self-help materials, carers and patients to identify and respond to the ‘authoritative’ categories of mental disorder promulgated in its pages (cf. Kutchins and Kirk 2001). Once a discrete ‘problem’ has been officially recognised it can then be ‘managed’ with the right help and at a price (cf. Furedi 2004: 98-102) as it becomes a niche market. Thus the commodification imperative of late capitalism identified by Harvey (1991) and Jameson (1992) exploits pathologies for economic gain: research is funded, pharmaceuticals developed, therapies offered, training devised, publications produced and advertising created (cf. Horwitz et al. 2005; Wright 2011: 23).

The processes of expansion and commodification can be seen at work, for example, in the case of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) which has been called one of the most researched disorders of all time (Bailey & Haupt 2010: 3). As the historical survey undertaken by Lange et al. (2010) makes clear,
the challenging childhood behaviours now being described as ADHD are not a recent phenomenon. But once the designation ADHD was introduced into DSM-III-R (APA 1987) a penumbra of formal and informal commentary, together with a variety of proposed interventions through both professional and non-professional therapy, soon developed around the concept. And this rapid growth of interest in the issue can be clearly observed in the pages of the British Library Catalogue (BLC) which contains just 16 items about ADHD published before 1987. But there are 11,520 publications on the topic subsequently: 201 between 1987-1994; 1,549 between 1995-2000; 3,824 between 2001-2007 and 5,946 since 2007. This list includes books, articles, journals, reports, conference proceedings and what the BLC terms ‘popular literature’ such as practical advice for parents, teachers and those with ADHD themselves. Thus we find Cognitive Behavioural Therapy for Adult ADHD: An Integrative Psychosocial and Medical Approach (Ramsay & Rostain 2008) sitting alongside The Pocket Guide to ADHD: Practical Tips for Parents (Green & Chee 2004). Furthermore a Google search for ADHD in February 2014 elicited more than sixteen million results which included the sites of professional and clinical organisations, charities, training companies, personal blogs and the web pages of informal support groups. Clearly a clinical denotation created less than thirty years ago as a definitive term within a specialist lexicon is now entrenched in demotic discourse.

Similarly, after the term Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) appeared in DSM-III (APA 1980) to describe not just behaviours which had long been of concern to the military (Dean 1999) but also the persistent severe anxiety suffered by other groups of people after terrible experiences, research concerned with the nature of trauma-related disorders, their societal effects, their treatment and support rapidly grew (Wilson & Keane 2004; cf. Fassin et al. 2009). Clearly traumatic distress has not somehow been recently ‘invented’. The point is that when an aspect of human experience becomes officially ‘pathologised’ and specifically named, as ADHD and PTSD have been, ordinary people eventually begin to acquire some new vocabulary with which to discuss the issue and an additional area of personal concern becomes established in society (Mays & Horwitz 2005; Illouz 2008: 165-7).

Moreover the publishing industry eagerly responds to such developments, thereby furthering the conversation. For example AD/HD for Dummies (Strong & Flanagan 2004) and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder for Dummies (Goulston 2007) are part of a highly popular series of publications which began with a single guide to the DOS computer operating system in 1991. The Dummies franchise, whose publicity claims that it is designed to make everything easier in our lives by providing step-by-step instructions, currently has over 1,800 ‘manuals’ covering, business, health, sports, pets, relationships etc. etc. There is advice on universal experiences such as anger (Gentry 2006) and eldercare (Zukerman 2003) as well as on more specific personal problems such as stroke (Marler 2005) and schizo-
phrenia (Levine & Levine 2008). Indeed the For Dummies backlist presents cultural commentators with a useful primary source of information about various manifestations of contemporary angst because it is effectively an index of those issues which have come to trouble people significantly enough for them to seek published advice in the last few decades.

Meanwhile the 12-step model of therapeutic intervention originally developed by members of Alcoholics Anonymous (Kurtz 1991; Kaminer 1992) has been widely promoted by the ‘recovery’ industry as an effective intervention stratagem in other settings (Travis 2013). So the disease theory of addiction is now being applied to problems such as drug use, eating disorders, hoarding, gaming, obsession with work and ‘co-dependency’: a condition described by Beattie (1986) as the compulsion to control the behaviour of others. Each of these issues now has its own register of 12-step meetings as well as a characteristic ‘recovery’ discourse which is articulated in a collection of associated guides, testimonies, workbooks, calendars, websites, blogs etc.

Moreover the professional counselling industry has expanded remarkably since the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy was set up in 1977 to provide practitioners with a code of conduct and to advise official bodies about developments in mental health treatments. Indeed the wide variety of organisations now active in this area can be seen in the Counselling Directory (2014). However there has been some concern about the possible negative effects of the growing intervention culture. For example Ecclestone and Hayes (2008) worry that therapeutically-nuanced education in schools may be infantilising young people by focusing attention on present behavioural problems and issues of emotional vulnerability; rather than teaching them how to welcome challenges and cope with instances of failure, thereby helping them to establish a core of psychological resilience for the future.

Yet not all is therapeutic anxiety and there is also significant interest in what makes for personal agency and sustained inner strength. For example the discipline of Positive Psychology developed by Professor Martin Seligman and his colleagues at the University of Pennsylvania (Seligman 1991; 2011) is now being widely taught (Hefferon & Boniwell 2011) and has generated much scholarly material, such as the articles in the Journal of Happiness Studies. Seligman’s ‘new’ approach studies the character strengths and virtues that produce well-being in people, rather than focusing on mental pathologies. Unsurprisingly there have also been a number of related self-help books such as The How of Happiness: A Practical Guide to Getting the Life You Want (Lyubomirsky 2007) and Happiness for Dummies (Gentry 2008), which describes itself as a guide ‘to living the good life you deserve’. In this it echoes the L’Oreal cosmetic company’s trademark slogan ‘Because You’re Worth It’ which gained a US patent in 1976 and still appears constantly in advertisements. Happiness itself has been called a ‘new science’ by Professor Layard of the London School of Economics (Layard 2011) and there is
now *The Oxford Handbook of Happiness* (David et al. 2013); politicians talk about the importance of well-being for the nation (Bok 2010) and life coaching has become a recognised career choice (Purdie 2010; cf. Ehrenreich 2009). Furthermore the publishers of self-help books continue to earn many millions of pounds. However it must be remembered that their success is unavoidably predicated on readers feeling that something in their life needs need fixing. Thus even the most optimistic publication may be said to contribute to the prevailing ‘therapeutic sensibility’ (Lasch 1979: 7) inasmuch as it must initially situate the reader as a subject which is in some way ‘lacking’ and thus in need of relief.

**The Therapeutic ‘Ontosphere’**

In view of so much self-reflexive activity and ‘solution-seeking’, it is not unreasonable to speak of a ‘therapeutic turn’ in our peri-millennial experience, and the variety of discourses which may be encountered in therapy culture is remarked upon in *The Rise of the Therapeutic Society* (Wright 2011: 13-48; cf. Imber 2004). Many different assumptions and experiences coexist symbiotically in the current climate of self-concern. Some of these are scholarly while others feature in everyday conversation; some relate to issues of personal well-being while others are matters of public attention. Therefore the word ‘ontosphere’ is here co-opted into the critical lexicon from the fields of computing and artificial intelligence (AI) in order to describe this therapeutically-nuanced climate of thought with greater economy. Whereas in philosophy ‘ontology’ denotes a systematic account of the nature of existence, in computing, knowledge engineering (KE) and artificial intelligence (AI) the term is used to describe the accretion of concepts, relationships, vocabulary and behaviours existing and acknowledged within a grouping of disparate members who need to share virtual-encoded information during their contingent activities, and who must therefore establish common ground and protocols (Gaglio & Lo Re: 2014).

Thus there are different ‘ontologies’ in different communities, each one constituting a particular consensual space with perceptible yet protean conceptual boundaries within which members operate. Such a shared space might therefore be called an ‘ontosphere’ and I propose that this new generic term be used to describe any notional social environment in which variously linked formal and informal conceptualisations and shared assumptions about values and entitlements circulate axiomatically and are taken for granted in the popular apprehension of ‘reality’. An ontosphere is inhabited by professionals and the wider public alike; it is not a competitive or hierarchical environment but may be thought of as the matrix and host to a variety of contingent, sometimes competing, discourses which circulate at a variety of societal levels, yet which share fundamental concerns.

An example of a detectable yet comparatively recent ontosphere is the digitally-suffused environment inhabited by individuals and organisations who turn au-
tomatically to information technology for information, communication and entertainment and for whom engagement with the hypermedia, which allows seamless interaction with text, pictures and sound, is second nature. Brynjolfsson and McAfee (2014: 57-70) predict ‘the digitization of just about everything’; and work on the Internet of Things (IoT) in which everyday objects contain embedded technology which enables them to interact with their external environment and each other is well under way (Adler 2013). This is the ‘virtual ontosphere’. Meanwhile in the ‘therapeutic ontosphere’ the significant and pervasive assumptions are that while people are entitled to prosperity, health and personal fulfilment, they are likely to need interventions, advice and support from various ‘authorities’ throughout their lives in order to achieve them (cf. Illouz 2008; Wright 2011).

The term ‘ontosphere’ which is being coined here usefully extends the lexicon of Cultural Studies by describing a nebulous yet powerful climate of opinion in which certain ‘taken for granted’ assumptions circulate and are assumed to be a given in every-day life: metaphorically like the atmosphere we breath. Firstly ‘ontosphere’ complements the well-established critical term ‘discourse’, which is used about more conscious and sometimes more formal mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion in the language and praxis associated with certain professional, social or cultural groupings (cf. Fairclough 2001). There are various contingent, and sometimes competing, discourses within an ontosphere. Secondly ‘ontosphere’ complements the notion of ‘episteme’ which was introduced by Michel Foucault in The Order of Things (1966/1970) and has come to signify the body of formal ideas, and thus the system of understanding, which shapes intellectual knowledge during a certain period. It is therefore quite possible to speak of the ‘postmodern episteme’ which has been for some time the naturalised domain of cultural theorists, but not of a ‘postmodern ontosphere’ in which an awareness of postmodernity has become assimilated into every-day conversation. Even though the term ‘postmodern’ is sometimes to be found in popular articles about art, architecture, film and fashion, the notion has not significantly established itself in demotic ideology. Perhaps this is because the visual and material manifestations of postmodernity are more easily recognised and discussed (cf. Jenks 1989; Papadakis 1990) than the abstractions and complexities of cultural theory (Kellner 1988: 241; Jameson 1992: x-xiii). However both digital technology and issues of self-development impinge significantly on our personal narrative and very many of us now confidently inhabit both virtual and therapeutic ontospheres.

The Self-Help Book: A Postmodern Commodity

Within the therapeutic ontosphere the self-help book, which is defined by Katz (1985: xv) as a publication designed for those who wish to improve, modify or otherwise understand their physical or personal characteristics, is a highly visible
phenomenon (Starker 2002). Ever since Samuel Smiles (1859) inadvertently named a whole genre with a book which begins ‘Heaven helps those who help themselves’, self-development has become very big business; part of the culture of consumerism in which the ‘mobilisation of desire and fantasy’ (Harvey 1991: 61) sustains buoyancy in the market and keeps expansive production possible. Indeed some writers and publishers have earned many millions of pounds; not only from the primary publication but also as a result of the sequels, media appearances, seminars, coaching franchises and other merchandise which have followed. A striking example of this ‘inflation’ can be seen in the phenomenal success of John Gray’s *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* (1992/2012) which has been a best-seller since the 1990s and has generated all of the above ‘additions’ as well as spin-off material about diet and exercise, thus becoming both a trademark and a world-wide franchise (Mars and Venus Coaching 2014).

Moreover the popularity of self-development material in general shows no signs of waning and in February 2014 Amazon.co.uk listed more than one hundred and forty-five thousand items under the heading ‘Mind, Body and Spirit’. Even allowing for duplicate hard copies, Kindle editions and the fact that this flexible commercial category embraces occasional works of fiction such as *The Celestine Prophecy* (Redfield 1994) and *The Alchemist* (Coelho 1993), there is clearly sustained demand for what Illouz (2008: 13) calls ‘commodified, quick-fix advice’. Furthermore new self-help sub-genres constantly arise to cater for emergent matters of self-concern. For example although the sub-genre devoted to ‘emotional intelligence’ (EI) is a fixture in bookshops today, it only surfaced as a truly commercial proposition for the book-trade in the mid-1990s. This topic had already been the subject of a scholarly piece by Leuner in 1966 and was quietly revisited by Salovy and Mayer in 1990. However it was when *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ* became a bestseller for Daniel Goleman in 1995 with its readable mix of anecdote and research that a veritable spate of both popular and scholarly publications soon followed. Thereafter the Emotional Intelligence industry was underway and the EI approach began to appear in diverse and unexpected areas. Now senior managers, military personnel and debt collectors are all encouraged to develop Emotional Intelligence in order to improve their professional effectiveness (Illouz 2008: 209-216) and the Consortium for Research on Emotional Intelligence in Organisations (2014) maintains an extensive online bibliography and news hub for its members.

Meanwhile professional therapists have also been turning to self-help books in order to reinforce their treatments: as described in *Read Two Books and Let’s Talk Next Week* (Maidman Joshua & DiMenna 2000; cf. Stanley 1999). Oxford University Press has published *Self-Help that Works* (Narcross 2013) which provides a list of resources for clinicians; and GPs are being officially encouraged to offer ‘bibliotherapy’ to certain patients. To this end they have been issued with a core list of ‘Books on Prescription’ which will be held by their local library. Among
the topics covered in the list are obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), low self-esteem, anxiety and depression (Reading Agency/Reading Well 2013). Since it is likely that people will already be consulting self-help materials, this may be seen as an attempt to direct them to better quality resources (cf. Stanley 1999). But presumably this strategy will also prove much cheaper for the NHS than prescribing drugs or providing one-to-one counselling for patients.

Clearly the self-help book is a remarkable cultural and economic phenomenon in the present therapeutically-nuanced epoch and so it is unsurprising that the genre has attracted considerable critical attention, not all of it positive (cf. Chandler & Kay 2004; Pearsall 2005: 4-12; Dolby 2005: 35-55; Wright 2011). After all these hugely popular publications are de facto the indices and vectors of contemporary existential self-concerns, thus constituting a rich primary source of information for social commentators and historians. Moreover as notably successful commercial products which reify the aspirations of their consumers while encouraging them in that inflationary yearning for ‘more’ which Jameson (1992) describes as being the logical outcome of ‘late capitalism’, they are highly symptomatic of the ‘postmodern condition’. Certainly they have flourished remarkably in what Charles Jencks, himself a pioneering chronicler and theorist of the postmodern, has characterised as ‘an age of incessant choosing’ (Jencks 1989: 7; cf. Schwartz 2005). In their insistence that people have the right to individual agency, self-help publications not only commodify the reflexive process but also standardise the personal ethic into various formulae for ‘success’; simultaneously exhorting their readers constantly to desire greater things for themselves, both materially and ‘spiritually’. Consequently, as a result of its characteristic responsiveness to changing social conditions and fashions, self-help literature has been able to generate substantial on-going revenues for its producers, not least through stimulating demand for future publications and related life-style products. Thus the genre now plays a significant part in the post-industrial ‘knowledge economy’ in which information of all kinds is traded and where the individual’s continuing desire for more and better everything, a characteristically postmodern dynamic identified by Lyotard (1979/1984: 38), must be maintained.

The Self-Help Genre: A Postmodern Paradox

But although it is clear that self-help books are a notably successful product in the current therapeutic market-place and may thus be said to contribute to the wider ‘postmodern condition’, both as fashionable material artefacts and through their remarkable commercial footprint, things become more challenging when one seeks to interrogate this group of publications more specifically as a postmodern textual genre: that is, to examine their content. This is less because of their topical diversity than because the theoretical debate about what actually constitutes ‘postmodernity’ and ‘the postmodern’ is so multi-faceted. However some consen-
sus about certain salient postmodern patterns has emerged (cf. Hassan 1985: 123-4; Edgar & Sedgwick 2002: 295; Malpas 2004) and it is illuminating to measure self-help material against two well-known ones which may be summarised thus: firstly the recognition that traditional, ‘legitimising’ narratives have now lost credibility; and secondly the idea that there is no essential, given ‘self’ – only an incrementally-constructed and contingent social phenomenon which provides us with the illusion of personal autonomy while we proceed to live out our lives mostly unaware of the wider discursive forces which are actually shaping and constraining our understanding and ability to communicate.

Since Lyotard published *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* in 1979 it has become a tenet of postmodern thought that the totalising ‘grand narratives’ of enlightened rationality, science, religion, politics and patriotism, which were long thought by many to provide comprehensive explanations about existence and a framework for living, have lost their credibility (Lyotard 1979/1984: 60). Yet Eagleton (2007) observes that although postmodernity may lack faith in more traditional systems of legitimisation, its characteristic celebration of relativism and subjective value systems has proved to be a matrix in which diverse personal beliefs flourish. For example, although formal religious practice has declined (Rieff 1966/1987: 48-65) and secularisation has increased (Bruce 2002), issues relating to people’s well-being and ethical conduct are widely discussed: not least in self-help literature which is unashamedly enthusiastic about the possibility of bodily, mental and spiritual renovation. Indeed, although self-help material as a whole is unaligned to those monumental, totalising sources of authority or ‘metanarratives’ (Lyotard 1979/1984) which have historically sustained people, and which the postmodern critical project has sought to discredit, the genre accommodates very many different ‘localised’ approaches to achieving personal fulfilment.

Rather than discussing the ramifications of challenging philosophical matters in depth, self-help books are carefully designed to educate and comfort their readers by providing them with concise information and easily digested ‘little narratives’ (cf. Lyotard 1979/1984: xi, 60) of personalised struggle and success which are often presented in the form of anecdotal testimony or confession. Paradigmatically each self-help book is a quest narrative similar to the ‘hero’s journey from darkness to light which Joseph Campbell finds to be the fundamental and ancient structure of many tales throughout the world. He calls this pattern the ‘monomyth’ and describes it thus: ‘A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won’ (Campbell 1949: 23). And similarly, the questing reader who is seeking to overcome some difficulty or sense of ‘lack’ in their personal narrative (cf. Propp 1968: 53; Dolby 2005: 4) ventures to consult a self-help book which addresses their problem, thereby aiming to become empowered and ‘victorious’ as a result of following its advice.
But of course each self-help publication has its own notion of what constitutes ‘success’ and takes a particular approach to dealing with what Charles Taylor famously calls ‘the affirmation of ordinary life’ (Taylor 1989: 3-91). By this he means those situations, activities and challenges which have significance for individuals who must make themselves a framework for effective daily living in a society where, as Smart (2010) observes, there is now unprecedented ethical and consumer choice. So it is perhaps no surprise to find that although self-help books sometimes mention those scientific developments, particularly in psychology, which offer insights into how people behave to each other (e.g. Nettle 2005), they pay comparatively little attention to wider political and social issues over which the individual can have no control. These publications are necessarily circumscribed texts which are designed to show readers how to make significant and speedy improvements in their every-day experience. Therefore the challenging theoretical questions about the existence or otherwise of the unified ‘self’ and personal agency which exercise and excite postmodern critics are not at all an issue for them.

Yet inasmuch as this kind of literature focuses on personal development and comprises a remarkably wide range of topics and techniques from which readers can choose, it *de facto* articulates the reflexive imperative towards self-fashioning which critics such as Schrag (1997) find to be a defining characteristic of the pluralistic postmodern epoch. Indeed a visit to the self-help section of a bookshop will confirm that there are many kinds of ethical ‘truth’ on offer out there; just as the cultural theorists would have us believe. Readers may select and combine advice from a highly diverse topical menu, thereby undertaking their psychic and physical renovation through a process of ‘bricolage’: a term from the lexicon of postmodern criticism which is used to describe the way in which each person assembles their identity from the disparate cultural resources available to them. For example they are likely to find the bracing work-ethic of authors like Spencer Johnson (1998), Dale Carnegie (1936/2009) and Stephen Covey (1989/2013) alongside extensive material on aspects of physical and mental addiction; a growing corpus of what the book-trade calls ‘misery memoirs’ from people who have survived abusive situations and feel that sharing their experiences will help others; a whole lot about negotiating emotional relationships; various traditional and New Age spiritualities; and many suggestions about thrifty living. They are also likely to encounter the sincere optimism of publications such as *The Cosmic Ordering Service* which declares that ‘thoughts create matter’ (Mohr 2006: 20) and assures its readers that the universe is just waiting to fulfil their dreams.

Such diversity of topic and approach within self-help literature is surely consonant with the claim made by postmodern theorists that there can be no single ‘objective’ account of reality and no ultimate ‘truth’: all is relative. The critical view is that the discursive resources available to each of us at any particular time inevitably limit what we can think and say; our perceptions and understanding are nec-
necessarily contingent upon our given circumstances: family, education, gender, class etc. However the postmodern affirmation of what Giddens (1991: 32-3; 75) calls ‘the reflexive project of the self’ also suggests, more encouragingly, that we can achieve a significant amount of personal reinvention should we choose to adopt different linguistic strategies and habitual practices: for example by reading self-help material. Here then is a paradox for the postmodern theorist. Whether someone buys How to Make Money (Dennis 2011) in order to explore the putative opportunities offered by late capitalism or The Joy of Less (Jay 2011) in response to the economic downturn, the underlying assumption is the same: that this particular individual is absolutely entitled to effect significant changes in their circumstances and will be enabled to do so.

Beneath all its superficial and fashionable variables therefore, the self-help genre shares the same liberal humanist faith in self-determination which is to be found in the optimisms of the Enlightenment project and modernity (cf. Thompson 2004: 107-122). Meanwhile postmodern critical ‘orthodoxy’ insists that the notion of telos is obsolete (Jameson 1992: xi), that ‘progress’ is illusory and that the grand narratives of universalism, religion, science and politics have lost their power over us (Lyotard 1979/1984: 37). Indeed Harvey (1991: 9) claims that ‘fragmentation, indeterminacy, and intense distrust of all universal or ‘totalizing’ discourses’ are the hallmark of postmodernist thought. Yet Taylor (1989: 211-304) observes how much people truly yearn to have goal-directed experiences which will give some shape and sense of meaning to their lives: for example through establishing a family or following a vocation. And in its engagement with the dynamics of personal loyalties, alliances, conflicts, reversals and triumphs, as well as with life’s more practical challenges, the self-help book acknowledges, articulates and enables this telic human drive.

Moreover when the issue of psychic autonomy in the self-help book is further contemplated, then the critical paradox intensifies. Whatever the particular topic of a publication may be, and whether its writer adopts a rigorously didactic or comfortably discursive approach to advice-giving, the existence of the individual reader as audience is never in question. Indeed while people clearly consider themselves to have pressing emotional, spiritual or bodily problems when they seek for guidance in a bookstore, anxiety about the metaphysical status of ‘the self’ is never going to be one of them. Yet as indicated by the various scholarly extracts collated by Atkins (2005) in Self and Subjectivity, traditional assumptions about the nature of essential selfhood have undergone vigorous critical attack. For example Lacan (1968) powerfully argues that the axiom of the coherent ‘given self’ which has long existed in Western philosophy and psychology must be replaced by the notion of the decentred ‘subject’ whose experience of life will be both incremental and fragmented. Likewise Foucault (1982) famously insists that personal freedom is inexorably limited by institutional discourses and societal practices over which the individual can have no control. Thus what seems to be a
‘self’ is actually an impersonal discursive construct. Likewise Metzinger (2004) observes that we have only phenomenological ‘selves’ which manifest as a result of social consensus and through the processes of our life experience. Yet the contemporary self-help book has no problem at all in assuming the existence of a ‘self-reflexive individual’ with a unique and stable, albeit sometimes troubled, core personality which can always choose to improve itself.

**Conclusion**

Self-help books are a notable element in the therapeutic ontosphere inasmuch as they are a highly successful commodity which engages with many issues of contemporary personal concern and is widely consumed. Indeed they are acutely responsive to the cultural fashions and economic shifts of late capitalism as publishers seek new ways of ‘pathologizing’ experience in order to provide readers with a constant stream of advice at a price. Yet a paradox for the postmodern theorist lies in the fact that structural analysis of the genre as a whole finds it to be essentialist and telic in its fundamental narrative paradigm. The literature of personal development necessarily conserves the liberal-humanist creed of an essential stable core identity which has always been the focus of traditional ethical advice. Even though self-help books must initially situate their readers as beleaguered people in a risk-laden society who are in need of therapeutic support, their fundamental framework is always the problem/solution model and they are ultimately optimistic and integrative. These ‘closed’ texts are designed to give clear, concise information and advice and it is not their purpose to worry their readers with opportunities for deconstructive, negotiated readings.

Moreover self-help books pay little attention to variables like class, ethnicity or the possession of cultural capital which can significantly shape lives. These are unselfconsciously ‘universalising’ texts whose global sales figures show how much readers crave ‘salvation narratives’ which offer a comfortably circumscribed experience of comprehension and control in an increasingly fragmented world. Each publication, whatever its particular subject matter or linguistic register, and whether it is advising about perceived threats to well-being or is concerned to promote personal development and agency, is predicated on a fundamental narrative of transformative possibility for the individual. Thus in asserting the power of personal instrumentality in an episteme which has seen the critical decentring of the human subject, this genre perpetuates the telic optimisms of the Enlightenment and modernity in reified form.

In its engagement with an essential self which seeks improvement, self-help literature is clearly part of the liberal humanist tradition which has always regarded the notions of human progress and individual responsibility as axiomatic. Furthermore, in its many ‘re-presentations’ of the quest narrative in which the reader may start out as a victim but is encouraged through self-reflexivity and right ac-
tion towards self-renovation and eventual triumph, the self-help book surely perpetuates the grandest narrative of all: the ‘hero's journey’. Thus while it is undoubtedly a significant material artefact in the contemporary market place and seems capable of undergoing infinite transformation in order to respond to emergent anxieties in the contemporary therapeutic ontosphere, the self-help book presents a paradox for the critical theorist inasmuch as it also constantly asserts and celebrates the power of essential self-hood which the deconstructive debates of postmodern cultural theory have enthusiastically sought to undermine. A popular product which presents a paradox! What could be more postmodern than that?

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“Not a Vacation, But a Hardening Process”: The Self-Empowerment Work of Therapeutic Craft in Nova Scotia

By Erin Morton

Abstract
This article will examine the development of a state-sponsored therapeutic craft regime in Nova Scotia in the early to mid-twentieth century. Built on the notion that postwar residents needed “work therapy – not a vacation, but a hardening process” (Black n.d. a: 3) – therapeutic craft emerged in Nova Scotia through a complex combination of the individualization of work habits, the desire to construct an antimodern regional identity around handwork, and the notion that both infirm patients and the province as a whole could be healed from economic stagnation through craft. Key to the success of Nova Scotia’s therapeutic craft regime was occupational therapist Mary E. Black’s career as director of the provincial government’s Handicrafts and Home Industries Division from 1943 to 1955. Black’s healthcare training led her to seek out therapeutic possibilities in everyday work activities, not to mention a therapeutic solution to what she called “the attitude of most Nova Scotians…[:] defeatism” (Black 1949: 46). Her ability to turn seemingly disparate things – such as Scandinavian design, the ordered work of occupational rehabilitation, and a phenomenological focus on what she called “individualistic existence” (Black n.d. b: 2) – into a unified therapeutic solution demonstrates that the contemporary rise of therapeutic culture under the increased individualism of the neoliberal era has an established historical root in the postwar period that remains important to understand.

Keywords: Therapeutic craft, arts and craft revivalism, occupational therapy, antimodernism, tourism, Nova Scotia, economic development
Introduction

Occupational therapist Mary E. Black wrote that her 1943 initiation of an economic development program centred on craftwork in the eastern Canadian province of Nova Scotia was “a complete about face from considering the patient’s reaction to considering the sales value of the product, [a strategy that] was completely revolutionary. Medical concepts had to be discarded and thought given to commercial processes rather than therapeutic” (Black 1949: 46). Yet Black’s initial comments did not tell the whole story of the connection between liberal therapeutic ideals of the postwar period and her desire to institute a form of capitalist development built on handwork. Black’s program, which she initiated in her role as Director of the Handcrafts Division of Nova Scotia’s Provincial Department of Trade and Industry from 1943 to 1955, saw economy and therapy as intertwined in its initiation of widespread craft training programmes bent on helping postwar residents negotiate economic decline.

Black’s revival has been described at length by Canadian historian Ian McKay as “an almost utopian liberal vision of the redemptive power of craft in the modern world. … Crafts were valuable therapy for the wounded …. On a much larger scale, crafts could also heal the wounds of damaged regions” (1994: 166). Yet while historians have examined the particulars of Black’s craft revival, which took the form of government-coordinated technical training workshops and exhibitions, the underpinnings of her therapeutic mission remain less understood. There is evidence to suggest that Black’s therapeutic craft programme was both utopian in its aesthetic vision and practical in its capitalist outlook. In her words, therapeutic craft could help Nova Scotians address:

A distinct group problem...inadequacy and defeatism. Viewed from this angle the whole program took on an added interest and a definite challenge. A program that seemed comparatively simple at first glance, in its concept of commercialism and culture, began to take on a deeper meaning as the large group broke up into smaller groups and small groups into people who became individuals – individuals with problems as acute as those suffered by many hospitalized persons (Black 1949: 46).

Black’s role, as she saw it, was to help postwar Nova Scotians merge their economic development strategies with liberal individualist perspectives on both cultural production and on therapeutic ideals – ideals that she encountered long before taking up her post as Director of Handicrafts in 1943. The result was that Black implemented a state-sponsored therapeutic craft regime around the premise that residents of the province needed “work therapy – not a vacation, but a hardening process,” a notion that both meshed and complicated Black’s earlier understandings of craftwork revivalism and therapy (Kennedy 1942, cited in Black n.d. a: 3).

This article examines the paradox of Black’s mission by considering her experiences with craftwork and medical practice leading up to her 1943 appointment as Director of Handicraft in Nova Scotia, when she came into her own as a bu-
reaucratic organizer of therapeutic craft. While Black worked as an occupational therapist across New England and eastern Canada in the 1920s and 1930s, after 1943 her patients shifted from the disabled and the infirm to the rural resident and the urban worker in Nova Scotia. Her hiring by the Nova Scotia government was a response to an educational meeting known as the Antigonish Conference in 1942 at St. Francis Xavier University, where organizers argued that handicrafts revivalism in the province was “a million dollar industry awaiting development” (McKay 1994: 164). Black was the ideal developer to tackle this challenge, since she made good use of her medical background in employing craft as therapy to set up a systematic state handicrafts programme in the province. She encountered her new clients by establishing training opportunities in rural communities and launching handicrafts exhibitions to display the resulting objects, all in the name of forging possibilities for economic and cultural revival. While other arts and craft revivalists existed on a smaller scale in Nova Scotia earlier in the twentieth-century, Black’s programme was unique in that it garnered governmental support for craftwork province-wide in an attempt to both build and capitalize upon the tourist desire for locally-made material objects (McKay 1994). Hers was a strategy that combined the aesthetics of transnational arts and crafts revivalism with local interpretations of antimodernism that remain significant in Nova Scotia to this day. Less a political attempt to remove workers from a Marxist sense of alienation in postindustrial labour, Black’s goal was instead an unapologetic exercise in “modernizing antimodernism” that used crafts as a commercial base to assist Nova Scotians in recovering from postwar economic disaster (McKay 2001: 119). This in itself is significant, for Black’s revival was not only commercially successful in Nova Scotia but it has also continued to provide the foundation of present-day tourist craft production in such notable examples as the provincial tartan, which has since been reproduced on everything from playing cards in England to a Manhattan manufacturer’s bathrobes (McKay 2001: 126).

From its inception, then, Black’s therapeutic craft programme was connected to the tourist state in Nova Scotia and to commercial craft industries. Black’s idea that Nova Scotians needed work rather than a vacation might appear especially ironic to those familiar with Nova Scotia’s twentieth-century history and the influence on tourism on local material culture. The province that came to be known as “Canada’s Ocean Playground” in a 1931 government tourist slogan has since been used to capture an ideal antimodernist destination for visitors in search of “salty little villages … in unexpected places along a jigsaw coastline, where mellowed inland clearings offer drowsy summer afternoons and wild berries for the hiker … [and] where memories have gathered giving depth and meaning to the lives of a people who always had leisure to be kind,” in the words of one travel writer (Will R. Bird 1959: book jacket quoted in McKay & Bates 2010: 163). Nova Scotia’s tourist and heritage promoters certainly capitalized upon – and helped to shape – a liberal political economy in which tourism and the objects it produced
worked together to mediate social exchanges built on discrete experiences and decontextualized images (McKay & Bates 2010: 9). In Nova Scotia, tourism and history became synonymous in many ways, but particularly in terms of heritage industrialists such as Black who worked with the provincial government to fill in the antimodernist gap left by the realities of industrialization that also tapered tourist expectations of lazy seascapes.

In fact, tourists arriving in Nova Scotia in the postwar period of the 1940s came face to face with an industrialized province that was anything but “mellow” or “drowsy” because of the complexities of modern capitalist development there. Moreover, Black’s take on such promises of a “mellow” life in Nova Scotia geared at potential visitors was not entirely positive. In fact, she understood the province as plagued not by a life of leisure but by an idleness borne from a sense of postwar defeatism that resulted from increasingly precarious work conditions and changing labour patterns that brought rural residents into urban centres en masse. Black’s strategy to get idle Nova Scotians to find meaningful work during the 1940s had the aim of “increas[ing] income, improv[ing] standards of physical living and cultural development, [and encouraging] the therapeutic concept of easement of individual problems …” (Black 1949: 48). Black thus expected resident Nova Scotians to participate as tourist hosts according to a set therapeutic logic, in which those who were not on vacation were hardened and improved by the healthy benefits of craftwork, not to mention by the “work-cure” itself.

Black was not alone in her ideas about the therapeutic use of occupation during this period, especially those focused on craftwork. The U.S. American physician Herbert J. Hall established the “work-cure” model in a 1910 article published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. According to Hall, the “suitable occupation of hand and mind is a very potent factor in the maintenance of physical, mental and moral health in the individual and the community” (Hall 1910: 12). Hall founded an on-the-ground therapeutic commune known as the “Handicrafts Shop” in Marblehead, Massachusetts, where he taught craftwork to patients to focus the mind and to uplift the spirit of the infirm (Hall 1917; Hall & Buck 1915). Hall’s mission in using craftwork therapeutically towards the productive building of occupation thereby challenged standard late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century “rest-cure” practices, which insisted that patients remain in bed and avoid activities to receive therapy (Friedland 2011: 70). Often, the rest-cure model maintained that patients be isolated in establishments with curative possibilities such as water or sunlight, far away from their families, where the afflicted could focus on nutrition and environmental therapies in an attempt to cure their invalidism (Lefkowitz Horowitz 2010: 129-135).

Like Hall, Black purported that individualized activity and not isolated rest was the way to cure mental illness and physical ailments, and saw craftwork in terms of its “specific purpose of contributing to or hastening recovery from disease or injury” (Black n.d. a: 1). To prove this point, she researched the chief “work-cure”
advocates of her day, and collated their collective arguments together in an undated manuscript draft that examined such diverse conditions as injuries to the spine, amputations, cardiac diseases, effort syndrome, pulmonary tuberculosis, mental diseases, hysterical contractures, war neuroses, and chronic arthritis. While Black concluded her manuscript with the words of physician John Grove Kuhns that there “is no one craft for a single disability,” on the whole she saw craftwork as having the potential to bring patients back to the reality of capitalist productivity after injury or illness (Kuhns 1941 quoted in Black n.d. a: 17; italics in original). In fact, according to Black, patients must be “encouraged, cajoled, stimulated and when necessary bullied into activity” (Black n.d. a: 5).

While Black’s advancement of the work-cure model in postwar Nova Scotia helped her build a therapeutic craft regime on occupation, it also established a system that encouraged craftmakers to think of “work [as] being reality” in their daily lives in ways that were unique to this particular context (Black n.d. b: 1). Following the practices of established work-cure practitioners such as Hall, who warned of the dangers of “ill-advised work” producing “positive harm [that] … may result not only in deepening discouragement, but in the intensifying of all symptoms” (Hall 1910: 12), Black’s goal was to teach postwar Nova Scotians productive occupation as a means to achieve individual sustainability. Specifically, Black wrote that the first goal of an occupational therapist should be “to seek out what remains of individual thinking and acting in each patient[,] work to rehabilitate this and so fit the patient for re-entry to an environment of individualistic existence” (Black n.d. b: 8).

This idea that Black’s “patients” (infirm and healthy alike) could improve themselves by tapping into the work-cure’s discourse of individual wellbeing and self-empowerment indicates that her therapeutic craft program was in line with broader notions of liberal therapeutic culture during the mid to late twentieth century. The paradox of the liberal ideology of therapeutic craft, which insisted that individual craftmakers both become self-sufficient workers in a capitalist context and also be heavily moderated and directed in their therapies by knowledgeable healthcare experts, ensured that Black advanced her therapeutic craftwork on a number of fronts. In particular, Black drew on the words of physician William A. Bryan to insist that “organized systematic work is better treatment than careless haphazard occupation” (Bryan 1937: 186 quoted in Black n.d. b: 4). Additionally, Black validated her system of therapy not only with her own authority as a healthcare practitioner, but also through providing evidence of her craftmakers’ success by documenting their personal experiences. The result was a context in which Black sought out the therapeutic possibilities in everyday work activities and a therapeutic solution to the postwar Nova Scotian’s attitude of defeatism – which she understood as a social disease more widespread than any physical or mental ailment she had encountered in her training as an occupational therapist to date.
Therapeutic Craft in Nova Scotia and Abroad

Although Black was born in Massachusetts in 1885, she spent most of her young life in Wolfville, Nova Scotia, before training and working in a series of hospitals and sanitariums throughout Canada and the US in the 1920s and 1930s. In 1919, Black trained as a ward’s aide (later known as occupational aides and, then, occupational therapists) in Montreal through the newly formed, federally-funded Department of Soldiers’ Civil Re-establishment (DSCR) (Morton 2011: 326). The DSCR was a programme founded to help injured soldiers prepare to return to work or to train them to perform new work when injury prevented them from taking up their former vocations; the Department established the ward’s aide programme at both McGill University in Montreal in 1919 and the University of Toronto the previous year (Friedland 2011: 88). As part of her training with the DSCR, Black specialized in using craft towards therapeutic purposes in the form of basketry, beadwork, weaving, and woodcarving under the auspices of the Canadian Handicrafts Guild, which touted the teaching of craftwork to help people improve their productivity (Friedland 2011: 68; 125).

In essence, the DSRC used occupational therapy to help professionalize young middle-class women so that they could contribute directly to the war effort, for they were thought to best be able to “tend to a soldier’s broken spirit” as the “guardians of culture and morality” (Friedland 2011: 114; 128). Yet when Black returned to Nova Scotia in August 1919, where she took up her first medical post at the Nova Scotia Sanatorium before transferring to the Nova Scotia Hospital in Dartmouth in 1920, she began working with civilian patients – and was the first occupational therapist in the province to do so (Twohig 2003). She felt, however, that women professionals such as herself had limited opportunity to advance their careers in Nova Scotia and so she quickly returned to New England in 1922 to take up a position at the Boston State Hospital (Morton 2011: 328), before moving to Michigan in 1923 and Milwaukie in 1939.

Nova Scotia was never far from her mind, however. In 1935, she wrote to the president of the Nova Scotia Technical College, Frederick H. Sexton, to express that despite having “travelled far in experience and knowledge” she found her “thoughts turning frequent of late back to Nova Scotia and its problems in curative measures for the rehabilitation of its mentally (and other) ill” (Black 1935). That being said, Black also spent significant time travelling throughout Europe in the late 1930s, for example, to attend the Paris World’s Fair in 1937, and certainly such touring informed her particular understanding of Nova Scotia’s postwar therapeutic needs in the 1940s. While on tour in 1937, she wrote to her colleagues in the Ypsilanti State Hospital in Michigan, where she worked as director of occupational therapy from 1932 to 1939, to remark that she found “some grand craft idea[s] in the Swiss [pavilion]. … Have seen some marvelous tapestries and petite and gros point this past week – old – but colors still beautiful” (Black 1937a). Earlier
that spring, Black registered as a special student at the Sätergläntan Vävskola weaving school near Insjön, where she learned to weave Swedish samplers such as Daldräll, Möbeltyg, and Rosengång. The school presented these patterns as “typical Swedish tekniks [sic.]” that would benefit its pupils in the instruction of historical Scandinavian design (Augulander 1937). Black’s participation in this training, and her travels in Scandinavia, might be understood as a starting point for expanding her therapeutic craft mission to Nova Scotia, where she would soon return as Director of the Handicrafts Division of the Provincial Department of Trade and Industry in 1943.

Part of the Sätergläntan’s influence on Black no doubt stemmed from the fact that the school was well known in North American crafting circles in the 1930s, having received coverage in such publications as the popular Massachusetts-based Handicrafter magazine. These publications followed the ideas of such prominent English craft revivalists of the 1840s and 1850s as William Morris and John Ruskin, who considered craft and machine work as innately antagonistic (Schaffer 2011: 37). Late nineteenth-century followers of their Arts and Crafts movement in Britain often clung to the idea of peasant art as not only being threatened by modernization, but also as existing in tension with most contemporary domestic handwork, which commonly celebrated industrial modernity (Schaffer 2011: 51). Morris and Ruskin therefore attempted to emulate medieval craftwork; this nineteenth-century perspective on modernity insisted, according to Alice Chandler, that medieval society “be built upon imagination and emotion; modern society upon a shallow rationalism” (1970: 151-152). In turn, twentieth-century disciples of Morris and Ruskin interpreted their ideas with perhaps greater utopianism in an effort to build communities of artisans according to particular “medievalizing impulses,” including Eric Gill’s Ditchling village in 1920s Sussex (Robichaud 2007: 30). Gill in particular championed the artist’s role as a craftsperson, arguing that handwork could help fight against the alienation of creators in postindustrial society (Robichaud 2007: 30-31). Indeed Black’s craftwork followed the visions of arts and crafts revivalists before her, even if hers was a less utopian model in its direct linkage to the capitalist enterprise of modernity.

The appeal of learning Swedish craft techniques for Black may have been connected to the nature of the Swedish-form of the revival itself, which presented itself in ways distinct from British and American examples. In particular, the Swedish model embraced traditions of domestic craftwork in ways that Morris and Ruskin outright rejected (Schaffer 2011). Marie Olsen of Handicrafter noted that Sweden’s Sätergläntan was representative of a trend in “all civilized countries” of “a revival in the art of weaving” (Oslen 1934: 10). The teaching of “Swedish skill” through textile art also provided a therapeutic benefit according to Oslen, as she pointed out that “to all those who long for a rest from the hectic life of the present day, Sätergläntan offers the very best recreation, both when snow covers fields and marshes and affords opportunities for skiing, and when the
school is enveloped in the beauty of the Nordic summer” (Oslen 1934: 11). In other words, the Sätergläntan was both school and retreat, a place where pupils such as Black could learn about the tenets of craft revivalism from those who sought out “the country people who still clung with tenacity to their national costumes and old tradition” (Oslen 1934: 11). The paradox here, to be sure, was that Black’s participation in the Sätergläntan curriculum built its notion of “retreat” on a particular understanding of craftwork that was in line with her work-cure centred therapeutic ideals. The Swedish peasants who developed the patterns that Black and her counterparts learned at Sätergläntan were, in Olsen’s words, “people who could not loaf long, who must keep hands and mind alert to combat the wear and tear of the daily fight for bread” (Oslen 1934: 13).

The Sätergläntan program therefore suggested that productive design came from people engaged in daily craftwork rather than from those whose idleness was the result of inactivity. Students such as Black not only recreated the patterns of Swedish weaving samplers with this in mind, but also mimicked the routines of an idealized peasantry with which they associated such crafts. To immerse students in the world of Scandinavian homecraft, the Sätergläntan curriculum included sightseeing tours of the area to see where rural peoples still produced such textiles. Black’s itinerary was filled with visits to “numerous picturesque villages, castles, churches, cloisters, etc.” (Black n.d. c). She toured the rural villages in the area, noting in a letter home that while many of the Sätergläntan students were advanced weavers, “the loveliest I have seen is done by the farm women and brought in and sold from here” (Black 1937b). This exposure to Sweden’s rural craft traditions in particular contrasted with Black’s experience at Sätergläntan, which she observed was “much more modern than I expected” to the point that “it could be in America anywhere” (Black 1937b). Her training was therefore one built in a discourse of class difference, in which relatively privileged students such as herself could afford the leisure time to undertake craftmaking on vacation rather than as vocation, even if such associations between craft and leisure remained ideologically undesirable for work-cure proponents.

Yet Black’s training at Sätergläntan also solidified her belief in work-cure methods, particularly those that could help her to transfer the antimodernist ideals that she learned in Sweden back to North America in general and to Nova Scotia in particular. The idea of hardworking Swedish peasants relying on their own hands and minds to produce woven goods fit well with Black’s notion that in North America industrialization had wrought too many mechanized solutions to disease. As she put it:

Many patients who come to our hospitals are crushed emotionally by the impact of industrial standardization. Somewhat homeopathically we prescribe work as an antidote for work sickness. We call it OT. Patients like it. It helps them. It is work, but it is different from the daily grind. It’s work beautified and dignified by being individualized. The patient makes all of a thing whether it’s a rag rug or a piece of sculpture. There is the pride of creation. Here is the lesson to be learned from industry: if
the entire process of the making of the end product were visualized for them and they were given vocational cultural opportunities, assembly line workers would find a degree of satisfaction in life which cannot be won by strikes (Black 1942: n.p.).

The idea that it was “natural for a man to be occupied,” but occupied by a particular kind of work that distracted producers from such things as labour disputes, certainly was consistent with North American perspectives on Swedish craftmaking. As a feature article on Swedish craft in a Nova Scotian newspaper reported, for example, before the nineteenth century Sweden represented a lifestyle in which everything “was hand-made, home-spun, and the work of the whole family. Then, industrialism reared its ugly head, the machine took over and ‘traditionally Swedish’ became ‘just European’” (Anon, 1953). For craft revivalists such as Black, Sweden provided an ideal locale with which to imagine a national preindustrial domestic craft tradition that Nova Scotia could model in Canada at the provincial level. If Sweden represented for Black the ideal of hardworking landed peasants whose craftwork was of a high quality because of its connection to vocation, Nova Scotia was a context where the trained therapist’s hand could impose such standards could be imposed where they did not naturally exist.

Certainly, it is clear that Black’s conception of Swedish design was heavily informed by craft revivalism in the United States as well, where entire communities such as those centred on Hall’s Handicrafts Shop focused on teaching historical craftmaking techniques as therapeutic work. However, there remained a sense in North American coverage of Swedish craft revivalism that these Scandinavian craftmakers were ideal examples of how organized work-cure methodologies could be emulated elsewhere:

Like everything else in Sweden, the Swedish handicrafts, the “Hemslojd,” are well-organized, well-run, and superlatively efficient. Information is readily available on everything from what kind of yarn to use for rug-making to setting up a handcraft exhibition, and lecturers pay regular visits. Many of the individual societies for handcraft have their own full-time consultants, and the State Inspector of Handcrafts in the Board of Trade is a permanent government official available for lectures and consultations (Anon. 1953).

This hyper-efficiency was in line with what Black herself observed throughout her travels in Scandinavia, particularly in Oslo and Stockholm, where she noted that:

The State has abolished the slums and built very fine apartment houses. One part of the city is given over to the working classes; another to the white collar people and then the residence section proper. The apartment houses are comfortable looking certainly and we in America would be more than fortunate to have such housing at such prices (Black 1937c).

For Black, dividing housing based on class enhanced the productivity of the local populace and had the benefit of regulating work. Indeed, the Sätergläntan curriculum depended on such ordered measures, where students “weave from 9 to 1 then from 2 to 5” as part of a regulated work day – even if such work was often undertaken on vacation (Black 1937c).
That the orderliness of craftwork methods combined itself with an ordered everyday existence also struck Black, who commented on “the cleanliness of everything” in Sweden – “streets, shops, houses, people – which is all the more impressive because it seems to be self-perpetuating” (Black 1937d). She used this perception to ascertain “certain basic qualities of the Swedish people[s’] character: solidity, stability and self-respect; in fact Swedish self-respect and self-possession goes so far that a stranger might, and sometimes does, mistake them for self-complacency and assumption of superiority” (Black 1937d). This idealization of Swedish character was indeed in sharp contrast with what Black interpreted in her home province of Nova Scotia, which, upon her return there in 1943, she described as “very dirty” and as a place where crafts held “nothing of interest” save a “few pieces of woodenware unpainted furniture and a few piece of pottery” (Black 1943a).

Moreover, she expressed concern about the province’s capital city of Halifax having unsafe streets, where “everything [was] crowded and food not only poor but uninteresting and dirty. Ugh!” (Black 1943a) Black connected what she saw as a lack of order and cleanliness in Nova Scotia with a “standard of design and appreciation of good design [being] very low” there, leading people to “bring in poorly designed and executed articles for sale” at local shops and then feeling “very badly” when merchants “explain that they are not acceptable (Black 1943b). Compounding the problem was the fact that unlike in Sweden most rural people in Nova Scotia had “no interest in crafts” according to Black, since parents tended “to get children educated away from manual labour” and that “any hand work is looked down upon” (Black 1943c). To say the least, Black did not see Nova Scotia as having the same kind of fruitful environment for therapeutic craftwork that she observed in Sweden – although this challenge did not deter her occupational therapy mission for long.

**Crafting a Therapeutic Regime in Nova Scotia**

Black’s travels to Sweden in 1937 and her subsequent move from the United States to Nova Scotia in 1943 ultimately paved the way for her greatest challenge as a therapist. In essence, Black saw Nova Scotians as having a hardworking past that they had not properly tapped into in the present. Specifically, despite the fact that she understood Nova Scotians as toiling “hard and long for generations to wrest and hold their land from the sea and from exploitation by outside big business,” she feared that they had only “come to realize that their strength lies rather in emergencies than in normal living” (Black 1949: 45). For Black, this attitude was typical of a postwar situation, since in the 1940s Nova Scotia saw major state commitment to such industrializing efforts as rural electrification, roadway expansion, and refrigeration services (Miller 1993: 337). In other words, rural Nova Scotians did not have to confront the same challenges of daily life under the rubric...
of modernization that the culmination of World War Two brought to the province on the whole. In general, new employment opportunities based on a wartime economy drew rural workers away from the agricultural, forestry, and fishing occupations that had dominated local labour up to that point (Miller 1993: 314). The influx of such wartime workers to city centres such as the capital of Halifax strained available housing to the limit, and compounded the “often deplorable” living conditions that Black observed into the late 1940s and early 1950s there (Miller 1993: 316).

While Black’s observations here certainly point to her desire to use crafts towards social reform, and in particular to help give workers productive, moral activities, there may have also been a racial sub-text in her writings. Certainly, tourist literature promoting Nova Scotia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century alluded to the idea that it was a place settled and populated by “the best races in the world,” which no doubt informed Black’s perspective in terms of the province existing according to a particular racialized register (McKay & Bates 2010: 13). Indeed, Nova Scotia was home to the first eugenics movement in Canada, which came in the form of the 1908 establishment of League for the Care and Protection of Feebleminded Persons (Grekul 2009: 136-7). When conceptualizing weaving patterns that she would use to teach locals the craft, for example, she outlined a colour scheme inspired by the grey twill of a “French Girl’s dress” and the yellow buttercup field “on which United Empire Loyalists are resting” (Black n.d. d). While Black did not comment directly on the use of craft towards improving Nova Scotia’s established Anglo-Celtic racial hierarchy, the fact that she made connections between craft aesthetics and nationality does suggest that she sought to improve residents’ ability to perform as peasants based on particular racialized identities. To be sure, Sweden’s valorization of peasant culture and the country’s own postwar exercises in eugenics signaled a relationship between racial science and therapeutic culture that Black undoubtedly recognized.

This situation created what Black saw as a heightened need for therapeutic craft, which she understood not only as reinvigorating a preindustrial work-ethic in Nova Scotia but also as helping to address what she framed as the unacceptable social conditions created by the industrializing process itself. In a manner typical of her commitment to liberal ideology, however, Black insisted that such therapy had to be highly individualized. Even if social defeatism was widespread in Nova Scotia and could benefit from the general implementation of the kind of ordered craftwork that she witnessed in Sweden, it remained up to the individual craft worker to heal themselves under her guidance. A provincial handcraft program modeled on what Black understood as the Swedish ideals of ordered work could provide the people of Nova Scotia with what she described as “an opportunity to develop latent talents thus adding to income and enriching their cultural life” (Black 1949: 46). Ultimately, though, Black saw craftwork as a way to teach Nova Scotians self-sufficiency based on a highly individualized commitment to
craftwork as vocation, rather than as another form of postwar industrialization that she saw as impeding such personal commitment to valuable work. In this regard, and as Canadian historian Ian McKay has argued (1994), Nova Scotia’s craft revival was less about returning to an “old way” of rural production and more about establishing a viable occupational base that tied in well with the expansion of a tourist industry in the province into the late twentieth century. As McKay puts it, “the handicraft revival in Nova Scotia was entirely predictable” given this context, even if it “took far more effort, against greater odds, to naturalize a description of Nova Scotia as a haven of handicrafts” than it did elsewhere in North America and Western Europe (McKay 1994: 155). In 1943, the year that Black returned to Nova Scotia to implement her therapeutic craft program, it was “a matter of common knowledge among those interested in sponsoring a craft revival that Nova Scotians lagged far behind the rest of North America in handicrafts” (McKay 1994: 155). Not only did this situation contrast with what Black felt she had observed in terms of the revival and maintenance of traditional craft-making in Sweden, but it also conflicted with Nova Scotia’s provincial government’s creation of a tourist environment in which visitors to the province expected to find rural peoples toiling away at preindustrial activities such as handwork. Yet, even if tourists held “an idée fixe … that fishing villages, home of the hearty and independent fisherfolk, must also be havens of domestic handicrafts (especially weaving, woodwork, and leatherwork), apparently they rarely were” (McKay 1994: 155-156).

The reality that Nova Scotia did not have a rural craft tradition that Black deemed acceptable to draw upon for revival deterred her therapeutic craft mission very little, however. In fact, she understood her role as an occupational therapist as teaching Nova Scotians vocational craft skills to bring on a form of healing that would mend the wounds of wartime modernization and the social unrest that emerged alongside it. This in and of itself was a form of revival for Black, since its ideology depended on an understanding of Nova Scotia having a self-sufficient past to draw upon even in the dependent present. As I have argued elsewhere, Black’s work in Nova Scotia emerged under what she described as “the therapeutics of weaving” (Morton 2011: 324), in which occupational therapy offered one possibility for social reform. In short, occupational therapy allowed Black “to remodel her therapeutic craftmaking for a different kind of patient, one less affected by disease of the mind and body and instead stricken with the more common social and moral affliction of idleness” (Morton 2011: 333). Thus, even though Black wrote that some of her occupational therapy colleagues accused her “of ‘quitting’ O.T. when I came to my own Province to organize the Handcrafts and Home Industries of Nova Scotia,” she saw her therapeutic work as facilitated by craftmaking: “if some of my critics could follow me around a bit I am sure they would find I’m as much O.T. as I ever was. There is a broad scope for the
practice of psychiatric and other types of O.T. in field work as in hospitals if one but sees it” (Black 1947).

What Black saw in Nova Scotia was an expansive field in which therapeutic craftmaking could bring about widespread social reform. Black’s therapeutic objective was quite simply to stimulate the creative interests of her patients. This, she noted, “is always a difficult task, yet by perseverance success will be attained, and it is a sign of improvement when a patient begins to be absorbed in his work” (Black n.d. a: 12). Moreover, Black was convinced that the patient’s ability to engage in meaningful therapy through craft was tied to personal conviction, which she saw as informed by an individual’s own experiences rather than by systemic social disparity. For instance, she argued that:

> It may be possible to obtain leads from the patient’s history which will be suggestive, as a man whose artistic craving had been thwarted by the necessity for making a living may take a greater interest in leather tooling or decorative painting than in carpentry or weaving, while another whose professional duties have kept him from manual work may greatly enjoy the latter (Black n.d. a: 12).

It was therefore necessary for Black to tackle therapeutic craft in Nova Scotia by both addressing the idleness that she understood as plaguing the province as a whole, while at the same time comprehending that “it is as necessary to individualize treatment with this as with any other form of therapy” (Black n.d. a: 12).

The result was that Black orchestrated a therapeutic craftmaking program through the Handicrafts and Home Industry Division between 1943 and 1955 that was built around her occupational therapy training (Morton 2011). Black pointed out that “occupational therapy is not merely to be used as a pastime, but as a deliberate means of directing the patient’s attention to material objects,” which would in turn help the province focus on “the therapeutic aspect of the work” (Black n.d. a: 13). That Black understood her “patients” in Nova Scotia not as the physically infirm or the mentally ill, but as the socially challenged, made little difference in her decision to treat them with craftwork. “Idleness,” she insisted, “is a positive evil and … the cause rather than the effect of social, moral and intellectual deterioration …” (Black n.d. a: 13). With this in mind, in 1944 Black attempted to implement a ten-point program for craftmaking across the province, built on technical training, aesthetic instruction, and a marketing program to make the resulting craft articles salable to tourists (McKay 1994: 171). Part of the goal here was to attain particular social welfare objectives by mimicking the Swedish model, since she proposed to the Nova Scotia government that she could best accomplish her therapeutic craftwork through “a central bureau for coordinated efforts and for the dissemination of information and exchange of ideas to those interested in Handcrafts, and to give instruction where needed” (Black quoted in McKay 1994: 172).

Yet Black’s ambition to establish a Sätergläntan-like regime of therapeutic craft in Nova Scotia was never fully realized. In the end, Black’s use of craftmak-
ing to combat idleness in the province took on a highly commercialized form, in which she directed the selection of weaving patterns in particular to correspond with her expectations of craft revivalism where it did not intuitively exist. Black launched a series of exhibitions entitled “Craftsmen at Work,” which became a regular part of tourist calendars around the province. Visitors could see craftworkers orchestrate “a pattern that is part of Canada … hooked into rugs from native wools, molded into pottery from native clays, and carved from native woods,” according to the exhibitions’ accompanying publicity film (Perry 1945). She created weaving guilds across the province, in keeping with her interest in this particular form of craft production, and distributed patterns and instructions through a quarterly bulletin entitled *Handcrafts* (McKay 1994: 173). Even if the model did not entirely conform to her expectations for a highly ordered and bureaucratized central craft agency, Black’s supervision of the Handicrafts and Home Industries Division did yield certain results. Namely, it demonstrated that, in McKay’s words, “local manifestations of the craft revival required the coordination, inspiration, and pedagogy of a state if they were ever to amount to a coherent plan of development” in Nova Scotia (1994: 175).

### Conclusion: Therapeutic Craft at Work

Black’s relative success in creating a craft revival based on occupational therapy in Nova Scotia between 1943 and 1955 is important to consider in light of more recent calls for therapeutic solutions to a contemporary society in stress. In particular, Black’s case demonstrates that discourses of social wellbeing and individual self-sufficiency and empowerment are not unique to the neoliberal era, even if the hyper-individuality of this moment has since spurred therapeutic culture in new directions. The notion that individuals have the power to transform their own lives outside of the social fields that shape them was indeed alive and well in Black’s day. Her objective in therapeutic craftmaking was to do no less than to confront individual crisis on the one hand – particularly that of idleness – and to rehabilitate her patients “for re-entry to an environment of individualistic existence” on the other (Black nd a: 2). Indeed, Black represented a community of physical culturalists of her day who believed that committed bodily labour could contribute to both individual health and to the greater task of nation-building (Shocket 2006: 125).

The work-cure model of therapeutic craft offers several avenues for critical interpretation from a contemporary perspective that seeks to unsettle the present-day neoliberal impulses of therapy. Commonly, neoliberal thought insists that people can choose between idleness and work, which suggests, for example, that poverty is not the symptom of a liberal political economy but rather of individual irresponsibility (Whitehead and Crawshaw 2012: 7). In this respect, the “curative possibilities” of individualized work remains at the core of many therapeutic mis-
sessions, including Black’s, whether she enacted it in state hospitals in the United States, on vacation in Sweden, or in her position as a bureaucrat in the Nova Scotia provincial government (Black n.d. a: 3). Black’s role, as she saw it, was to help organize such work in a systematic way, so that her patients could avoid falling into a pattern of using craftmaking as leisure or as carelessly undertaking craft as vocation without the help of a trained healthcare expert guiding them. The ideal result was that Black could ensure “the therapeutic value of the development of initiative and originality,” since to “prevent [the patient’s] use of initiative destroys the object of the whole program” (Black n.d. a: 4). While “idleness” might be easily recast as a point of resistance to work-cure methods, such a position requires a greater understanding of the tensions that existed between Black and her clientele in terms of the failures that therapeutic craft no doubt enacted in Nova Scotia.

What is known based on Black’s archival papers is that the work-cure method provided her a means to a very particular end in Nova Scotia and beyond it, in which the socially afflicted could benefit from being led to individualized self-care. In short, Black’s idealized end result was to foster a situation in which her patients (broadly defined) could bring about their own healing through systematic craftmaking activity. To be sure, the resulting material craft objects provided a base for economic self-sufficiency if orchestrated under her careful guidance. More than this, though, Black understood therapeutic craftmaking as having a very particular cultural benefit: “These men and women, from both urban and rural centres [of Nova Scotia], freely discuss their various crafts without restrain because crafts speak a universal language and are not bound by race, creed, colour or social barriers” (Black 1949: 48). In this regard, Black had at least marginally achieved her therapeutic vision at home, since she encouraged the dissolution of group mentality in favour of individualized cures for social disease. She ultimately concluded that her therapeutic craft program in Nova Scotia “increased income, improved standards of physical living and cultural developments, [and that] the therapeutic concept of easement of individual problems” benefitted provincial residents on the whole (Black 1949: 48). If therapeutic craft could not entirely resist the narratives and institutions of modernity in Black’s day, it could at least succeed in articulating a notion of individual identity through curative work that has implications up to the present moment.

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Happiness Studies and Wellbeing:
A Lacanian Critique of Contemporary Conceptualisations of the Cure

By Colin Wright

Abstract
Criticising the discourse of happiness and wellbeing from a psychoanalytic perspective, this article is in five parts. The first offers a brief philosophical genealogy of happiness, charting its diverse meanings from ancient Greece, through Medieval Scholasticism and on to bourgeois liberalism, utilitarianism and neoliberalism. The second contextualizes contemporary happiness in the wider milieu of self-help culture and positive psychology. The third explores the growing influence but also methodological weaknesses of the field of Happiness Studies. The fourth then focuses specifically on the notion of wellbeing and the impact it has had on changing definitions of health itself, particularly mental health. The fifth and final section then turns to psychoanalysis, its Lacanian orientation especially, to explore the critical resources it offers to counter today’s dominant therapeutic cultures. It also emphasises psychoanalytic clinical practice as itself an ethico-political challenge to the injunction to be happy that lies at the heart of consumer culture.

Keywords: Happiness studies, wellbeing, self-help, positive psychology, biopolitics psychoanalysis, Jacques Lacan
Introduction

This article will draw on Lacanian psychoanalysis to criticize the recent discourses of Happiness Studies and Wellbeing, as well as the diffuse culture of positive thinking and self-help of which they are a reflection. It will be argued that Happiness Studies and Wellbeing demonstrate a fundamental shift in conceptualizations of illness, health and cure, best characterized with reference to Foucault’s notion of ‘biopolitics’: a form of neoliberal governance that makes life itself, including health, the target of direct political administration (Foucault 1997, 1976/1998, 1997/2003, 2004/2008). Yet, with Lauren Berlant (2011), it will be argued that ‘happiness’ and ‘health’ have become objects of political control precisely as it becomes more and more obvious that unbridled consumer culture can deliver neither. If Happiness Studies and Wellbeing advocate ‘positive thinking’ (which Berlant recasts as ‘cruel optimism’) in the face of the intensifying depredations of capital, then psychoanalysis, conversely, makes us attend to the new forms of suffering that arise from an inability to be happy with consumer models of happiness – an affliction that Oliver James has dubbed ‘affluenza’ (James 2007). Such suffering, however, struggles to be heard within mainstream therapeutic culture in which health has been redefined as a narrow capacity to produce, consume and enjoy. The article will therefore close with a defense of psychoanalysis, particularly its Lacanian orientation, as one of the few clinical approaches that works against the grain of these dominant notions of the cure.

A Brief History of Happiness

By first providing a condensed philosophical genealogy of what happiness has become today, some of the positivist claims made about it in Happiness Studies can be loosened from the outset. And yet Happiness Studies, somewhat disingenuously, claims to have its roots in precisely the Western philosophical tradition, or that strand of it which interrogates happiness via the classical question concerning the nature of the ‘good’, and the kind of life to be lived according to it (see Haidt 2006). It is true that this eudaimonic theme is fundamental enough to organise the divisions among the schools of ancient Greek philosophy.

As is well known, hedonism privileged intense sensual pleasure as the route to earthly bliss. Less well known is that hedonism also contained a range of positions distributed along a continuum from bodily pleasure to rational serenity. Thus, while the Cyrenaic school championed the direct indulgence of physical sensations, the Epicurean School anticipated Freud’s homeostatic pleasure principle by introducing the balancing factor of the absence of pain. At the more ascetic end of this continuum, the Stoics emphasised rational self-control as a defence against unruly emotions that they saw as potentially destructive. Plato went on to intensify this Stoic opposition between rationality and the body by presenting the body
as an obstacle to the ‘Form’, rather than the sensation, of the Good, now accessible only through the reasoning of the philosopher-king (a dualism which would find a new articulation with Descartes).

Probably the most durable formulation of happiness, however, comes from Plato’s pupil, Aristotle. In the *Nicomachean Ethics* (Aristotle 2006), Aristotle seeks happiness not as the satisfaction of men’s diverse desires but as their unification beneath an ultimate end that Lacan, in *Seminar VII*, calls the ‘sovereign good’ (Lacan 1986/1997: 13). Happiness for Aristotle then is not an affect connected to the momentary enjoyment we would today call ‘fun’. It is instead the culmination of a life lived *virtuously*, with virtue (*arête*) understood as excellence in realising one’s innate potential to fulfil a particular function. This perspective has everything to do with Aristotle’s zoological vision of a hierarchical natural world. Thus, when he defines happiness as ‘an activity of the soul in accordance with virtue’ (Aristotle 2006: 1098a13), he is invoking a maximization of one’s place in the fixed schema of nature – an early version, then, of ‘be all you can be’. To be all one can be, Aristotle argued that one must acquire all the virtues constitutive of a moral character (courage, generosity, a sense of justice etc.), but also the capacity to exercise them in a rational, which also meant a *practical*, manner. Lacan notes that ‘ethics for Aristotle is a science of character: the building of character, the dynamics of habits […] training, education’ (Lacan 1986/1997: 13).

Aristotelian ethics also stress the notion of a Golden Mean (Aristotle 2006: 1006b36) which steers the moral man between the extremes of passions such as rage, impetuosity and fear. Yet if this is possible it is because something even in man’s more bestial appetites is responsive to rationality, making possible what Aristotle calls *enkrateia* or ‘self-control’ (see Cottingham 1998 and Tilmouth 2008). This set of values around ‘virtue’ and ‘character’ as attainable through disciplined training arguably resurface in 20th and 21st Century self-help culture and allied practices of ‘self-fashioning’ (see Illouz 2008). But certainly, with the notable exception of courtly love, this Aristotelian vision of the virtuous life held sway over the entire scholastic medieval period in Europe, when happiness was very different from today’s consumerist vision. Thanks to theologians like Aquinas who re-read the pagan philosophers through a Christian lens, Aristotle’s *arête* was transformed into something like *contentment with one’s place within God’s creation*. The critique of earthly sensualism is carried forward from Plato into Christian asceticism but true pleasure now comes from proximity to, or speculative contemplation of, the divine. Far from being a question then, medieval happiness was an arduous spiritual discipline which adjusted one to one’s lot in life, with a view to compensation in the hereafter (this is what Darrin McMahon refers to as ‘perpetual felicity’ in McMahon 2006).

In this sense, happiness only really becomes a *question*, and therefore takes on the modern dimensions of a worldly demand, with the Enlightenment and the subsequent emergence of the bourgeoisie as a class. Specifically, it emerges with
those revolutions with which the bourgeoisie refused the supposed virtue of accepting their lot in life, especially when that lot did not amount to a lot (or more precisely, to enough). Lacan points out again in *Seminar VII* that it was the militant French revolutionary, Saint-Just, who enthused that ‘happiness is a new idea in Europe’ (Lacan 1986/1997: 359). Lacan identifies a consequence of Saint-Just’s claim even more manifest in our times than it was in Lacan’s: ‘happiness has become a political matter’ (*ibid.*). But the emergence of the modern demand for happiness from revolutionary tumult also demonstrates its political ambivalence. What was enshrined in 1776 in the *American Declaration of Independence* as the constitutional right to pursue happiness could, on the one hand, articulate an egalitarian demand for an end to the misery borne of inequality, but on the other, it could also be a demand for a specifically bourgeois paradigm of happiness, one based upon the freedom to consume and trade but also to profit from the exploitation of wage-labour. Marxist historiography of both of these revolutions would indicate that the capitalist formulation of happiness quickly won out. Thus, the discourse of happiness in the late 18th Century can be seen to shift from being an urgent political demand to end servitude and injustice (egalitarianism) to a matter of good bureaucratic governance (a legalistic conception of ‘equality’ that shores up bourgeois property rights).

However, it was really the development of a philosophy of utilitarianism that elaborated a biopolitical conception of happiness, one that has now become universalized with neoliberal globalization. In this sense, utilitarianism, and not ancient Greek philosophy as a supposed ‘art of living well’,¹ provides the true foundation for the modern science of Happiness Studies. It was the British philosopher and social reformer, Jeremy Bentham, who took the universality already present in the *Declaration of Independence* and added to it a numerical, majoritarian logic that placed happiness at the heart of the legitimacy of the modern liberal state, and hitched it to the redistributive mechanism of the market. Albeit steered for Bentham by a paternalistic state, it was thought the market could facilitate this seismic shift from the Good - in a theological register that had ordered the pre-modern world - to goods in the plural, whose production, circulation and exchange would shape the modern world. This utilitarian conjoining of libidinal and fiscal understandings of ‘economics’ inaugurated a transformation in the field of ethics. This is crystallized in Bentham’s injunction in *A Fragment on Government*, also of 1776: ‘it is the greatest happiness of the greatest number that should be our measure of what is right and what is wrong’ (Bentham 1776/1988: 3). This emphasis on number, and more specifically on distributed averages, coincides with the rising importance of statistics, demographics and population management that Foucault identifies as instrumental in the historical transition from disciplinary to biopolitical modes of sovereignty (Foucault 1998). Conceived in utilitarian terms then, happiness becomes inextricably linked to what can be measured, counted, rationalized and apportioned.
Thus, in An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation – published at exactly the moment that the French Revolution was bursting into flame in 1789 – Bentham had already mapped right and wrong onto a careful taxonomy of measurable types of pleasure and pain (Bentham 1780/1970). These were to be administered by the state through what he coined the ‘felicific’ or ‘hedonic’ calculus: an algorithm calculating the variables of pleasure and/or pain (such as intensity and duration) that would follow a particular course of action as it impacted on, potentially, whole populations. Beyond the panoptical prison system proposed by Bentham (but never actually built) that early Foucault presented as a conceptual paradigm of disciplinary power (Foucault 1995), it is arguably Bentham’s ‘hedonic calculus’ that undergirds later Foucault’s understanding of biopolitical power and our neoliberal present (Foucault 2004/2008). We should go further: the utilitarian dream of the hedonic calculus laid the foundations for modern welfare economics, Happiness Studies, and the current Wellbeing agenda.

The Contemporary Cult of Happiness

This rapid genealogy of happiness, from ancient Greece, through the Medieval period and on to the emergence of bourgeois liberalism and utilitarianism, brings us up to the present. Today we can see that happiness has been widely distributed – as ideal, promise, entitlement and demand – across a diffuse culture encompassing positive psychology, watered-down versions of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy such as Neuro-Linguistic-Programming, innumerable self-help books, fake spirituality, corporate motivational discourse, consumer ‘confidence’, and a general miasma of what, after Judith Halberstam, I would like to call ‘toxic positivity’ (Halberstam 2011). This pervasive atmosphere of toxic positivity refers to the superegoic injunction to maintain a cheerful, uncomplaining disposition even in the face of a world replete with the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. What positive psychology and much of the self-help industry teaches us is that happiness is a power of the mind: thinking ‘happy thoughts’ somehow magically leads to success in work, in relationships, in sex, in life as we are enjoined to live it. It is toxic, of course, to the extent that it is brutally normative. If one refuses to fall into line with this ‘happy clappy’ band of positive thinkers, one is deemed to have chosen depression and marginalization. The usefulness of such toxic positivity in anaesthetizing the contradictions of capitalism is immediately obvious from bestselling book titles in the pop psychology genre, such as We Got Fired ... And it Was The Best Thing That Ever Happened to Us! (Mackay 2004), and even more directly, Loving What Is (Mitchell 2002). If religion was the opiate of the masses according to Marx in the nineteenth century, perhaps positive thinking has become the Prozac of the atomized neoliberal individual of the twenty-first?

It is this paradoxical situation that Lauren Berlant analyses in her book Cruel Optimism (Berlant 2011). Her title refers to affective and sensorial attachments to
the limitless pursuit of wealth and happiness promised by liberal capitalism, even as state-based welfare provision, job security, and upward social mobility are systematically dismantled by neoliberalism’s rapid privatization of the previously public. She thereby identifies a time-lag between the fantasy of exponential profit and opportunity exemplified in the Dot Com bubble of the 1990s, and the starker reality that has hit home since the 2008 credit crunch and ensuing austerity measures. In an implicitly psychoanalytic vein then, Berlant zeros in on our stubborn fantasy attachments to objects, ideals and practices that are simultaneously obstacles to satisfaction. However, in the wake of Slavoj Žižek’s Lacanian re-reading of ideology as precisely fantasy – and thus as something not deceptive but a positive force shaping our enjoyment (Žižek 2009) – Berlant refuses to present ‘cruel optimism’ as a mode of false consciousness vis-à-vis the failure of the social promises of liberal capitalism. She even finds something redemptive in the modest utopianism of trying to continue living with dreams in the context of what she calls ‘crisis ordinariness’ (Berlant 2011: 101), a generalized condition of precarity that makes upheaval and instability the norm rather than the exception. Although her focus is on literary, filmic and artistic texts that exemplify the contradictions and possibilities of this affective state of ‘cruel optimism’, the chapter she provides on the epidemic of obesity in the West, among adults and increasingly children, opens up the kind of biopolitical questions regarding happiness and health I want to investigate here.

In it, Berlant identifies obesity as a paradigmatic problem for consumer cultures predicated on hyper-consumption. The moral and medical discourses around obesity are therefore very revealing. Berlant points out that the issue has become something of a political football kicked between Left and Right with a view to political point-scoring, rather than any clarification or critique of its connections to capitalism. For the (Centre) Left, obesity has been used as an argument for stronger state-based regulation of industry, as well as a defense of a more pastoral role for a state with continuing welfare commitments. For the Right, the discourse around obesity often slides into responsibilization of lower class ‘lifestyles’ that ‘choose’ fast-food diets out of laziness and ignorance. Indeed, both Left and Right regularly appeal to ‘education’ and ‘information’ as solutions to obesity, from parenting classes to improved food labeling, from public health campaigns to home economics in schools (as if ‘learned behaviours’ could be entirely abstracted from their socio-economic circumstances).

There is an echo of this pattern in more technical medical discourse about obesity, which increasingly situates it under the ever-expanding heading of ‘addiction’. Understood on a physiological disease model, the causation of obesity-as-addiction is explained largely with reference to evolutionary and genetic etiologies that let states, corporations, and indeed individuals ‘off the hook’. Berlant notes that if obesity is categorized as a health issue of ‘epidemic’ proportions at all then, it is more fundamentally because, as David Harvey observes in *Spaces of
Hope (Harvey 2000), sickness under capitalism is defined as the inability to work. As we will see, both Happiness Studies and the Wellbeing agenda contribute to cost-benefit approaches to health provision that do indeed evaluate various psychological complaints not in terms of subjective suffering but of the loss to the economy through sick leave. In this way, psychological well-being has been brazenly rebranded as ‘mental capital’.2

This way of thinking about illness also shapes models not of treatment per se, but of pre-emptive psychological training, such as the push to coach increasingly frazzled workers in the psychology of ‘resilience’ (see Pryce-Jones 2010, and for a critique, Neocleous 2013). A different, less behaviourist strand of psychology might alert us to more complex subjective factors and, admittedly, more expensive because slower forms of treatment. With regard to obesity in particular, surely we have to take into account the subjective and perhaps even unconscious dimensions of food consumption embedded in individual biographies and the forms of sociality constitutive of everyday life? How else are we to understand eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia in the context of developed nations with literal food mountains,3 by scandalous contrast to mass malnourishment and starvation in other parts of the globe fighting food poverty? Cruel optimism shows its cruelty here: in developed nations, ‘comfort food’ and ‘comfort eating’ literally feed off the failure to achieve the BMI we are supposed to be happy with. In other words, the emotional ‘solution’ contributes to the problem itself. Equally however, constant self-denial in the form of extreme dieting can become a perverse mode of enjoyment in conditions of plenty. The un-gendering of eating disorders, such that male complaints of this type are now rising sharply, indicates a structural connection between capitalism and this mode of suffering suspended between gluttony and privation. Only psychoanalysis allows us to understand this mechanism of libidinal investment in dissatisfaction itself: Freud called it, long ago now, the death-drive, and based his understanding of the discontents of modern civilization upon it (Freud 2002).

Berlant’s account of ‘cruel optimism’ can be supplemented by Barbara Ehrenreich’s wonderfully acerbic book, Smile or Die: How Positive Thinking Fooled America & The World (2010). The moving and at the same time exasperating opening chapter to that book also pertains to matters medical: it recounts the author’s experience of breast cancer. At one of the lowest moments of her life, Ehrenreich admits to having been more prone than usual to the allure of positive thinking. Yet as she encountered various online support communities for cancer sufferers, she grew concerned about an evangelical enthusiasm bordering on religiosity. More specifically, she became alarmed by the pseudo-medical claims made by them regarding an alleged correlation between a cheerful disposition, boosts to the body’s immune system, and improved survival rates. Her careful consideration of the clinical research both demonstrates the lack of hard evidence for such a
correlation and highlights, nonetheless, a strong push within mainstream psychology towards a more ‘scientific’ version of positive thinking.

This is evident in the relatively new field of ‘positive psychology’, whose most outspoken advocate has been former president of the extremely powerful American Psychological Association, Martin Seligman (see Seligman 2003, 2006 and 2011). Reflecting, as we shall see, wider shifts in the definition of health over the last fifty or so years, Seligman has championed positive psychology as a much needed move away from the traditional emphasis in psychiatry and psychology on pathology and mental illness. With such depressing themes downplayed, evolutionary and neuroscientific psychology can be conscripted into the much more affirmative project of self-improvement. Seligman and his followers regularly claim that positive psychology can make us leaner, faster, fitter, better human beings. Under the quintessentially biopolitical heading of ‘flourishing’ then, neoliberal normativity is imposed. The incipient blurring discernible here between, on the one hand, ‘respectable’ evidence-based psychiatry and psychology, and, on the other, self-help movements, new age mysticism, and even extropian posthumanism, is one of the more worrying aspects of today’s cult(ure) of happiness.

In ways that connect convincingly with Berlant’s thesis of ‘cruel optimism’, Ehrenreich’s penultimate chapter in Smile or Die finds this pernicious culture of blind hope extending into the stock exchange and finance markets, contributing directly to the collapse of 2008. In a milieu in which fundamentally affective states like ‘confidence’ literally translate into trillions of dollars, it is all-too easy to place undue faith in positive thinking. In other walks of life, such zealous and rigid attachment to an idea in the face of all rational evidence to the contrary, would be more than sufficient for a diagnosis of delusional mania. And yet, seeing themselves as the handmaidens of the market, governments bolster this group illusion with taxpayer’s money. Though welfare economics aims to enable ‘the greatest good to the greatest number’, in the wake of mass repossessions following the collapse of the mortgage market, state bailouts of banks deemed too big to fail, and unprecedented cuts in the social budgets of numerous states, it can hardly be said to have upheld Bentham’s worthy maxim over recent years. This has not stopped a particularly cruel form of optimism from persisting, however. Traders continue to enjoy enormous bonuses, and even CEOs of failing banks continue to receive multi-million pound golden handshakes. Capital, it seems, has institutionalized cruel optimism at the highest levels: the problem is still prescribed as if it were the solution.

**Happiness as Science**

Nowhere is this more obvious than in the coming together of economists and psychologists in the so-called science of Happiness Studies, which has managed to insinuate itself into the policy agendas of numerous states around the world. On
July the 13th 2011, the United Nations (UN) General Assembly accepted the attempted push from GDP to GDH (Gross Domestic Happiness) at the core of Happiness Studies when it adopted a resolution that:

invites member states to pursue the elaboration of additional measures that better capture the importance of the pursuit of happiness and well-being in development with a view to guiding their public policies.4

Sixty-eight countries have now signed up, and the 20th of March 2013 was the first ever International Day of Happiness.5 Among the adopting countries is Britain, and enthusiastic convert, Prime Minister David Cameron, responded by launching his own ‘Wellbeing Index’ in October 2011. The UK’s Office for National Statistics now collects data annually on a variety of alleged indicators of individual and social wellbeing, including health, the economy and governance.6

Like similar indexes in countries such as America, Italy, Germany and Japan, Cameron’s Wellbeing Index draws on methodologies developed by the World Health Organisation (WHO) which has long collected data on ‘quality of life’. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) similarly runs its ‘Better Life Index’ for all of its 34 member countries.7 In the United States, academics like former Harvard president Derek Bok advocate the use of happiness research by lawmakers in a range of policy areas such as health, education, and even marriage (Bok 2010). Bok’s equivalent in the UK is Baron Richard Layard who was a key influence on the economic and social policies of New Labour, co-edited the UN’s World Happiness Report of April 2012, and founded the Action for Happiness Movement.8

But it is not just states and supra-national state-like entities such as the UN, the WHO and the OECD that are pushing the happiness and wellbeing agenda. Independent research institutes and thinktanks are also lobbying in this area. The New Economics Foundation, for example, administers the ambitious ‘Happy Planet Index’ in order to foreground an ecological dimension of ‘flourishing’ generally occluded from narrow preoccupation with fiscal growth.9 And yet – and this should give pause for thought – multinational corporations, too, are sponsoring what are basically marketing initiatives in wellbeing, such as the food giant Danone Actimel’s ‘Family Wellbeing Index’, which offers (very middle class) families guidance in healthy, fun and fulfilling parenting.10 The Wall Street Journal also now produces its own career happiness index.11

So important has the constant affective monitoring of whole populations become in fact, that pollsters Gallup and private healthcare provider Healthways have collaborated to produce a daily wellbeing index, providing the ‘real-time measurement and insights needed to improve health, increase productivity, and lower healthcare costs’.12 Given the primarily corporate but also American interests driving a great deal of this research, it is hardly surprising that its results almost always end up confirming a version of the American dream. One recent multinational comparative well-being study determined that three factors are pivotal
in making for cheery individuals across all cultures: predictably enough, they are high income, individualism, and human rights (Diener et al. 2010). Is it even necessary to point out the connection with that other index, the Index of Failed States produced by the thinktank Fund for Peace? Once again, the political ambivalence of the right to happiness becomes clear, especially in the light of ‘humanitarian wars’ that impose the blueprint for Western Wellbeing on such ‘failed states’.

Despite the increasing influence of this rhetoric in a number of areas however – economics, environmental politics, development discourse, psychology, business studies and marketing – even a brief glance at the much-vaunted ‘evidence-base’ of happiness research suggests it may well be a castle built on sand. Two empirical methodologies dominate the field. Firstly, ‘experience sampling’ which gathers reports of mood states at particular points during a single day and claims accuracy on the basis of the immediacy of the reporting. Secondly, ‘life satisfaction’ surveys, which typically invite Likert scale responses to extremely general questions regarding levels of satisfaction with life as a totality (so far). A typical but crude question would be: ‘On a scale of 1-10, to what extent would you agree with the following statement: So far, I have gotten the important things I want in life’. In the absence of critical scrutiny, the enormous assumptions built into this kind of question remain obscured behind that dangerous thing, ‘common sense’, as do the policy uses to which the resulting data is put. And yet experience sampling and life satisfaction surveys, often gathered by networked communications technologies, remain by far the most prevalent research methods in this brash new field.

But even within happiness research itself, it has been acknowledged that problems can accompany data-sets rooted in self-reporting alone, especially around something as elusive as emotion (see chapter 2 of Bok 2011). For this reason, happiness research increasingly appeals to more ‘objective’ measures. It draws, for example, on neuroscience and neurochemistry, through MRI scans and levels of neurotransmitters such as dopamine; or on the psychology of emotion, through video-evidence of the number of genuine Duchenne smiles appearing on a test subject’s face under controlled conditions. For broader number-crunching purposes, more robust sociological data on ‘quality of life’ such as longevity are correlated with happiness indicators in the search for statistically significant patterns. Even social media have become potential sources of mass affective mapping: Adam Kamer, a psychologist from the University of Oregon, has developed a quantitative Gross National Happiness metric that counts positive and negative words in Facebook status updates (Kamer 2010).
Well-being and the Politics of Health

The almost ubiquitous use of the term ‘wellbeing’ in the literature on happiness also arises from an attempt to nullify this problem of self-reporting. It implicitly locates happiness at a more concrete, bodily level, invoking empirically measurable physiological states and thus the more established domain of the medical sciences. And yet, on another level, the term ‘wellbeing’ is also a crucial signifier in the wider discursive reconfiguration of health. If it enables the relatively new field of Happiness Studies to borrow the credibility of the sociology of health and of medical science, ‘wellbeing’ also facilitates the importation of a biopolitical conception of ‘flourishing’ into definitions of health – be they philosophical, policy-based, diagnostic, or embedded in clinical practice.

This is a process that can be traced back to the WHO’s redefinition of health in 1948 which still governs its varied activities around the world today: health became ‘the presence of a state of complete psychological and social well-being, not just the absence of illness or infirmity’.[14] Something extremely important changed with this definitional shift at the end of the Second World War. In it was crystallized the replacement of the nineteenth-century medical model, which foregrounded disease and pathology, by the first stirrings of a biopolitical model focused on individual and social affective harmony. Although Foucault rightly criticized the nineteenth-century medical model for its anatomically probing ‘gaze’ and the institutional structures of authority that stemmed from it (Foucault 1983/2010), his critique really pertained to the era of disciplinary power. In the era of biopolitics by contrast, the often digitized medical gaze falls upon – and constitutes – an informatized body composed less of functional or dysfunctional organs and more of flexible, recombinant sequences of genetic code or re-writable cognitive scripts that are well or poorly adapted to a rapidly evolving environment. Biopolitical control concerns itself not with pathology or ill-being then, but with affect and wellbeing, now ‘indexed’ to both economic productivity and the production of economies of enjoyment.

What is largely left behind in this shift is subjective suffering, which the psychiatry, psychology and psychoanalysis of the last part of the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries was arguably much better at rendering visible and audible. Because wellbeing appears on a numerical sliding scale, everyone can locate themselves somewhere along the Gaussian curve it describes. Whilst this seems to offer a degree of health and happiness to everyone, and thus to make good, rhetorically at least, on the promises of liberal capitalism, it also has the paradoxical effect of responsibilizing individuals who suffer when they can find no place within the contemporary cult of happiness. Why, when I have, or potentially could have, everything, am I so miserable? This is what Oliver James has referred to as ‘affluenza’ (James 2007). James draws partly on findings within Happiness Studies itself that suggest that beyond a certain level of income, happi-
ness gains tail-off quite steeply. For obvious political reasons, this so-called ‘Easterlin Paradox’ has been hotly contested (see Hagerty & Veenhoven 2003). More important, however, than the relationship between money and happiness, are the underlying assumptions not only about what makes life worth living, but also about what kinds of lives have worth.

It is no accident, then, that one can see parallel adjustments in the field of mental health specifically. The standardized psychiatric manual now used by health professionals around the world, The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), was initially an American rival to the WHO’s own International Classification of Diseases (ICD), which included a separate section for psychiatric disorders. With worrying origins in the US military’s interest in the psychological limits of soldiers during the Cold War, and now utterly enmeshed with the globalised pharmaceutical industry, the DSM has specialized in exponentially proliferating mental disorders in its sixty year existence. The first edition in 1952 listed 106; the second in 1968 listed 182; and the massive revisions involved in the third edition of 1980 led to no less than 265 disorders. This third edition explicitly abandoned Freudian psychopathology and based the etiology of mental disorders on the catch-all notion of ‘chemical imbalance’. For each new condition, there had to be a corresponding pill. Psychiatry and increasingly clinical psychology boiled down to almost instantaneous check-list diagnoses, followed by drug prescriptions. The revision of DSM-III that appeared in 1987 once again increased the number of disorders, this time to 292. The, at the time of writing, current fourth edition published in 1994 (though revised in 2000) lists almost triple the number of disorders identified in the first edition at a whopping 297. It is likely we will see this trend toward inflation continue with the newest edition, due out in May 2013. Amidst this nosological profusion, conceptual overlaps between disorders have increased proportionally, as reflected in the rise of ‘borderline’ and ‘not otherwise specified’ conditions. Reminiscent of One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest, the DSM even reserves a category for those who do not co-operate: it is called ‘Treatment-Resistant disorder’.

According to Lacanian psychoanalyst Paul Verhaeghe (2008), this sprawling proliferation of ‘disorders’ (a word already intended to replace ‘illness’) is an inevitable result of the DSM’s purely phenomenological approach, and the deliberate lack of any guiding metapsychological framework of the kind that Freud provided. Verhaeghe proposes an alternative psychodiagnostic framework that draws on Freud and Lacan as re-interpreted through aspects of attachment theory and even evolutionary and neuropsychology. While some of these sources may in fact be part of the problem, without a theoretical framework of this kind, normative politics – and specifically the politics of happiness I have tried to identify here – flood in to institutionalized clinical theory and practice. This is perhaps clearest in happiness’ other, depression.
Another Lacanian psychoanalyst, Darian Leader, has demonstrated the link between the transformations in the DSM and an abandonment of forms of classical psychiatry and psychology that focused on the subjective experience of depression (Leader 2009). After DSM-III in particular, Leader argues that the parameters of depression were fundamentally molded by the revolution in neuroleptic drug treatments, leading to a vertiginous rise in diagnoses. In other words, in the early 1980s the definition of depression was drawn into the gravitational pull of observable effects consequent upon the administration of drugs. Although the psychiatrist thereby became much more like a GP insofar as he now prescribed medicines, this came at an enormous cost. With both the patient and the therapist reduced to elements in a mechanism that merely balanced out chemicals, the notion of ‘treatment’ and indeed ‘cure’ were radically reconceptualized. This overwhelmingly pharmacological interpretation of mental distress has had major repercussions throughout popular culture (see Wurtzel 1996) as well as in mainstream mental health provision.

Though this ready recourse to pills has been acknowledged as problematic, therapies presenting themselves as alternatives often adhere to the same underlying reasoning. For example, Lacanian psychoanalysts have been among the most vociferous critics of the rapid rise in clinical funding for, and widespread adoption of, cheap and quick Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), generally based on just six to twelve sessions (Miller 2005). Just as Happiness Studies is weakened by its reliance on self-reporting, so CBT typically begins with a goal-setting meeting tailored to what the patient wants to achieve. It thereby largely eliminates any notion of unconscious desire, drawing instead on a customer-knows-best logic. Related to this, it invites extremely instrumental criteria for cure that remain at the level of superficial ‘presenting problems’ without addressing underlying structural causes. One of the reasons for the state’s willingness to fund CBT is the rapidity and relative cheapness with which it can return people to work. ‘Normal functioning’ is thus interpreted entirely functionally. Another reason is CBT’s pioneering role in the culture of evaluation and ‘evidence-based practice’. As if directly inspired by Bentham, part of CBT’s ethos from the beginning has been a focus on measurable outcomes. However, just as there is something circular in Happiness Studies research, so CBT can fall into the trap of finding exclusively what it sets out to look for. With cure defined very narrowly, short-term outcome studies can allow CBT to claim a high degree of ‘success’ whilst responding to a wider target-setting agenda. For example, CBT treatment of an anxiety disorder might measure clinical efficacy in relation to a reduction in the number of panic attacks before and after treatment. On one level, this is obviously a relevant measure the patient would welcome. But in no way does it address the underlying meaning or cause of anxiety for such an individual. Instead, it conflates presenting problems with structural symptoms.
Though now enormously broad, the evidence-base for CBT is chronologically rather shallow. As longer-term outcome studies have started to appear, its clinical efficacy over time has been questioned. Moreover, because it has been so adept at justifying itself on the grounds of value for money, CBT has become a victim of its own success: particularly in the United States where health insurance plays such an important role, there is an increasing pressure to push CBT even further away from a Freudian paradigm of one-to-one therapy, and towards group therapies. Despite such doubts, there remains something alluring about the simplistic, linear logic of CBT programmes, resonant as it is with wider cultural trends in self-improvement and mind training. But like the medicalized interaction (or transaction) between psychiatrist and patient, the ‘therapeutic alliance’ in CBT threatens to be reduced to both parties following such programmes to the letter. The role of the therapist then becomes mechanized to the point of redundancy – hence the wide availability of CBT through online modular courses, as well as computer-based CBT in hospitals. This is hardly accidental, given that CBT tends to view individuals as more or less functional machines.

Of course, many CBT therapists are much more nuanced and sophisticated in their application of it than this caricatured picture suggests. Many have training in other psychotherapeutic approaches and work valiantly in complex clinical settings under the constraints that exist there. Nonetheless, I would argue that there is a logic within CBT that overwhelmingly interpolates the patient through the old stimulus-response model at the heart of behavioural psychology, with its inherently de-humanizing roots in ethology. Though CBT is heralded as an alternative to blinkered psychopharmacology, randomized clinical trials contributing to its ‘evidence-base’ still generally measure their effectiveness by comparison to a pill-popping group. Thus, in common with medicalized psychiatry, cure remains conceived along the lines of corrective re-programming.

The ‘therapeutic’ culture created by CBT’s overlaps with both managerialism and self-help explicitly disregards a rich thread within classical psychiatry that sees the symptom not as a disease to be eradicated or a glitch to be ironed out, but as a body or mind in the process of elaborating its own cure. From this perspective, cure becomes a singular creative elaboration that a patient can be supported in via a transferential relationship to the therapist. Such transference may be fragile and take both time and money to establish and maintain. Yet it has the virtue of being very far removed from a mechanical transaction mediated by the pharmaceutical industry. Unfortunately, there is almost no room for this in the contemporary clinic.

The Lacanian Alternative

In such a context, psychoanalysis presents a rare and therefore precious alternative to these dominant medicalized notions of the cure. Far from being an indication of
its mere outmodishness, the fact that, particularly in the Anglophone world, psychoanalysis now exists primarily at several removes from mainstream ‘psy’ practices, demonstrates its stubborn resistance to the biopoliticalization of health.\textsuperscript{18}

Indeed, psychoanalysis was arguably born from its opposition to these trends. Freud himself frequently cautioned against aligning psychoanalysis with the fantasy of untrammeled human happiness. In his early collaborative work with Joseph Breuer, \textit{Studies on Hysteria} of 1895, he famously addressed an imaginary patient by saying ‘much will be gained if we succeed in transforming your hysterical misery into common unhappiness’ (Freud & Breuer 1895/1991: 393). He thereby implied a base level of ‘normal’ dissatisfaction which in turn implied a different understanding of health: ‘With a mental life that has been restored to health you will be better armed against that unhappiness’ (\textit{ibid.}). It should also be noted that Freud’s notion of the ‘pleasure principle’, with its apparent nod toward sensual enjoyment, is misleadingly named. The reverse is more accurate: the pleasure principle revolves around a thermodynamic model of the \textit{avoidance} of discomfiting psychic excitation (by means of cathexis and repression), making it closer to an un-pleasure principle. This break with a certain reading of the eudaimonic tradition became even clearer in 1920 when Freud revised his own dualistic theory of the mind by pushing, as he put it, \textit{Beyond the Pleasure Principle} (Freud 1920/2003). It was then that he formulated a notion that really has no place in the feel-good world of today’s positive psychology: namely, the death-drive, which postulates an inherent inclination to return to a state of absolute homeostasis. Despite its rather metaphysical resonances, the death-instinct was in fact rooted in Freud’s clinical practice and that of other psychoanalysts, many of them working with shell-shock victims staggering from the trenches of World War One. Freud went on to place the death-drive at the centre of his psychoanalytic social theory, invoking a dialectical battle, within both individuals and group formations, between Eros and Thanatos, life and death. In \textit{Civilization and its Discontents} (Freud 1930/2002) he both acknowledged the universality of happiness as a goal of human life, and its structural impossibility in the psychic conditions of modernity. ‘What we call happiness’ he said, ‘is from its nature only possible as an episodic phenomenon’ (Freud 1930/2002: 14). Echoing his earlier sentiment in \textit{Studies on Hysteria} regarding ‘common unhappiness’ then, he concludes: ‘Unhappiness is much less difficult to experience’ (15).

None of this, however, makes the founding father of psychoanalysis a willful miserabilist. Although there is now a widespread cultural impression of Freud that ascribes to him a dark, hubristic vision of the so-called ‘human condition’ – his legacy perhaps being read backwards through the lens of Sartrean existentialism (despite Sartre’s antipathy for psychoanalysis) – he nonetheless explicitly states in ‘Analysis Terminable and Interminable’ that ‘it is not a matter of a pessimistic or an optimistic theory of life’ (Freud 1963/1970: 261). Freud’s refusal of the shallow consolations of the promise of permanent happiness was by no means an exis-
tentialism avant la lettre. It was, rather, already a means of separating psychoanalysis from the normative dimensions of the psychiatry and psychology of his time.

Freud’s most sophisticated, systematic and creative reader – Jacques Lacan – would go on in the mid-20th Century to clarify and concentrate exactly those aspects of psychoanalysis critical of normative models of happiness and health. Lacan is therefore a crucial theoretical source for any contemporary critique of Happiness Studies and the Wellbeing agenda, which he seemed to see coming early on. As already stated, in the seminar that took place between 1959 and 1960, Lacan recognized that happiness had become a political matter, and like Freud before him, expressed his concerns regarding its influence over notions of the cure. He refers in no uncertain terms to happiness as a ‘bourgeois dream’ (Lacan 1986/1997: 359) which analysts should have nothing to do with (though as a dream, we can infer that happiness still calls for interpretation). In the last few sessions of this seminar – concerned, after all, with ethics – Lacan makes it clear that happiness is a fundamentally imaginary category, having to do with ideals of reciprocity, completion and fulfillment without remainder, yet also that happiness is a master signifier increasingly ordering the social link of consumer culture. For this very reason, Lacan is keen in Seminar VII to show his fellow analysts ‘how far we are from any formulation of a discipline of happiness’ (ibid.). Looking beyond this seminar to Lacan’s wider oeuvre, there are, I believe, at least three strands of argument pertinent to the critique of contemporary therapeutic culture: his polemics against ego-psychology, against the instinctual reading of Freud, and against the vague deployment of the concept of affect.

To briefly take each in turn, Lacan’s hostility towards ego-psychology demonstrates his acute awareness of a distorted reading of Freud (promulgated in part by Freud’s own daughter, Anna) that from the 1940s onwards had begun to find fertile soil in the same America that would later champion positive psychology. By emphasizing the unconscious as the problem, and the ego, conceived as a set of defense mechanisms well or poorly adapted to ‘reality’, as the solution, the ego-psychology that prevailed in the US until the end of the 1960s ultimately peddled a conservative, adaptationist view of psychoanalysis. In publications like Ego Psychology and the Problem of Adaptation (1958), Heinz Hartmann for example seemed more concerned with the ego’s interactions with stimuli from the external environment than with the unconscious per se, thereby opening the door to behaviourism. For Hartmann, as opposed to Freud, the ego could be seen as a conflict-free zone that had the power to synthesise and order the subject’s potentially harmonious relation to ‘reality’. Although it is true that Hartmann often stressed a mutual interaction between the subject and their environment rather than the brute imposition of the latter on to the former, the ego remains for him the locus of an active-reactive response, somewhat on the model of a servomechanism. The Freudian unconscious becomes much less important, and for related reasons, the
ego becomes amenable to ‘training’ in a manner reminiscent of Aristotelian virtue ethics. If Hartmann and other ego-psychologists such as Ernst Kris, René Spitz and Lacan’s own analyst Rudolph Loewenstein, could seem to sympathise with the symptom over and against social norms, it was nonetheless because they viewed the symptom as one of the weapons with which the ego could defend itself from both instinctual and social pressures. From a Lacanian perspective, to emphasize the ego and thus the imaginary in this way is to throw a veil over the symbolic unconscious that Freud discovered. And although ego-psychology did fall into decline in the 1970s in the wake of the cognitivist turn, one could argue that elements of it have been inherited by contemporary positive psychology, which focuses on self-esteem and ‘resilience’. When, as early as 1953 in his ‘Rome Discourse’, Lacan called for a ‘return to Freud’, it was explicitly an attempt to recover what was being obscured in the reading championed by ego-psychologists across the pond (Lacan 2006).

An indispensable aspect of this mis-reading of Freudianism was a biological reductionism that placed the concept of ‘instinct’ at the causal root of ‘normal’ and pathological psychosexual development alike. Again presciently, Lacan recognized as early as the 1940s the ways in which this instinctual reading of the Freudian unconscious would necessarily pave the way for an animalization of the human. Such reductionism finds newly sophisticated forms today thanks to genetics, evolutionary theory and neuroscience (all fields drawn upon in happiness and wellbeing research of course), but the underlying political as well as ethical implications of turning subjects into determined objects, remain the same. Lacan regularly took issue with the translation of Freud’s *trieb* as ‘instinct’ in the Standard Edition of Freud’s work, preferring instead *pulsion* or ‘drive’, now inextricably linked, by his own turn to Ferdinand de Saussure, to the structure of language and what he called the ‘logic of the signifier’ (Lacan 2006). Thus, rather than an underlying primordial instinct that neuroscientists today might locate in the hypothalamus, sexuality became a symbolic matter peculiar to human beings by virtue of the fact that they speak. As counter-intuitive as it might seem, human sexuality is from a Lacanian perspective only secondarily and often precariously connected to biological reproduction (Morel 2011).

The third strand of critique within Lacan’s work is less obvious, but noteworthy for that very reason. I am referring to his skepticism regarding the amorphous notion of ‘affect’. This term is clearly adjacent to ‘instinct’ but implies the field of emotions and thus the ‘wellbeing’ of the patient. It has moreover been at the centre of a putative ‘affective turn’ within the human and social sciences. But as with instinct understood biologically, the term ‘affect’ substantializes the unconscious. It turns it into a reservoir of repressed, painful emotions that the therapist must facilitate an outlet for, through an emotionally ‘nourishing’ therapeutic environment. Whilst this sounds intuitively laudable, from a Lacanian perspective, any simplistic focus on ‘feelings’ alone is incompatible with the analytic setting. And
yet, as Colette Soler has argued (Soler 2011), it does not follow that Lacan’s emphasis on structure and logic excludes affect or its importance in the clinic. On the contrary, one affect in particular plays a central role in his thought, and in that of psychoanalysis generally: namely, anxiety. Lacan devoted an entire year-long seminar to it (Lacan 2004), developing a theory of anxiety which could be contrasted, point by point, to the largely behavioural model dominating CBT treatments today.19

Moreover, anxiety is connected to one of Lacan’s key concepts that in itself poses a significant challenge to the contemporary cult of happiness. I am referring to jouissance, a word that – quite possibly for cultural and political as much as for etymological reasons – has no direct equivalent in English. In contrast to enjoyment as conventionally understood, jouissance refers to an intensity which can be painful as well as pleasurable. Indeed, it invokes the dialectical co-implication of pain and pleasure, thereby short-circuiting the conceptual separation of these two terms at the heart of utilitarianism as Bentham had conceived of it, and as the discourses of Happiness and Wellbeing develop it. Distilling Freud’s conceptual innovation in Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Lacan’s notion of jouissance is surely a more salient way to understand the discontents of contemporary civilization (eating disorders, self-harming, and addiction) than any recourse to ideas of ‘flourishing’ or ‘positive reinforcement’?

Although these three strands of critique are vital in the contestation of today’s dominant therapeutic culture, I want to close by insisting that it is at the level not of theory, but of clinical practice, that Lacanian psychoanalysis has the most to offer. As a praxis (in the Marxist sense of the dialectical combination of theory and practice), Lacanian psychoanalysis performs a politics and an ethics more significant than even theoretically-informed polemics against the reigning eudaimonic doxa. Already with Freud, psychoanalytic technique was a practical answer to the problem of undertaking a form of cure that refused the facile promise of permanent contentment. Because Lacan sharpens this critical aspect of Freud’s work, his understanding of clinical technique and the process of analysis are correspondingly radicalised. I will briefly mention just three concepts from the Lacanian clinic, each of which shows that while ideals of happiness absolutely cannot be haughtily dismissed, they must nevertheless be prevented from contaminating the model of cure that comes to guide its progress. Those concepts are ‘the demand for analysis’, ‘the desire of the analyst’ and ‘the end of analysis’.

The demand for analysis refers simply to the request to undertake an analysis with a particular analyst, but the form, timing and conditions of this request are always worthy of interrogation. Particularly today, the demand for analysis often takes the simplistic form ‘I am not happy, something is not working anymore, tell me what it is, or better, just fix it so I can get back to how I used to be’. In other words, the demand for analysis starts out with a complaint registering a failure to be happy. It also implies a plea for cure on the model of a faulty machine, or in-
creasingly, on the self-improvement model: ‘make me better’ can mean better than before. In any case, because of its omnipresence as a perceived right, happiness, even in the form of its painful absence, is bound to be an element in the form the complaint takes, and the type of ‘cure’ thought capable of rectifying it. But the demand for analysis presupposes a certain prior transference to psychoanalysis itself, and thus to a deeper question regarding subjective desire: part of ‘I’m not happy’ is also ‘why aren’t I happy?’ This barely formed question regarding an inability to settle for off-the-shelf versions of ‘customer satisfaction’ already implies an orientation toward truth, rather than just quick-fix, bandaid solutions. And yet the analyst cannot dismiss the role of notions of happiness in the analysand’s speech, since they are a crucial way of articulating their complaint, within which is lodged the truth of their unconscious desire. This is why in Seminar VII Lacan says in a deliberately ambivalent way: ‘there is no satisfaction for the individual outside the satisfaction of all’ (Lacan 1986/1997: 359). This is undoubtedly a critique of the herd-m mentality within imaginary understandings of cure, but it can also be read affirmatively, to indicate the importance of social ‘semblants’ of happiness, at least at the early stages of analysis.

When Lacan writes of the ‘desire of the analyst’, he often does so as part of a polemic against the understanding of transference at work in ego-psychology, which involves the notion of a strong, healthy ego on the part of the analyst, and a weak or damaged ego on the part of the patient. Transference then becomes a process of identification and emulation that can elevate the damaged ego to the heights of the healthy ego. That the ‘desire of the analyst’ in such a framework would be entirely narcissistic is obvious, as is the passive position by which the patient would be interpolated. Donald Winnicott’s formulation of the analyst as a ‘good enough mother’ literally spells out this infantalization. For Lacan by contrast, the ‘desire of the analyst’ is not a ‘touchy feely’ quasi-avuncular concern for the patient’s happiness on the part of the caring therapist. It is a resolute fidelity to maintaining the difficult path toward truth opened up by the unconscious, which often ‘speaks’ directly against the subject’s most cherished self-images. Anxiety is unavoidably involved, and that goes for the analyst as well. Whereas CBT tends to reassure the therapist that he or she has a technical form of knowledge that the patient lacks, and that, related to this, he or she knows what cure is, the Lacanian orientation implies that, beyond a certain know-how with interpretation, there is no pre-existing ‘global’ knowledge that can be universally applied and serve as a safety-net. It follows that there is no overarching model of cure beyond what is elaborated within and through analysis itself. This is why in his Écrits, Lacan writes of the ‘error on the analyst’s part […] of wanting what is good for the patient to too great an extent’ (Lacan 2006: 184). The analyst must be ‘wary of any misuse of the desire to cure’ (Lacan 2006: 270) because that sympathetic yearning for the ‘wellbeing’ of the other is also what snuffs out the unconscious. Whoever listens to the speech of a patient only in terms of dominant narratives of both hap-
piness and unhappiness will fail to hear what the unconscious has to say, which is by definition unexpected.

Finally then, Lacan did consider persistently and very seriously the problem of what he termed ‘the end of analysis’ (with ‘end’ understood both as goal or aim, and the right moment to conclude). Precisely in the era of toxic positivity, how is it possible to formulate a mode of treatment that does not conform in any way to the obligation to happiness characteristic of consumer culture? Moreover, how can such a treatment be advocated without lapsing into a kind of romanticization of suffering which itself has a weighty history, from Christian martyrdom to ideas of ‘alienation’ in Marxism and ‘authenticity’ in existentialism and phenomenology? Lacan had different formulations of the ‘end of analysis’ at various stages of his teaching, but all of them deliberately avoid referring to happiness, whether in the form of ‘traversing the fantasy’, or ‘subjective destitution’, or the ‘liquidation of the transference’. A useful definition for my purposes here, however, comes in one of Lacan’s late seminars (Lacan: 2005) when he suggests that the ‘end of analysis’ involves imparting to the patient a certain savoir-faire with the singularity of their symptom, so that they can live more comfortably with the mode of enjoyment they have unknowingly invented. It is this subjective singularity, not egoistic individualism, which separates us from the ‘herd’ interpolated as ‘happy’ by late neoliberal capitalism. Lacan’s emphasis on what is singular, what cannot be counted, what organizes an enjoyment that cannot be shared or exchanged in the form of a commodity, is what arguably constitutes the most important challenge posed by psychoanalysis to the reigning discourses of happiness and wellbeing.

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Notes

1 Happiness Studies has a very skewed reading of the history of Western philosophy that reduces it to a kind of treasure trove of self-help wisdom avant la lettre. There is indeed a strong connection between philosophy and a kind of therapeutics of the psyche or soul. But what is largely occluded in Happiness Studies is philosophy as a challenge to reigning doxa around erroneous conceptions of the good life.

2 For a particularly egregious example, see Foresight Mental Capital and Wellbeing Project: Final Project Report – Executive Summary; London: The Government Office for Science,
In 2008, on page ten of this report, the authors assert that ‘The idea of ‘capital’ naturally sparks associations with finance capital and it is both challenging and natural to think of the mind in this way’.

A 2013 report by the Institution of Mechanical Engineers showed that average domestic food wastage in the UK is running at 40%. See [http://www.imeche.org/docs/default-source/reports/Global_Food_Report.pdf?sfvrsn=0](http://www.imeche.org/docs/default-source/reports/Global_Food_Report.pdf?sfvrsn=0)

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Preventative Therapeutics: 
A Study of Risk and Prevention in 
Australian Mental Health 

By Andrew McLachlan 

Abstract 
This study investigates the preventative therapeutics of two major Australian mental health organisations – beyondblue and The Black Dog Institute. The aim of this study is to examine how the resilience-based programs of both organisations reconfigure clinical and preventative expertise into new forms of ‘anticipatory action’ (Anderson 2010). First, this article situates beyondblue and the Black Dog Institute within their historical contexts to consider how issues of risk and protection have become essential to mental health care today. Second, it examines the institutional practices of beyondblue and the Black Dog Institute and the role of clinical and preventative expertise as enacted forms of authority. Finally, this study investigates the intellectual and biokeeping technologies promoted through both organisations’ resilience-based pedagogies. The view taken in this study is that such technologies actively participate in the making of new therapeutic cultures and practices. Moreover, as biomarkers continue to act as indicators of future states of ‘unhealth’ (Dumit 2012: 112), biokeeping technologies will continue to act as essential elements in the governmentality of mental health and wellbeing. 

Keywords: Risk, prevention, mental health, pedagogy, governmentality, beyondblue, the Black Dog Institute
Introduction
Preventative therapeutics is a common feature today of mental health policy and practice. Whether through campaigns that promote depression literacy, or resilience-building programs that target the at-risk, these initiatives are all informed by concerns diversely related to the prevention of illness. What sets these programs apart is that they all take action against different kinds of mental health risk. To borrow an idea from Ben Anderson, these programs are ‘anticipatory’ – they problematise the future in particular ways, transforming potential threats into present concerns and action (2010: 777).

This study considers how notions of risk and protection have become essential to mental health therapeutics today. To focus the study, two leading Australian mental health organisations – beyondblue and the Black Dog Institute – are examined to illustrate the ways in which clinical and preventative expertise have been taken up and redeployed in new modes of risk pre-emption, risk mitigation, and risk management.

Such practices can all be considered anticipatory, because they each anticipate potential futures and mobilise certain measures to address them. The term preventative therapeutics is used here to indicate the emergence of new forms of anticipatory action whereby future health threats are anticipated and acted upon through measures typically considered therapeutic. It thus denotes a new kind of rationalisation of risk – one in which risks are treated as signs of illness themselves (Dumit 2012). Crucially, the ways in which risks are problematised impacts the design of the interventions themselves—from those that seek to pre-empt a disorder before its onset, to those that address complications during and after its eventuation.

As this article will show, discerning which activities are strictly therapeutic and which are preventative is no longer a straightforward task. This is because therapeutics today has been increasingly operationalized through education practices, literacy campaigns and various public awareness initiatives. Moreover, these initiatives have been framed by a politics of risk – and more accurately risk prevention. The school-based pedagogies of beyondblue and the Black Dog Institute illustrate this emerging trend, as teachers transition between the exigencies of teaching and pedagogy, and the imperative to deliver new forms of preventative therapeutics in the face of changing risk dynamics. The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between risk and therapeutics in more detail. It thus asks the following question: in what ways has therapeutic expertise been authorised and deployed in the prevention of mental illness?

This study takes a topological approach to explore this question – one that prioritises the relations between heterogeneous elements over the designs or consequences of any one single event or actor. Simply defined, topology concerns itself with how spaces are organised and assembled (Collier 2009). In the context of this study, mental health care is treated as a constellation of elements – comprised of
policies, governments, institutes, expert knowledges and technologies. Such an approach heightens our appreciation of complex events and processes. In part, this is because it makes it harder to conflate heterogeneous elements under all-inclusive theories and narratives, urging us to attend instead to the processes through which therapeutic spaces undergo continual reconfiguration.

This paper is divided into three parts. The first section takes up many of the ideas animated in recent governmentality analyses to examine how expert knowledges and techniques are authorised in the prevention of mental illness. This section also offers some historical context around the incidents and events that led to the innovation of key concepts, policies and technologies instrumental to this problematisation.

The next section then considers the role of expertise in determining mental health policy and practice. In the case of beyondblue and the Black Dog Institute, clinical expertise performs a legitimising role as an enacted form of authority. It is also used to implement certain kinds of therapeutic and preventative interventions, including diagnostic tools, clinical guidelines and resilience-based school programs like SenseAbility and HeadStrong.²

In the final section, this study analyses the ways in which expert knowledges have been operationalized in the preventative therapeutics of beyondblue and the Black Dog Institute. Crucially, it is through the resilience-building technologies of programs like beyondblue’s SenseAbility and the Black Dog Institute’s Head-Strong programs that the risk of depression is treated as a target of therapeutic intervention itself. Such programs thus entail protecting the community by installing, at the level of the individual, particular forms of anticipatory action. Notable here are the cognitive techniques adapted from cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT), as well as the biokeeping technologies prevalent in general medicine. This study will thus illustrate how techniques normally applied in medical settings, have become disseminated through the education system as preventative ‘technologies of the self’ (Foucault 1988).

**Problematising Risk and Prevention**

As mentioned in the introduction, the term preventative therapeutics is used to indicate how preventative initiatives retain certain therapeutic capacities depending on the circumstances in which they are deployed. In the case of this study, therapeutic capacities are actualised when preventative initiatives like public health campaigns, or online self-help services, or school-based resilience programs, attempt to pre-emptively treat a disorder before its onset.

Due to the ambiguity of the word ‘prevention’, many researchers have advocated the need for a clearer delineation of terms. Patricia Mrazek and Robert Haggerty (1994) for instance, argue that interventions which seek to pre-empt the
incidence of a disorder should be strictly defined as preventative. Interventions directed after onset should consequently be classed as treatment.

This study adopts a slightly less categorical approach to view preventative measures as comprising an ensemble of promotion, pre-emptive, therapeutic and maintenance strategies. This is not to conflate the different forms of preventative intervention, nor to confuse educational and health promotion initiatives with therapeutic ones. The point, rather, is to illustrate the potential for fluidity between practices, especially when expertise and technical aspects translate across fields.

This mutuality is even more pronounced in policies and practices of public health, because it typically operates through a spectrum of measures – from primary prevention aimed at reducing the incidence of a disorder before onset, to early intervention aimed at preventing the development of established cases, to rehabilitative strategies aimed at reducing the duration and severity of a disorder after onset. All three forms of intervention are claimed to reduce the ‘disease burden’ of disorders like depression, and often work collaboratively. Importantly, such measures also involve co-opting and reworking methods outside conventional fields of medicine from fields as diverse as marketing, public relations and pedagogy.

Where governmentality becomes a useful concept is in speculating how public health policies and initiatives attain a certain logical coherence and regularity. According to Nikolas Rose and Peter Miller, government is essentially ‘a problematizing activity’ – it refers to a process of rationalisation that renders aleatory issues in the population amenable to intervention, often by adapting them to specific logics and styles of thought (2010: 279). It is important to stress, however, that while the concept of governmentality provides a useful insight to the kind of rationalising that occurs in government, it does not denote a clear transfer between the articulation of an idea and its eventuation.

If we think of these issues topologically, political strategies are always enacted through certain situated practices – practices that are themselves the product of specific relations (Collier 2009). As will be shown, therapeutic concepts emerge out of a composition of forces, attracting and binding together heteromorphic elements that include the routines of medical practitioners, procedures of diagnosis and treatment, use of mundane items, and the production of biomedical knowledge. Importantly, regulative technologies like national policies, clinical guidelines and health gap metrics are not the exclusive product of authorities like the state (Rose & Miller 2010). Rather, technologies of government become authoritative through prior transactions and affiliations – in this case the prioritisation of evidence-based rationalities in public health, and the increasing reliance on epidemiological data in policy formulation.

According to Nikolas Rose, Pat O’Malley and Mariana Valverde, it is through processes of expertise and rationalisation that new elements and concerns are re-
combined in ways that render them ‘internally consistent’ (2006: 98). Crucially, as these concerns are taken up and redeployed by governments and institutions, they are also subtly modified in the process – a point illustrated in the next discussion of Australian mental health reform.

The Australian Mental Health Policy Context

Australia’s first attempts at preventative health reform were driven initially by the need to address a spate of human rights abuses than anything expressly concerned with health promotion and prevention. Meg Smith & Heather Gridley (2006) outline a number of critical events that led to these transformations. Prior to the reforms of the 1990s, doctors and mental health practitioners were empowered to certify and institutionalise the ‘insane’. While the innovation of psychotropic drugs in the 1960s allowed more people to be discharged from psychiatric hospitals, it was the exposure of a number of institutional scandals and abuses that incited major reforms around mental health legislation and treatment.

By the time the Mental Health Act 1990 was passed in New South Wales, a major reconceptualization of mental illness and its treatment was underway. According to Smith and Gridley, the act enshrined the rights of the mentally ill, reduced the discretionary powers of doctors and mental health practitioners, narrowed the definition of mental illness, and crucially, specified what was not mental illness (political views, sexual orientation, antisocial behaviour). This legislation also provided a mandate for ‘least restrictive care’ that opened the way for alternate forms of community-based management and treatment (Smith & Gridley 2006: 132). Yet while the Mental Health Act enshrined a number of essential human rights provisions, it was not the sole political catalyst for reform. Indeed, the legislation was introduced amidst a context of heightened volatility, marked by persistent criticisms of psychiatric malpractice, mounting pressures to reduce the cost of institutional care, a vociferous antipsychiatry movement, and better advocacy of minority groups (Smith & Gridley 2006).

By the mid-1980s and early 1990s, a number of factors influenced key policy reforms in mental health in Australia. First, the pace of deinstitutionalisation in Australia occasioned the rapid expansion of community based mental health services as delivery of care shifted to various service providers including social workers, occupational therapists, general practitioners and psychiatrists (McDermott & Meadows 2007). At the same time, the ‘new’ public health movement was gaining momentum in countries like the United Kingdom, Canada and the United States. This movement aimed to promote health across the population through policy measures directed around issues of planning, coordination, consultation and outcomes-based assessment (Lupton 1995: 51). In 1986, the World Health Organisation’s Ottawa Charter of Health Promotion further legitimised the principles of public health promotion and prevention. As Fran Baum writes, it laid
out a single ‘blueprint’ of public health, reorienting discourses of healthcare from traditional hospitalised treatment to community-based approaches viewed to be more supportive of patients re-entry back into the workforce and community life (2002: 34).

While the political rhetoric of this period was translated into a spate of reports, commissions and recommendations that each in their own way advanced health promotion in Australia, it was not until Australia’s first nation-wide epidemiological surveys in the late 1990s that the scope of mental health policy was expanded (Whiteford 2008). These studies collated data on the impact of mental illness across the population, and were key drivers in shifting mental health policy away from its focus on individual outpatient care to prevention and early intervention of more common mood disorders (Whiteford & Groves 2009).

The Australian Burden of Disease (ABD) study in 1998 was instrumental in raising awareness of the social and economic costs of common conditions like depression. According to Mathers et al. (2001), it was the first study to measure the national burden of disease in a developed country using the Disability-Adjusted Life Year (DALY) – a new health gap metric developed in 1990 for the Global Burden of Disease (GBD) study. Traditionally, health liabilities were measured only through years of life lost through premature mortality. They thus ignored the epidemiological impact of chronic conditions like depression, which while hugely debilitating, tended to result in relatively few deaths. The DALY was seen to address this shortcoming, combining years of ‘healthy’ life lost due to disability, with years of life lost due to premature mortality. It thus accorded chronic conditions like depression a new economic status and political urgency.4

beyondblue and the Black Dog Institute

Within the political lexicon of public health, the DALY became the new orthodoxy for measuring disease burden. Developed countries, in turn, responded accordingly, adopting a spectrum of measures designed to mitigate the impact of conditions like depression – first by reducing its incidence through health promotion and prevention, second by reducing its duration and severity through early intervention. beyondblue: the national depression initiative, was part of Australia’s own policy response to the rising concern of depression.

Launched in 2000 as part of the federal government’s five-year National Mental Health Strategy (NMHS), the not-for-profit organisation set out to make common disorders like depression and anxiety a policy priority area for the first time. beyondblue and the NMHS thus marked a decisive moment in Australia where epidemiology, clinical practice and public health were made integrative concerns, incorporating nationwide planning and priority setting within an outcomes-based policy framework (Whiteford, Buckingham & Manderscheid 2002). It also func-
tioned as a catalyst for other health sectors, advocacy groups and mental health organisations like the Black Dog Institute.

beyondblue was thus conceived as part of a coordinated strategy to reduce the disease burden of common disorders like depression. Its stated mission was to create ‘a society that understands and responds to the personal and social impact of depression’ (Pirkis et al. 2005: 37). To achieve this aim, five key priority areas were outlined. They included initiatives to: a) raise awareness and reduce the stigma of depression, b) support consumer and carer advocacy, c) promote prevention and early intervention of depression, d) facilitate primary-care training and service reform, and e) fund strategic and applied research related to mood disorders (Hickie 2004). Today, beyondblue is considered an international leader in the promotion of mental health, with a number of key policy reforms attributed to its lobbying and campaigning efforts – notably the Better Outcomes in Mental Health Care in 2001.5

In contrast, the Black Dog Institute evolved out of the Mood Disorder Unit (MDU) of Sydney’s Prince of Wales Hospital – a clinical outpatient facility for individual patients established in 1985. According to the Institute’s website, the MDU was the ‘sole research, treatment and referral service’ in New South Wales for severe and treatment-resistant depressive disorders (Parker 2002). Following the MDU’s clinical and research pursuits, the Black Dog Institute was officially launched in 2002 and is considered a world leader today in the diagnosis and treatment of depression. Its stated mission is to ‘improve the lives of people affected by mood disorders through translational research, clinical expertise and education programs’ (Black Dog Institute 2012: 4).

While parallels clearly exist between beyondblue and the Black Dog Institute, important differences nonetheless remain, notably in their respective classification of depression. beyondblue currently adopts a dimensional approach consistent with the World Health Organisation’s International Classification of Diseases (ICD), and the American Psychiatric Association’s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM). The Black Dog Institute, on the other hand, delineates three principle subtypes of depression – psychotic, melancholic and non-melancholic. According to the Institute, while psychotic and melancholic depression are characterised by biological perturbations, non-melancholic depression comprises a heterogeneous set of depressive states, triggered by stressors that act either ‘alone or in conjunction with predisposing personality styles’ (Parker & Orman 2012: 50).

Importantly, beyondblue makes no mention of the Black Dog Institute’s non-melancholic category, preferring to endorse instead the broad dimensional constructs of major depression, major depressive disorder, melancholic depression, and dysthymia. More to the point, debates around the categorisation of depression have occurred in the past between both organisations’ chief advisors – former executive director of the Black Dog Institute, Professor Gordon Parker, and former chief clinical advisor to beyondblue, Professor Ian Hickie. As the next section
illustrates, the disparities between the two organisations reveal more than a point of procedural or epistemological difference. They reveal the multiplicity and inherent variability of diseases like depression that refuse ready containment within static frameworks and taxonomies.

**Disease Ontologies**

According to Parker (2007), dimensional models like those endorsed by beyondblue, homogenise multiple depressive conditions under a single rubric. In his words, reliance on such broad symptomatology undermines the credibility in psychiatric diagnosis, rendering it susceptible to confusion and contradiction. It also ‘risks medicalising normal human distress’ (328). The view the Black Dog Institute takes is that dimensional modelling is largely atheoretical, eschewing causal explanations in favour of severity markers like those endorsed by the ICD and DSM (Parker 2005). With no viable aetiological basis to work from, tailoring treatment to specific causes becomes an impossible task, with side-effect profiles in most cases acting as the deciding factor in treatments for depression.

Countering these claims, Hickie argues that there is no biochemical evidence to support the inclusion of melancholia in depression diagnosis, nor is there consistent evidence that ‘people with varying forms of depression’ respond better to specific treatments (Hickie; cited in Benson 2010: 1). In other words, there is no basis to direct salient therapies towards discrete depressive subtypes. Moreover, research indicates that classification systems used alone are insufficient to deal with the variability of mental illness. We should thus be wary of strict adherence to any diagnostic system and focus instead on integration between diagnostic models, as well as the adoption of alternative methods not currently used in psychiatry like clinical staging (Hickie et al. 2013).

The point to make here is that the controversies between beyondblue and the Black Dog Institute do not entail minor disputes on the periphery of psychology. They urge us to consider basic questions of disease ontology. Crucially, the diagnostic models used by beyondblue and the Black Dog Institute do more than interpret a disorder; they enact it. This is especially the case given that the purpose of diagnosis is to inform treatment and treatment necessarily entails interfering with a disease or condition in such a way so as to produce a therapeutic effect (Mol 2002).

As Annemarie Mol illustrates in her study of lower limb arteriosclerosis, diseases do not represent a priori natural conditions – they are ontological effects ‘brought into being’ through a convergence of socio-material factors (2002: 6). Mol uses the word ‘enact’ to indicate how diseases are done in practice, but more to the point, how they are contingent on the collective involvement of multiple actors, including patients, doctors, clinical guidelines and procedures, inventories, and classification systems (32). These networks not only produce multiple ver-
sions of a disease, they confer a coherence and stability between the sites and practices through which such diseases are enacted.

Within such networks, it is not possible to insist on the primacy of any individual actor, because it is not possible to assign causal or proportional value to any single entity or element. It is possible, however, to speculate how different assemblages of actors produce different versions of the same disease. For this reason, Mol opts for the term ‘multiplicity’ as a way to indicate how different versions of a disease ‘hang together’ – that is, how they are coordinated and rendered intelligible between the sites and practices through which various disease entities are enacted (71).

Following from Mol’s work, any study of depression would thus need to include classification systems, risk-factors, and therapeutic techniques, as much as an investigation of neurotransmitters, synapses, and the chemical milieu of the brain. Scientific knowledge, in particular, serves a coordinating role between different mental health actors and settings, framing and translating various concerns, and rendering them amenable to different kinds of intervention. Controversies like those between beyondblue and the Black Dog Institute work to reveal the contingency of such truth claims. They also reveal the role expertise has in the enactment of medical authority, a process that profoundly impacts how therapeutics is practiced, which health concerns are prioritised, how research funding is allocated, which groups and individuals are problematised, and how clinical guidelines are formulated.

Simply put, how a disease is classified and measured in the population, profoundly impacts the kind of preventative and therapeutic interventions directed towards it. What we observe in the case of beyondblue and the Black Dog Institute are the effects of a series of intricate encounters and transitions, occurring between multiple heterogeneous entities, in settings as diverse as the conference room, the laboratory, the clinic. Indeed, what we observe is the production of scientific truth – a process that entails both the production of facts, as well as their tactical deployment within shifting economies of power (Foucault 1980). The next section explores beyondblue and the Black Dog Institute’s deployment of clinical expertise in more detail, examining the political conditions required for certain forms of expertise to be authorised as formalised discourse, then operationalised as mainstream therapeutics.

**Risk, Authority and Expertise**

Rose writes that the heterogeneity of risk rationalities makes us question ‘where risk thinking has emerged, how it has emerged, and with what consequences’ (1998: 180). This section takes a particular interest in the risk rationalities deployed through beyondblue and the Black Dog Institute’s use of clinical expertise. It follows in part from the work of Simone Fullagar (2008) and her investigation
of how beyondblue discursively constitutes depression through its online mental health promotion. According to Fullagar, beyondblue uses clinical expertise to ‘mobilise particular truths about the aetiology of depression, treatment pathways and…the depressed self’ (327). This, in turn, functions to construct mental illness as a neurochemical problem requiring a neurochemical solution.

This section draws on many of the keen insights of Fullagar’s work, but with less emphasis on the discursive construction of therapeutic realities. Instead, it seeks to understand how particular forms of expertise are put to work – that is, how expertise is operationalised within existing practices of mental health policy, research and clinical treatment, to then authenticate and authorise various preventative and therapeutic activities.

When mobilised through particular forms of expertise, risk functions as a ‘technology of government’, conferring an authenticity to certain health claims and projects by enabling political centres to carry out probabilistic assessments of the future (Rose & Miller 2010: 284). This typically entails targeting specific at-risk groups, as well as the factors themselves deemed to pre-dispose individuals to mental health risk. By locating beyondblue and the Black Dog Institute within their proper historical context, we begin to see how they are informed less by uniform categories of risk, than they are by the complex intersection of certain felicitous situations and events.

Expertise performs an important function within these shifting political assemblages, in part, because it mediates processes of transaction and affiliation. According to Rose and Miller, expertise allows institutions to establish ‘enclosures’ of authority, serving to both legitimise certain programs, as well as enhance an organisation’s capacity to determine policy (2010: 286). In the case of beyondblue and the Black Dog Institute, both organisations seek to attract and enrol other participants through the authority of their expertise, forging alliances, co-opting resources, and entreatying governments to legitimise their authority through funding arrangements and strategic partnerships.

The point Rose and Miller make is an important one, because it urges us to consider the role of expertise in both concentrating authority within certain political and professional centres, as well as granting government the necessary distance to effectively administer policy. Expertise thus functions as a tool of political legitimisation—conferring authority to the claims of organisations like beyondblue and the Black Dog Institute, while authorising government to implement policy without compromising political ideals of autonomy. According to Rose and Miller, it is in this interrelation between authority and expertise that a dilemma emerges. While the political and therapeutic assemblages that make up a given health sector are in part composed of disparate entities seeking to influence each other, the affiliations cannot be viewed as too closely allied.

From an institutional perspective there are two main reasons for this. First, independent organisations have to convince governments of the uniqueness of their
contributions. Second, the closeness of relations between governments and organisations may be seen to compromise scientific impartiality. In the case of beyondblue and the Black Dog Institute, clinical expertise functions as a mode of political authority in order to fund and expedite certain public health initiatives. Public health campaigns are thus overtly affiliative, composed of governments, community health organisations, consumer and carer groups, professional bodies, corporations, and other vested stakeholders. In order for these political assemblages to be viable, the values and ambitions of each member organisation must be rendered translatable to the collective interests of the group.

The beyondblue (2010) Clinical Practice Guidelines illustrates this process of translation and affiliation. Developed through an expert working committee, the guidelines were endorsed by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) as the principle resource for the diagnosis and treatment of youth depression. The NHMRC in many respects acts as an arbiter of knowledge and research, establishing norms of clinical and administrative practice through the regulation of evidence. This point deserves further attention. In order to gain NHMRC approval, the guidelines needed to meet strict evidence-based criteria according to the type of evidence (e.g. randomised-control trials, cohort studies, case-series), consistency of findings, clinical impact, generalizability, and applicability. As is the case with similar governing bodies around the world, the NHMRC functions to impute a medical and economic value to research, with systematic reviews of randomised-control trials positioned at the apex of quality based on their perceived generalisability and low susceptibility to bias.

The NHMRC’s endorsement of the beyondblue guidelines, not only serve to confer clinical credibility to certain therapeutic interventions like cognitive behavioural and interpersonal therapies. They also indirectly authorise beyondblue in the dissemination of such interventions – a point demonstrated with their school-based SenseAbility program. More to the point, the NHMRC endorsement of the guidelines works to position beyondblue as a leading clinical authority in Australia for the diagnosis and treatment of depression, above and beyond their existing public health record.

Given that the original aims of beyondblue were promotional and educational rather than clinical, the impact of the NHMRC’s endorsement of beyondblue is quite remarkable. By endorsing a dimensional framework consistent with recognised international classification systems (ICD-10, DSM-V), the NHMRC has also inadvertently subverted the efforts of the Black Dog Institute in advocating a subtyping model of depression. The broader political consequence of this is that organisations must either compete for support and approval from centres like the NHMRC, or find ways to co-opt the participation of rival centres towards mutually beneficial ends. Such activities reveal the heteromorphic nature of political topologies, characterised by shifting modes of divergence, coordination, alignment and translation. In the case of beyondblue and the NHMRC, clinical expertise thus
performs a function beyond its usual procedural and rationalising role to inadvertently undermine competing expert claims and authorities.

As has been demonstrated, the circumstances through which clinical and scientific expertise is deployed is often as decisive as the forms of expertise itself. Statistical expertise, for instance, has had the unintended effect of deprofessionalising fields of medicine, with clinical decisions becoming increasingly determined ‘by algorithms of safety, effectiveness, efficiency, and cost-effectiveness’ (Wahlberg & McGoey 2007: 4). Similarly, education finds itself undergoing a similar process of transition as teachers are enjoined to equip themselves with new psychotherapeutic skills as part of a broader project of mental health literacy. The final section considers this dilemma in more detail by examining how psychotherapeutic expertise is reconfigured through the preventative pedagogies of beyondblue and the Black Dog Institute SenseAbility and HeadStrong programs.

**Preventative Pedagogies**

beyondblue and the Black Dog Institute primarily use two evidence-based psychological therapies in their programs – cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and interpersonal psychotherapy (IPT). In contrast to psychoanalytic psychotherapy, cognitive behavioural and interpersonal interventions tend to have shorter therapeutic durations, with courses ranging from 10 to 20 sessions. They are also more readily adaptable to manualised formats – a feature that makes them particularly suitable to school-based pedagogies like SenseAbility and HeadStrong. Finally, their brief and manualised nature allows them to be ‘applied in a reliable way, such that their efficacy can be examined in research trials’ (Casey, Perera & Clarke 2012: 53).

These traits combined make CBT and IPT particularly appealing to evidence-based interventions like SenseAbility and HeadStrong. This section, however, focuses only on specific cognitive techniques used by beyondblue and the Black Dog Institute. This is partly due to issues of scope, but mostly due to the rich theoretical framework CBT provides in assisting practitioners in understanding and intervening upon internal states and processes. Moreover, CBT provides a useful basis to consider modes of reflexivity and self-conduct promoted in public health more broadly.

As the name suggests, CBT seeks to change cognitive and behavioural dysfunctions viewed as mediators in psychopathology. According to John Tiller, principles of CBT include ‘educating the patient, teaching basic relaxation skills, and developing the patient’s skills to identify, challenge and change maladaptive thoughts, feelings, perceptions and behaviour’ (2012: 30). Crucially, while CBT shares many techniques with other modalities, it distinguishes itself through its cognitive model of psychopathology. This model assumes that cognitive variables like thoughts and beliefs are important mediating factors in feelings and behav-
iour. They therefore act as effective targets of therapeutic change. Furthermore, the model posits that ‘every psychological disorder has a distinctive cognitive profile’ (Clark & Steer 1996: 78). In cases of depression, this often takes the form of maladaptive beliefs of personal loss and failure, as well as cognitive processing styles that tend to be global, absolute and past-oriented (Clark & Steer 1996).

Therapeutic change, thus tends to focus on changing the specific cognitions held as mediators or concomitants of depressive illness. There are two primary reasons why cognition in CBT acts as the fulcrum of therapeutic change. First, it is postulated as an important mediator of affect, motivation and action. Second, it is considered ‘the most flexible and adaptable of the personality systems and functions’ (Beck 1996: 21). In other words, cognition is considered more accessible and responsive to therapeutic intervention than affect and behaviour, and thus ‘central to the human change process’ (Clark & Steer 1996: 77).

The following provides an analysis of how cognitive techniques are used in beyondblue’s SenseAbility and the Black Dog Institute’s HeadStrong programs to promote various protective capacities. The purpose here is not to provide a systematic analysis of these programs, but to empirically interrogate them as examples of the kind of risk and protection logics that underpin public health more broadly. As will be shown, resilience emerges as a key rationality of both programs, because resilience is imputed as one of the most powerful protectors against psychopathology. To structure the analysis, SenseAbility and HeadStrong are dealt with each in turn, in order to then provide a more general analysis of the two program’s role within broader assemblages of preventative therapeutics.

Cognitive Techniques in SenseAbility

In beyondblue’s SenseAbility program, lessons are modelled on a student-centred style of learning that target individual protective factors of problem-solving, coping skills, interpersonal competence, and optimistic thinking (Spence et al. 2005: 161). The program is designed for high school students aged 12–18. There are a total of six modules which comprise the SenseAbility Suite, with each module focusing on individual features of resilience and positive psycho-social adaptation.

In the Essential Skills module, students learn that ‘while we often can’t change events, we do have the power to change the way we think about those events’ (Irwin, Sheffield & Holland-Thompson 2010: 6). The capacity to adapt and alter thoughts amidst difficult to change circumstances is promoted in SenseAbility as the hallmark of psychological resilience. In the activity titled ‘Our Special Guest’, students role play ‘helpful’ and ‘unhelpful’ panellists in a fictional talk show. As helpful panellists attempt to counter unhelpful commentary, students discuss how negative commentary might be similar to their own self-talk. Basic principles of self-talk are then explicitly taught, with students guided through the following
common thinking errors: a) all-or-nothing thinking, b) over-generalising, c) mind-reading, d) fortune-telling, e) magnification, f) minimisation, and g) catastrophising (2010: 26).

In all or nothing thinking, the belief is held that anything short of perfection is inadequate, which often leads to feelings of discontent. In over-generalisation, isolated events are construed as part of a consistent pattern of failure and disappointment. In magnification, minor errors are judged as catastrophes, making it impossible to form realistic appraisals. And in minimisation, positive experiences and events are downplayed, effectively negating attendant feelings of joy. Importantly, students are taught how to adapt and counter such thinking errors through a technique known as ‘cognitive restructuring’. This involves employing self-directed strategies like evidence-checking, reframing, reality-testing, and finding alternatives. The statement ‘nobody likes me’, for instance, is offered to students as an example of a negatively biased cognition that can be reframed and adapted to the more constructive ‘it doesn’t matter if I’m not liked by everyone’ (Irwin, Sheffield & Holland-Thompson 2010: 20).

Thinking errors like all-or-nothing thinking, over-generalisation, magnification, and minimisation are of particular interest in this study, because they are all theorised as depressogenic. In other words, they are viewed as predisposing to depressive illness. According to Aaron Beck and David Clark (1988), cognition in depressed patients tends to be global in nature, as well as oriented towards past losses and failures – a feature typical of the thinking errors above. Furthermore, students are warned how thinking errors ‘can increase the risk of emotional and mental problems’ (Irwin, Sheffield & Holland-Thompson 2010: 20). While biased processing might be theorised to increase an individual’s vulnerability to depression, the cognitive restructuring techniques taught to students are assumed to protect against such vulnerabilities. In other words, cognitive strategies act as neuroprotective agents, pre-emptively targeting key cognitive precursors. They also function as forms of ‘anticipatory action’, a term Anderson uses to describe the ‘coherent’ attempt to guide and enact certain predictive and anticipatory actions (2010: 788).

According to Anderson, anticipatory action becomes a reality in any situation where contingency of the future is deemed a potential threat but also a potential opportunity (2010: 777). Specifically, he focused on three kinds of future-oriented logics that guide anticipatory action – precaution, preparedness, and pre-emption. In this study, cognitive restructuring is maintained as an unusual form of anticipatory action, because it works through all three ontological modes. First, cognitive restructuring works as a precaution against the likely attendant effects of negative cognition. By counteracting an internalised thought like ‘no body likes me’, with ‘it doesn’t matter if I’m not liked by everyone’, feelings of anxiety and self-loathing are kept at adaptable levels. This acts as a preventative measure against future depressive moods and feelings.
Second, cognitive restructuring attempts to pre-empt depressive illness, by preventing the depressogenic factors that lead to depression in the first place. As Jeffrey Young, Arthur Weinberger, and Aaron Beck observe, automatic thoughts usually ‘go unnoticed because they are part of a repetitive pattern of thinking’ (2001: 278). Reflexive techniques like cognitive restructuring not only allows one to establish patterns between certain thoughts, feelings and behaviours, but enables one to intervene upon them through specific cognitive techniques like reframing. The hope is that with repeated interventions, the automatic thoughts themselves will become more functional, in effect, pre-empting the cognitive conditions of depressive illness.

Finally, cognitive restructuring prepares individuals for the aftermath of a depressive mood or state. Rather than preventing or pre-empting a future event from happening, interventions in this case aim to reduce the severity of present symptoms. Depressive moods often impact the ways in which people relate with the world, in turn, influencing cognition. Cognitive restructuring acts as a circuit breaker in this cycle, with the hope that by adapting thoughts, depressive feelings will be alleviated, and thoughts and motivation will begin to improve.

### Cognitive Techniques in HeadStrong

In the Black Dog Institute’s HeadStrong program, cognitive behavioural techniques are integrated with interpersonal psychotherapy and positive psychology. The program’s primary aims are to destigmatise mental illness and equip students with coping skills that promote better mental health (Black Dog Institute 2013a). Teaching and learning activities are divided into five modules that link directly to individual state and territory health curriculums, as well as the new Health and Physical Education National Curriculum.

In contrast to beyondblue’s SenseAbility, the program emphasises personality profiles over cognitive vulnerabilities like biased cognition. This is not surprising, given the classificatory differences between beyondblue and the Black Dog Institute. Within the dimensional framework adopted by beyondblue, categories like major depression and dysthymia offer no aetiological rationale to differentiate vulnerability factors. It is therefore not possible to postulate likely pathways to depression on the basis of predisposing factors such as cognitive bias.

The Black Dog Institute, on the other hand, delineates depressive typology on the basis of self-rated and clinician rated measures, clinical observation, and importantly, the likely aetiology of depression. While psychotic and melancholic depression are maintained as biological disorders, non-melancholic depression is argued to be caused by personality features that act in combination with a stressful trigger or event. Such a framework provides the Black Dog Institute with the theoretical scope to postulate specific pre-onset correlates for non-melancholic depression. These include two categories related to stress exposure, and eight categories
related to personality. The eight personality styles are: a) anxious worrier, b) irritable, c) self-critical, d) rejection-sensitive, e) self-focused, f) perfectionistic, g) socially avoidant, and h) personally reserved (Black Dog Institute 2014).

In the module titled ‘The Low Down on Mood Disorders’, students are guided through the various personality styles associated with non-melancholic depression. They are then split into ‘expert teams’ to conduct further research on predisposing personality styles using the Black Dog Institute’s website (Black Dog Institute 2013a: 30). Students thus discuss characteristic features of the eight personality types. The anxious worrier, for instance, is described as someone who ‘tends to be highly strung, tense, nervy and prone to stewing over things’ (Black Dog Institute 2014).

It is within this context that students are given a plausible rationale to apply specific interventions. Most activities in HeadStrong adopt traditional formats of instruction, discussion, and writing. Unlike SenseAbility, there is less focus on explicit instruction of cognitive techniques. Further, practical tasks that allow students to generalise cognitive principles (e.g. role-play, modelling, empathetic responding, visualisation) are used intermittently, with most lessons driven by student-led discussion. The self-reflexive activities in HeadStrong are the primary means through which students are actively engaged in applying techniques. In most cases, these activities involve reflective tasks where students think about their moods, and think about their thinking.

Given that the purpose of cognitive therapy is to change dysfunctional thinking, reflection is a crucial ability because it enables one to elicit underlying autonomic thoughts that influence subsequent feelings and behaviour. In the context of HeadStrong, it also enables students to monitor and intervene upon processes of self-talk.

In the module ‘Helping Yourself’, students are guided through the links between self-talk and resilience, together with the strategies that can help them ‘become the “Gate Keeper” of [their] thoughts’ (Black Dog Institute 2013b, Slide 109). Self-talk is promoted throughout HeadStrong as a key mediator in how people perceive themselves and the world around them. More to the point, students are taught how positive self-talk can aid in building resilience, enabling students to ‘bounce back’ from setbacks and difficulties (Black Dog Institute 2013a: 41).

As Vijaya Manicavasagar and Gordon Parker write, resilience ‘usually reflects the culmination of a number of adaptive strategies’ that prevent future problems (2005: 92). Positive self-talk is thus considered crucial in protecting individuals against depressive illness because it is primarily through our internal monologue that we form perceptions of ourselves, foster hope and confidence, find solutions and alternatives to problems, and manage anxiety.

Gaining access to this internal monologue, often involves skills of self-reflection. To help initiate this process, Headstrong encourages students to use a ‘Mood Tracker Journal’, which provides students with a framework to engage in
various self-reflexive modes of conduct, such as observation, monitoring, reflection, and analysis. Moreover, students are taught how to record and monitor feelings, contextualise fluctuations in mood, and reflect on instances of negative thinking or ‘put-downs’ (Black Dog Institute 2013a: 41). Data is then used to establish patterns between thoughts, feelings and the various externalities that might have triggered changes to internal states. This provides both a relevant context and plausible motive for students to discuss and apply certain resilience-building strategies in their own lives.

In the context of this study, the Mood Tracker Journal also works to codify and operationalise certain expert knowledges and techniques of cognitive theory. Not only do the self-reflexive technologies function to engender certain relations of self-conduct, they actively recalibrate and transform the self through processes of cognitive restructuring. The process thus entails more than the solicitation of students into modes of self-surveillance. While monitoring is a key prerequisite in rendering automatic processes visible, it comprises only one part in an ensemble of self-driven interventions that seek to transform and maintain the self. Indeed, maintenance is the primary objective of technologies like the Mood Tracker Journal – whether it be maintaining anxiety to adaptable levels, or maintaining perspective in situations of adversity, or maintaining a positive self-image and sense of efficacy.

In this sense, such devices act as crucial intermediaries in the continual upkeep of the body. For this reason, devices like the Mood Tracker Journal should be considered forms of biokeeping technology, a term used here to describe any instrument or technique used to detect and measure specific biological processes. In the case of the Mood Tracker Journal, biomarkers like depressed mood, loss of pleasure, sleep disturbance, and impaired concentration serve to indicate possible mental health risk. This is not to conflate differences between biological and psychological processes, but rather to foreground their mutability and illustrate how biomarkers that might strictly be defined as biological, act in some cases as potential indicators of psychological distress. More to the point, the use of such monitoring techniques incites people to employ certain preventative measures that work to uphold and maintain the body. By analysing the effects of biokeeping technologies like the Mood Tracker Journal, we can begin to discern how individuals are implicated into self-reflexive practices, and more importantly, how certain technologies work to reconfigure and transform the self.

Given the influence of Foucault’s (1988) work on ‘technologies of the self’, it might be useful to recall his observations here. According to Foucault, procedures of diary writing, self-disclosure and various other verbalisation techniques, were employed by individuals in the past to transform themselves towards a given ethical ideal, be it an ideal to care for oneself, master oneself, or know oneself. In contemporary times, the techniques of verbalisation adopted in the Christian con-
fessional have been ‘reinserted in a different context’ by the human sciences ‘to constitute, positively, a new self’ (1988: 49).

What makes Foucault’s work particularly relevant in this study is in thinking more broadly about how individuals are produced through a spectrum of technologies. While governmental technologies are instrumental in the dissemination of school-based programs like SenseAbility and HeadStrong, they form only one part of an assemblage of technologies that in combination work to produce certain ontological effects.

Throughout this study we have witnessed how different versions of depression emerge through different socio-material contexts. Similarly, we can observe how different versions of the self emerge as technological artefacts, replete with a psychological interior and ‘unique biography’ (Rose 1996: 3). Within the spectrum of technologies that work to produce new selves, intellectual and biokeeping technologies like the Black Dog Institute’s Mood Tracker Journal comprise a crucial part of the reflexive component that enables individuals to actively participate in their own transformation. Indeed, the defining feature of these technologies is their reflexiveness – a mode of action that once initiated, reverts back on the user. It is through the initiation of certain self-directed processes that tasks like observation, monitoring, calculation and reflection are then performed on the self, to constitute the self in new ways.

Conclusion

Much of this study has attended to the ways in which expert knowledges and techniques are recombined into new technologies of power. If there is one question, however, that draws these themes together it is the question of authority. Authority in this study has taken a number of forms. First, governmental processes were examined as modes of authorisation, redeploying existing resources and technologies in response to new situations (Collier 2009). Second, institutions like beyondblue and the Black Dog Institute were studied as ‘enclosures of authority’ (Rose & Miller 2010: 286), legitimising practices of diagnosis and treatment, disseminating certain truths on the aetiology of mental illness. Third, expertise itself was maintained as an enacted form of authority, whereby teachers and school administrators became authorised as public health professionals, assuming new responsibilities as part of an ongoing management of mental health risk.

While political and professional authority is not concentrated within any single entity or actor, authority is nonetheless enacted, in ways that often have lasting impacts on people’s lives. One way to think of authority is as a process of emergence. The affiliations and events that led to the coordination of mental health programs in Australia did not happen by design or the straightforward implantation of policy, but often through a series of felicitous accidents and unintended events. As shown throughout the study, the development of these technologies
required two things: a viable model of risk, together with the know-how and competency to put risk logics into action. In other words, they all require literacy, and more accurately, the production of a risk literate public.

As a final word, this study has shown that it is possible to think of mental disorders as more than naturalised entities, even if they are, in part, biologically composed. If depression is enacted in multiple ways, it therefore requires at the very least, a cross-disciplinary approach to examine the different ways depression is produced in the practicing of it. It is fitting to conclude then with the words of Mol (2002), who urges us to determine not which intervention is most effective, but to consider the effects of different interventions. This is the question that should guide any therapeutic program, policy initiative, or empirical study.

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Notes

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2 SenseAbility is a strengths-based emotional and psychological resilience program for students aged 12-18 years, first trialled in selected Australian schools in 2003. HeadStrong is a mental health awareness and resilience building program for students aged 13-16 years, rolled out nationally in 2012.

3 According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), the burden of disease ‘is a measure used to assess and compare the relative impact of different diseases and injuries on populations’ (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2014).

4 Several criticisms have been levelled against the DALY, none more significant than that it privileges loss of healthy life in the years deemed to be the most productive (i.e. the middle age group). See Anand and Hanson (1997) for further commentary.

5 The Better Outcomes in Mental Health Care enabled better access to psychological treatments, as well as improved collaboration between general and mental health practitioners. It also represented ‘the largest single allocation’ of primary mental healthcare funding by an Australian government (Hickie and Groom 2002).

6 The term biomarker is a common medical term used to describe a measurable indicator of some form of illness or condition.
References


Therapeutic Solutions, Disciplinary Ethics and Medical Truth on Self-Help TV

By Maryam El-Shall

Abstract

This article will consider the use of therapy television – specifically the self-help television program *The Dr. Phil Show* – as a locus of government. Specifically, I will examine the ways in which ethics are addressed as biopolitical problems of the self through the often disciplinary instruction of the therapist. In this respect *The Dr. Phil Show* is representative of a shift in the talk show genre away from the tabloid model to a pedagogical model. Self-help talk shows are increasingly concerned with the cultivation of the soul, the production of truth and the discipline of the body. I demonstrate this by analyzing a series of *Dr. Phil Show* episodes centered on the confession and obesity, respectively. I emphasize the connection between TV expertise – here embodied in the discourse of the expert/therapist Dr. Phil McGraw – and neo-liberal goals requiring subjects to both care, and take responsibility, for themselves.

Keywords: Biopower, biopolitics, Dr. Phil, discipline, truth, self
Introduction

In the fall of 1999 Oprah Winfrey launched “Tuesdays with Dr. Phil” as a regular, self-help segment on her long-running TV chat show Oprah. During these appearances, the then little-known Dr. Phil McGraw offered blunt and often critical advice to guests and viewers struggling with a variety of personal problems: marital discord, obesity and addiction, to name a few. Regardless of the issue, however, Dr. Phil adopted a confrontational, no-nonsense style. Reporting on one early episode in which Dr. Phil scolded a husband for calling his wife “the C-word,” Mark Donald of the Dallas Observer offered his summation of what was then an emerging persona in popular self-help culture: “Forget Freud, Jung, years on the analyst’s couch. McGraw delivers his down-home insight with the precision of a surgeon’s cut. He is the master of the therapeutic sound bite, the analytical flash delivered right before the commercial break” (Donald 2000). While many (Dembling & Guttierez 2003; Cottle 2004) were, like Donald, quick to criticize Dr. Phil or his seeming lack of compassion, his quick temper, and his on-camera theatrics, viewers were enamored. Fans enjoyed Dr. Phil’s “tell-it-like-it-is” approach to self-help so much that in the fall of 2002, Dr. Phil was able to launch his own television talk show, called The Dr. Phil Show. Drawing on The Oprah Winfrey Show’s audience and style, The Dr. Phil Show uses an instructive mode in order to help viewers help themselves. Also like Oprah, the goal of The Dr. Phil Show is one of social uplift. By following Dr. Phil’s advice, guests and viewers learn how to manage their lives and plan their futures.

But Dr. Phil diverges from the Oprah model in one significant way: the mode of therapy dispensed on the show is clearly disciplinary; the authority behind it stemming from its association with the discourse of psychology and mental health. Unlike Oprah, when Dr. Phil speaks, he speaks with the knowledge (and power) of the “expert;” his judgment, advice and discourse in turn become the tools with which guests and viewers can govern themselves.

Government

I borrow the terms ‘government’ and ‘governance’ here from Foucault’s later writings. Beginning with the lecture “Society Must be Defended” Foucault outlined the various ways in which, beginning in the eighteenth century, the instruments of power had begun to shift from a top-down model of sovereignty to a disciplinary system of consent in which the population is governed at a distance. Through procedures of constant surveillance and a “closely meshed grid of material coercions” (Foucault 2003: 36) exercised in the school, the hospital and the military barracks, for example, certain kinds of subjects were produced. Government thus presupposed the principle “that there had to be an increase both in the
subjugated forces and in the force and efficacy of that which subjugated them…This non-sovereign power…is disciplinary power” (ibid.: 36).

In other works, Foucault lays out the various forms of this new system of power. For instance, in the first volume of The History of Sexuality (Foucault 1976/1994a) he describes a system of power preoccupied with the anatomo-politics of the individual body on the one hand and the bio-politics of the population as whole on the other. Government, in this respect, assumed an organic quality. Its aim, according to Foucault, was the production of a docile subject. According to Milchman and Rosenberg (2005: 338) in their gloss of Foucault’s genealogy of government, this model of power:

centered on the body as machine: its disciplining, the optimization of its capabilities, the extortion of its forces, the parallel increase of its usefulness and its docility, its integration into systems of efficient and economic controls. A biopolitics of population, by contrast, focused on the species body, the body imbued with the mechanics of life and serving as the basis of the biological processes; propagation, births and mortality, the level of health, life expectancy and longevity, with all the conditions that can cause these to vary.

Focusing on one pole of this dynamic - the individual body and the production of the docile subject - Foucault demonstrates the ways in which this model of power would eventually be subsumed into the disciplinary mechanisms of the liberal state. Involving techniques of domination and technologies of the self, coercion and freedom, the state-authorized disciplines – medicine, criminology, psychology, among others – took on an increasingly important role in the government of the population by ensuring that, for example, school children would be taught the history, rules and responsibilities of citizenship; the bodies of workers would be arranged and regimented to enhance their productivity; the souls of prisoners would be cultivated through systems of surveillance and control. Individuals, in turn, would take on the norms and rules of the disciplines in constructing themselves as citizens, consumers, normal, healthy or sick. In the processes, they also potentially resist and transform those techniques.

With this said, if we are to understand how subjects are produced in these ways under contemporary conditions of government, we must orient ourselves to the ways in which they are governed. What are the discourses and techniques used to construct subjects of liberal government? And on what basis are these discourses/techniques authorized as instruments of governance? Here, I would like to examine the ways in which self-help TV functions as one such instrument.

Following what Ouellette & Hay (2008) show in their analysis of reality TV as a technology of government, what I term self-help television considers the way the self is instrumentalized as an object of therapeutic intervention as part of a wider culture focused on health and personal responsibility. In this context, television governs not through repression of people’s wills, nor by the dominance of an all-powerful state, but rather through the power and authority of the television expert, By “dispersing ideas and automat[ing] perception and cognition [and ena-
bling] on a massive scale and at a suitably removed distance, the shaping of con-
duct and attitudes” (McCarthy 2010: 251) governance by television in this sense
proceeds through a process of individual liberty and personal choice on the one
hand, and the disciplinary discourse of expertise on the other.

Here, then, I argue that by drawing on the truth-power of the disciplines –
namely, psychology and medicine – self-help TV operates as a contemporary in-
strument of government aiming to transform viewers into active, responsible sub-
jects of health. However, before I do so, I would first like to frame self-help TV
within the context of its talk-show predecessors in order to demonstrate self-help
TV’s didactic goals. In the following section, I demonstrate the shift away from
the tabloid model toward self-help TV’s instructive model. I also document the
popular and political controversy surrounding tabloid programs in order to contex-
tualize the self-conscious generic shift toward the self-help model of talk show
television ushered in by The Dr. Phil Show.

Background and Context

Since the 1980s, we have seen both a popular and a political resurgence in the
concern with the conduct of conduct in the US. The proliferation of various new
cable and satellite television channels beginning in the 1980s and into the 1990s
spawned an explosion of new television formats and genres as technologies of,
and problems for, government. The 1990s tabloid talk show and the movement
towards reality TV, which began with cable channel MTV’s Real World in 1990,
and the late 1990s’ and early 2000s’ “digital revolution” which interconnected
audiences to these shows and to each other through online media, changed the
relationship between television and viewers from a “top-down” mass cultural
formation to a customized, interactive experience involving the co-option of
viewers – their stories, their problems and their labor – in the production of TV
itself, allowing for the proliferation of all sorts of performances on and uses of
television unseen before (see Andrejevic 2003; Ouellette & Hay 2008). Through
write-in programming, surveillance and the use of the internet to recycle and ex-
pand television content, reality television came to seem an unstable technology for
governing because anyone could take to the stage and talk about anything they
liked, including such topics as incest, teen sexuality and gender-bending.

Jason Mittell’s study (2003) of popular attitudes about the talk show genre
shows the link between tabloid talk shows, their audiences and the concept of
taste emerging at this time. Mittell’s study provides the kind of viewer-response
analysis necessary for understanding the shift in the content and format of talk
shows from the tabloid model, represented by Jerry Springer in the 1990s, to what
I call self-help talk, represented today by American programs like The Dr. Phil
Show, The Dr. Oz Show and The Doctors. Mittell studies the talk show genre in
order to explore the connection between the concept of taste and that of audience
identity, and demonstrates the ways in which the “low brow” tabloid genre coincides with a conception of talk show subjects and audiences as “low class,” “abnormal” and/or “deviant.” Mittell’s study looks at the genre broadly and includes all of the shows categorized under the generic rubric of talk show, from daytime-issue oriented programs such as *Oprah* to late night celebrity interview shows, such as *Late Night with David Letterman*; from public affairs programs, such as *Larry King Live*, to morning chat shows, such as *Live with Regis and Kathie Lee*. Since I am only interested in the generic shifts in daytime talk, my discussion will be limited to responses about *Jerry Springer* and *Oprah*.

Participants in Mittell’s study ranked the value of the various types of talk show – from *Jerry Springer* on the “low brow,” “trash” end of the spectrum to *Oprah* on the socially valuable and spiritually uplifting end – by the shows’ inclusion of guests who were unlike “normal” Americans and, thus, had a strong sense of their own identity (Mittell 2003: 38). Nearly all respondents felt that *Springer* was the epitome of the genre or “exactly what I think of as a talk show” while others described it as “trash,” a “fighting show,” “junk,” “white-trash extravaganza,” “a carnival show for weirdos,” “a circus of idiots,” “the Christians and the lions,” and even “comedy” (Mittell 2003: 42).

The evaluative terms participants used to distinguish “the normal” from the “abnormal” included class, education and, most notably, questions regarding the sanity and sexuality of the particular show’s guests and studio audience. Detractors claimed that shows like *Springer* “encouraged violence, poor morality, exploitation and low cultural standards, and explicitly labeled them as “bad for society” (Mittell 2003: 42). Almost all respondents expressed similarly extreme opinions about the show, even if they watched it – calling it “abominable,” “awful,” “despicable,” “repugnant,” “terrible,” “revolting,” “perverted,” “crap,” “tasteless,” “absolutely hate it,” “an insulting waste of time,” “an embarrassment,” “downright destructive,” “crude and irresponsible,” and “the biggest piece of trash in the history of television” (Mittell 2003: 42). A few critics also reiterated the common assumption that tabloid programs caused social ills. As one wrote, “they actually decrease society’s existing morals” (Mittell 2003: 39). In contrast, *Oprah* was called “informative,” “classy,” “truly inspiring,” and “aimed at improving people’s lives.” Even those who disliked the show still noted that it had a “positive” message (Mittell 2003: 43).

In evaluating the guests who appeared on daytime talk shows, many of Mittell’s respondents showed a particular preoccupation with their bodies and behavior. Where *Oprah* was assessed on the basis of her predominantly female, middle-class and educated guests and panels, respondents discussed *Springer* in terms of guests who appeared abnormal or unusual and acted in risky or unhealthy ways. Respondents referred to *Springer* guests as “white trash,” “trailer trash,” overweight women,” “lower class,” “mental cases,” and more broadly “other types of people – strippers, gays, lesbians and others most people don’t come in contact with.”
with everyday” (Mittell 2003: 38). When questioned about the various shows’ wider home audiences, respondents also characterized typical viewers in bodily and behavioral terms.

While participants noted that Oprah appealed to a much broader demographic than most programs, offering a qualitative assessment such as “what some might call decent people,” or, as one respondent calling himself a “male housewife” wrote, “anyone who wants to see the beauty that is still in this world,” Springer’s audience was perceived as “bored,” “lonely,” “passive and lazy” and – overall – “underemployed, overweight, lazy, unimaginative, low energy, narrow minded, low income,” “living questionable lifestyles” and/or “suffering from a mental disability they do not want to admit to” (Mittell 2003: 38). For detractors of Springer, its pleasures were highly questionable. Respondents suggested that those who “really” enjoyed the show did so because they were like the guests who appeared on it, saying that such shows are “only good if you want the uneducated, perverted and interbred part of society revealed” (Mittell 2003: 39). Many respondents explicitly contrasted Springer to Oprah on the basis of the imagined class and behavior of their respective audiences, juxtaposing Oprah’s “decent folk” to the “morons who watch Springer” (Mittell 2003: 44).

Despite the critical attitudes toward shows like Jerry Springer, in the mid-to-late 1990s tabloid programs were at the height of their popularity. In 1998 Jerry Springer had a wider audience than even Oprah and numbered nearly seven million viewers in the US alone (Nagel 2002: 14). At the same time, Ricki Lake, Maury Povich, Jenny Jones, Montel Williams, Yolanda, Geraldo, Sally Jesse Raphael, Howard Stern and Morton Downey Jr. were all talking about sex, sexuality, sex-identity, teen sex, sexually transmitted diseases, extramarital affairs, domestic violence, incest, cross-dressing, race warfare, children who hate their parents, parents who hate their children, siblings in love, amongst a host of other topics – all at the same time every day of the week.

The general format of these types of shows revolved around the confession, which was sometimes coerced through the appearance of surprise guests, polygraph tests and behind-the-scenes video surveillance footage. Each episode focused on a panel of guests with some form of the same problem. The discursive rhythm of each segment was set by the host who introduced guests by name and “problem” – such as “this is Jessica and she is here to tell her husband that she is in love with another woman.” The host mediates the discussion by asking questions, interjecting an opinion when appropriate and thus maintaining the overall flow and dramatic tension of the discourse. The audience participates by reacting visibly and audibly to the guests’ revelations, asking questions and even sharing their own stories. On Ricki the audience of mostly black and Latino urban youth became known for chanting “Whoop there it is!” when guests made unexpected or humiliating disclosures (see Gamson 1998) The shows usually end with a question and answer session between the guests, the host and the studio audience.
Most of these tabloid talk shows were viewer-participation shows. They solicited stories from home viewers in exchange for travel fare and lodging (Gamson 1998). They tended to focus on stories and topics that were considered to fall outside of social norms, such as “I slept with my cousin,” or “My boyfriend cheated on me… with my mother.” As the competition for ratings intensified throughout the 1990s, the show discussions and guest performances became even more sensational. Jerry Springer regularly featured partners admitting adultery to each other, women or men admitting to their partners that they were post-op transsexuals, Ku Klux Klan families and other hate groups (Gamson 1998). The number of scandals generated by the content of these programs reached a climax in the late 1990s as the number of daytime tabloid shows topped twenty.

At the height of these shows’ popularity, many public officials were concerned about the links between social problems and television (Gamson 1998). In the late 1990s, a number of prominent politicians in office publicly voiced their concerns about the number of talk shows that were “blurring the lines between the normal and the abnormal,” a statement made by Democratic Senator Joseph Lieberman in 1995 (cited in Glynn 2000: 186). In the same vein, Massachusetts Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan made the more dramatic statement that the popularity and ubiquity of tabloid shows demonstrated that “Americans [themselves] are getting used to a lot of deviancy, taking it for granted” (cited in Glynn 2000: 186). William Bennett, who had served as Ronald Reagan’s Secretary of Education and was the first head of National Drug Control Policy under George H. W. Bush, was one of the most vocal critics of talk shows in the 1990s. Bennett argued that shows like Jerry Springer and Jenny Jones reflected not simply the “low brow” or “lowest common denominator” within American culture, but that they also predicted the demise of traditional American culture altogether (Mittell 2003: 42), and called them “moral rot” and “cultural pollution” (cited in Glynn 2000: 184).

The political action at the time when these shows were most popular was equally vociferous. In 1993 Bennett founded Empower America, a conservative think tank devoted to mobilizing public opinion in favor of “government actions [aimed toward] foster[ing] growth, economic well-being, freedom and individual responsibility” (Web.archive.org: 2013). This is reflected in Empower America’s mission statement regarding the cultural foundations of America’s unique status in the world as the place of “opportunity, competition, ownership and freedom,” (Web.archive.org: 2013) terms that implicitly reference America’s Puritan roots as the basis of a predominantly white, liberal society. Among the concerns listed on Empower America’s social agenda was the proliferation of socially irresponsible behavior considered against what Mittell refers to as a “conservative straight white male habitus and measured by the portrayal of “deviancy” on television (Mittell 2003: 36). In discussing matters related to sexuality, class and race (among other controversial topics) tabloid programs opened up a series of dichotomies between normal and abnormal conduct, nature and nurture, and reality and
fiction that political and cultural critics sought to hold in place. Cleaning up the airways was thus part of a larger political effort to reform the state along a neo-liberal model emphasizing self-help, enterprise and traditional morality.

However, beginning in 1998 when Oprah shifted the direction of her show away from the tabloid model, we began to see a move on the part of television itself toward advancing such neo-liberal goals. In Better Living Through Reality TV, Laurie Ouellette and James Hay argue that the emergence of reality television in the late 1990s and early 2000s marked a shift in the purpose and goals of television (Ouellette & Hay 2006). According to the authors, programs emphasizing personal responsibility and self-improvement over structural issues fill the vacuum created by cutbacks in traditional welfare programs. The neo-liberal reinvention of the state begun under Reagan and accelerated throughout the Bush-Clinton decade with welfare reform and public-private partnering of health care set the foundation for a new popular discourse of personal responsibility and individual enterprise. In this context, even the vicissitudes of the body became the grounds for enacting the responsibilities of citizenship. Popular medicine and TV experts offered the kind of social authority necessary for ensuring the creation of said citizens. We see this most dramatically with the first TV expert of this kind: Dr. Phil McGraw.

The Pedagogy of Dr. Phil

A preliminary glance at show topics for the first season of The Dr. Phil Show demonstrates its pedagogical goals. Episodes like “Should You Have A Baby?” “When Sexual Styles Don’t Match,” “Discipline Debate,” “Sex Talk,” “Feuding Families,” “Should We Get Married?” and the recurring “Ask Dr. Phil” address questions about the psychology of sex and marriage, when to have children and how to raise them, as well as how to recognize the signs of potential illness or pathology, respectively. Titles such as “Controlling People” and “Selfish People” focus on guests who are known by their friends and family to exhibit socially unacceptable or irresponsible behavior. Viewers learn how to deal with similar personality types within their own lives.

Other Dr. Phil episodes about eating disorders, addiction, and phobias take a more explicitly disciplinary tack. This takes the form of presenting individual problems of adjustment or trauma in a discourse of mental and physical disease that one is, nonetheless, responsible for. This is perhaps most evident on episodes dealing with addiction.

In a long-running series on Dr. Phil called "The Dr. Phil Family," we learn about the warning signs of substance abuse, the mental and physical effects of drugs on the body and the toll that addiction takes on family members. We watch as Alexandra, the drug addict and focal point of the “Dr. Phil Family” series, scores prescription drugs from a local clinic, neglects her children and takes up
with various men whom she believes can help her get more drugs. We also watch as her parents, Erin and Marty, argue over Alexandra’s condition and as their marriage, further tested by infidelity, financial hardship and, it seems, the family’s recurring role as America’s “problem family” on the *Dr. Phil Show*, begins to fall apart.

Dr. Phil first introduced “The Dr. Phil Family” in 2004 as an “all-American family on the outside” who were disintegrating from the inside – “struggling with problems that threatened to tear them apart.” Among the family’s problems, according to Dr. Phil, were young Alexandra’s (then fifteen) pregnancy, her younger sister Katherine’s (then thirteen) equally precocious sexuality, Marty’s several extra-marital affairs, Erin’s infidelity and the family’s ongoing financial difficulties. In spite of their problems (or perhaps because of them) the Dr. Phil Family was continually presented as the embodiment of the hopes and struggles of ordinary Americans. Yet the Dr. Phil Family’s very clear state of crisis made them exemplary candidates for the *The Dr. Phil Show* because, as the series unfolds, we learn that many of their problems stem from their failure or inability to “get real” with one another, to speak the truth and to properly care for themselves.

For Dr. Phil, taking care of the self is equivalent to “getting real” and speaking truth. This is the logic Dr. Phil utilizes in his unique brand of self-help and one that unfolds in virtually every episode of *The Dr. Phil Show* dealing with troubled guests. We can trace the significance of speaking truth throughout “The Dr. Phil Family” series as it is used as the therapeutic model to address all of the family’s diverse problems.

This power of truth was demonstrated on an August 2004 episode of the series called “A Family Divided: Marty’s Secret Confession.” While prior episodes starring the family focused largely on Alexandra’s sexuality and subsequent pregnancy, this episode was devoted exclusively to the parents, Marty and Erin. It also dealt with the topic of sex.

The central point of contention of this episode turned on the question of truth, namely, the truth about Marty’s sexual history. Erin claimed that she no longer trusted Marty to be honest with her about anything because of his previous sexual infidelities. Yet Marty vehemently protested Erin’s accusations of infidelity by suggesting that their marital problems stemmed not from him, but from Erin, who, according to Marty, insisted on “know[ing] every little thing” (*A Family Divided* 2004). The problem between Erin and Marty thus seemed to involve a breakdown in trust. The question the show sought to answer was whether or not this breakdown was the result of Erin’s insistent demand “to know” or of Marty’s refusal to speak.

The problem of assigning blame involved an interplay between the couple around the question of whether or not there was, in fact, anything to tell. Truth, in this instance, was inscribed through the ritual of confession: Marty’s silence suggested there was a hidden truth to be told, while Erin’s insistence on Marty’s
speech had the effect of bestowing meaning on Marty’s silence. And indeed, during the second segment of this episode, Dr. Phil clearly defined the parameters of Marty and Erin’s problem in this way: Theirs is a problem of truth.

According to Dr. Phil, there are two ways to lie. “One is by making an active, overt, misrepresentation,” which is when you say something that isn’t true. “The other way is when you lie by omission. You just fail to tell somebody something that you know damn well would be material to them” (A Family Divided 2004). Dr. Phil’s articulation of Marty and Erin’s problem in terms of lies, omissions and truth established the framework for the rest of the show: the insistence on truth, the confrontation of the confession and, subsequently, the work of emotional healing that speaking truth allows.

While the dialogue between Marty and Erin revealed the significance of confession in mending the couples’ relationship, Dr. Phil’s authoritative judgment legitimized the process as “real.” Indeed, this was made immediately evident when Erin began to use Dr. Phil’s language as an entry point for showing that, in fact, Marty was a liar: Erin stated that most of Marty’s lies were lies by omission and that his habitual reticence about his whereabouts led her to suspect that even when he was telling her the truth, he was actually lying.

Erin gave as an example a recent incident involving a business check Marty cashed without telling her. “It wasn’t the money,” Erin explained, but rather the fact that Marty did not tell her. For Erin, the distress produced by this incident had less to do with the event itself and more to do with prior events, past lies and omissions that it repeated. This “lie-by-omission” conjured prior lies, infidelities and moral failings. Erin’s true concern, it seemed, had less to do with what Marty said or did and more to do with what Marty’s sayings and doings revealed about his nature.

The framing of the show – “Marty’s Secret Confession” – set up the dialogue between Marty, Erin and Dr. Phil in terms of communication, trust and one’s “true” nature. Yet the show also problematized the question of truth by distributing the “blame” between Marty and Erin. Each is required to take account of their contribution to the problems in the marriage and correct themselves. Erin, for example, recognized that she says “very mean things to [Marty]” and acknowledges that she’s “got to change that about [her]self” (A Family Divided 2004). However, according to Erin, the “blame” for her and Marty’s failing marriage should not be assigned equally. Rather, from Erin’s perspective, her faults paled in comparison to Marty’s because “[Marty] doesn’t even really acknowledge that he’s making…mistakes” (A Family Divided 2004). This is the crucial point. The worrying element for Erin was that Marty was not aware of his mistakes either because he could not or would not recognize them for what they are: essential, deep-seated flaws in Mary’s character. For Erin, then, Marty’s repeated denials registered a concern about the truth of his self. Where Erin was willing to forgive Marty’s trespasses, she could not brook his denial.
Indeed, what Erin wanted and what she insisted on was what Dr. Phil often suggests is the first and most important step toward life changes: accountability. Once again, Dr. Phil’s introduction endowed Erin with the language with which to describe hers and Marty’s problems: “There’s no accountability there. He can’t say, ‘You know, I made a mistake here and I shouldn’t have done that’” (A Family Divided 2004). What Erin wanted here was not simply an accounting or, we should say, an admission of past and present wrongs, but, more importantly, she wanted an admission of guilt, a recognition on Marty’s part of the truth of his nature. Telling everything, even, in Marty’s words, all the “little things,” will purify his soul and heal Erin’s wounds.

In order to understand this need for self-accounting, we can perhaps contrast it with the cultivation of the self Foucault discusses in the third volume of the The History of Sexuality (Foucault 1984/1994b). In the ancient practice of self care, truth was not activated to determine culpability or to assign blame, but rather, “in order to strengthen, on the basis of the recapitulated and reconsidered verification of a failure, the rational equipment that ensures a wise behavior” (Foucault 1984/1994b: 62). With Marty and Erin, however, we can see that the two elements of truth separated in the Roman arts of existence – truth and culpability on one hand and truth for the sake of self-improvement on the other – are reunited in an effort not only to assign blame, but also to make the guilty party responsible for amending the problem. Erin’s concern about Marty’s truthfulness registers both principles at once. Marty’s past infidelities haunt her present preoccupation with Marty’s honesty not simply because, as Dr. Phil argues, “past behavior is the best predictor of future behavior,” but also because, by omitting even the most trifling details about his whereabouts, Marty’s “lie by omission” suggests to Erin that Marty is not being honest with himself. From Erin’s perspective, this is a presentiment that Marty is not only being dishonest with her about more important matters – is there another affair or other secrets as yet unimagined? – but also leads her to suspect that Marty has not reformed himself, has not fully examined himself, and thus has not yet determined the causes and rationales for his past misdeeds. In other words, he has not yet accepted responsibility for his actions as a way to changing himself.

This episode is a paradigmatic of the Dr. Phil therapeutic model. It involves moments of truth, the designation of responsibility and a commitment to self-change. It is, in this respect, quintessentially disciplinary. And as a hallmark of the contemporary moment, we also see the ways in which the show aims to connect its lessons to the lives of its audience: it involves ordinary people dealing with extraordinary problems, for many of which they are themselves considered to be largely responsible. For Dr. Phil, Erin and Marty’s problems can be reduced to one thing: lack of discipline. If they are to correct their problems and reform their lives, they must learn to be accountable and take responsibility for themselves.
The “Fat-Debate”

Individual responsibility also has a role to play in the cause of health. As a constant and intimate fact of everyday life, self-help TV forms an integral part of this system of bodily government. For Dr. Phil, as we saw in the previous examples, only those who are honest with themselves can take stock of the state of their minds and bodies. This is perhaps most true among guests who are considered overweight or obese. Though Dr. Phil is careful not to explicitly invoke the kind of moral discourse we saw in the previous example dealing with marital infidelity, it is nevertheless clear on the program that obesity is a problem of poor self-government, the consequence of bad eating habits and poor lifestyle choices. Implicit in this discourse is an equation of “fatness” with weakness, where weakness reflects on the nature of one’s “soul.” Dr. Phil’s self-help paradigm – getting real, speaking truth and taking responsibility – thus applies to the problem of obesity just as it does to that of marital discord and drug abuse. Presumed in this model is the notion of the responsible citizen who will be able to moderate her pleasures through self-discipline and self-control and assign a proper regimen for herself and her family.

As we saw in the previous example, Dr. Phil offers his life-strategies to viewers primarily through counter-examples. By showcasing guests who are not, or are only improperly, taking care of themselves, Dr. Phil can teach viewers how they can improve their own lives and health through his examples. This was illustrated in an April 2010 episode called “The Fat Debate,” on which a panel of “experts” appeared on the show to talk about the treatment of fat people. This panel included The Biggest Loser trainer and former add-on co-host of The Doctors, Jillian Michaels; MeMe Roth, president of the anti-fat organization National Action Against Obesity; Michael Karolchyk, owner of the military-style “tough love” Anti-Gym; Peggy Howell from the National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance; Marianne Kirby, joint author (with Kate Harding) of self-help publication Lessons from the Fat-O-Sphere; Erica Watson, comedian and star of the one-woman show Fat Bitch and reality TV star Kelly Osbourne, a new Dr. Phil Show contributor.3

This “fat debate” turned on several issues – such as: Are fat people entitled to the same or greater rights than those who are slim? Are fat people discriminated against and/or mistreated in American society? Are the rising numbers of overweight and obese Americans the cause of our spiraling health care costs? – all of which ultimately boiled down to the show’s bottom-line message: self-discipline and individual responsibility.

During the first segment of this episode, Dr. Phil and his panel of experts explored the social and cultural treatment of those whom the show called “fat.” On one side of the debate were MeMe Roth, Jillian Michaels and Michael Karolchyk who maintained that the US is facing an obesity epidemic unlike any other in its
history but that, regardless of the “soaring” numbers of obese adults and children, obese Americans are not discriminated against. “Americans have gotten so fat,” Roth explained, “at this point the self-reported number is two-thirds of us are overweight or obese. That is how bad it has gotten” (The Fat Debate 2010). Similarly, fitness celebrity Jillian Michaels invoked the language of crisis to talk about the scope of this problem, saying "This is a crisis in our country, especially with our children, and adults need to set an example” (The Fat Debate 2010). Finally, boldest of all, Michael Karolchyk, who wore a T-shirt on the show that read “No Chubbies,” took the argument the furthest by suggesting that America’s obesity epidemic is at the heart of our health care and energy “crises,” saying that "Nobody wants to address why these people keep getting larger and larger, costing us more money for health insurance, costing us more money in fuel costs, causing so many problems in our country. If nobody wants to address it, we’re going to be talking about three airline seats in a couple of decades" (The Fat Debate 2010).

The obvious paradox of these claims was revealed by what these contributors didn’t say, or, perhaps, tried to contest: that in making these statements, Roth, Karolchyk and Michaels were clearly not taking into account their own participation in the denigration of those with large bodies, as their often disparaging language and derogatory tone conveyed the very disgust and intolerance those on the “pro-fat” panel complained of. For instance, when the discussion turned to the then recent incident involving director Kevin Smith getting kicked off of an airplane for taking up two seats, Karolchyk asked, "Whatever happened to the skinny people who were offended when the person came over their seat? ... Fat bias? No. I believe skinny bias" (The Fat Debate 2010) Yet, in spite of these gaffes, the “anti-fat” panel took their cue from public health and medical officials who have argued that obesity is a growing public health problem that urgently needs to be addressed. In this vein, Karolchyk and Roth, though seething with disgust for their “pro-fat” opponents, attempted to present the issue in black-and-white terms of health and illness, drawing on public health statistics and medical data to support their claims that obesity is akin to disease while thinness is equal to health.

On the other side of the debate were Marianne Kirby, Peggy Howell and co-comedian Erica Watson. They also argued two (but also, ultimately, paradoxical) points. From their perspective, the obesity epidemic to which Roth, Michaels and Karolchyk referred was the product of media hype and a cultural obsession with thinness. Marianne Kirby, for example, argued that “the media has decided we’re in the middle of a fat apocalypse… We have this obsession with bodies, especially famous people’s bodies, and we examine them for any minute change” (The Fat Debate 2010). The group also argued that though the problem of obesity in America is overblown by the media, overweight Americans are systematically discriminated against. They are less likely to be hired or promoted, are more frequently denied loans, are more likely to receive substandard medical care and regularly experience what the Obesity Action Coalition calls relational victimization—
social exclusion, being ignored, avoided, or the target of rumours (Puhl 2011). In this regard, Peggy Howell specifically argued that “height and weight should be added to the anti-discrimination laws on a federal level,” (The Fat Debate 2010) a position that undercut Howell’s earlier denial of an obesity epidemic as an amendment to existing anti-discrimination laws would support the notion that in fact obesity is both pervasive and is a kind of illness condition akin to other forms of disability.

Putting the contradictions evident on both sides of the debate to one side, what seemed most apparent in the venom and emotion with which the panelists addressed one another was the sense in which fatness, however it is perceived, is not only a bodily condition, but also a moral one. Indeed, while Roth and Karolchyk took umbrage at the invocation of the word “discrimination” to talk about the treatment of overweight people, with Roth arguing that the term should not be applied to the overweight because “To believe that fat people are discriminated against, you have to believe that obesity is an innate state, like race, like sexual orientation,” the acrimony with which Roth and Karolchyk talked about obesity suggested that, though not an innate state in and of itself, obesity is reflective of an individual’s inner “nature” (The Fat Debate 2010). Rather than being manifest in sexual desire or, phenotypically, through skin color, the innate state of obesity is reflected through behavior: "It is not race or sexuality," Karolchyk insisted, “It is behavior…. “We don’t hate fat people; we hate fat behavior. We don’t like laziness” (The Fat Debate 2010).

Catching on to the moral implications of the debate, Dr. Phil explicitly asked Karolchyk if he thought someone who had previously been overweight became a “better person” through weight loss. Stammering and hesitant, Karolchyk responded that though he did not think the person was necessarily better, he did imagine that they were happier, “happier and healthier,” he said. When Marianne Kirby wanted to know why the anti-fat panel thought that it was “morally imperative that [she] seek this magical solution to become thin?” (The Fat Debate 2010) Dr. Phil, in the show’s moment of truth, opined that while body weight “isn’t the sole indicator of health,” it is an indicator, saying further that this was a matter of fact: “ No matter how bad you want it to not be, no matter how politically correct or otherwise it may be, there is a risk factor associated with obesity” (The Fat Debate 2010). But if the goal of the show was simply to offer viewers (and the misled “fat” panel) the statistics and health risks associated with obesity, what was there to debate on the show?

In fact, at the heart of this “fat-debate” lay the same, implicit indictment of individuals whom the show imagines as irresponsible and dishonest as we saw was the case with Marty and Erin. Buried beneath the public health statics, medical jargon and statements of “fact,” was another, subtler point about the morality and causation of obesity. This was made evident when Dr. Phil reframed the debate away from the way obese Americans are treated toward a discourse of choice,
pointing out that “There are two issues here. One is whether or not losing weight is going to precipitate a return to health and I don’t think there’s any question that losing weight, reducing your volume, is going to help that,” adding further that “when you choose the behavior, you choose the consequences, but at some point, you have to make a choice to be as healthy as you can possibly be” (The Fat Debate 2010).

Yet even without Dr. Phil’s saying so, the almost visceral fear and hatred demonstrated by the anti-fat position on the show pointed to the notion that obesity is the disease individuals choose. By failing to take care of themselves and/or exercise self-control and self-discipline, the obese represent a more dire threat to public health than drug addicts or alcoholics, for where drug and alcohol addiction are widely recognized for the blights that they are, obesity masquerades as an innocuous disease that, though it kills, kills slowly and unspectacularly, creating a drain on our wealth and resources, threatening our present and future productivity and, most alarming from this perspective, ruining the futures of our children. In his blog for this episode Dr. Phil makes this explicit, saying that he “worries about kids today for a lot of reasons”:

not the least of which is the fact that so darn many are getting overweight and out of shape. Today, one out of three children under the age of 12 is now considered medically overweight. And the tragedy is that we know that very few of those children ever lose that weight. Seventy percent of those children will become overweight and obese adults and endure all the problems both psychological and physical that come with it. Diabetes and heart disease are exploding among the overweight and obese – so much so that experts now say the lethal effects of obesity are literally greater than cigarette smoke. Are you hearing that? Today, obesity is our number one public health issue above all others (McGraw 2011).

Towards the end of the back-and-forth between the pro and anti-fat panelists on the show, MeMe Roth finally made explicit what had until then been implicit throughout. Referring to Marianne Howell’s “pro-fat” movement, Roth suggested that Howell and others were leading the country down a slippery slope towards higher rates of illness and early death, asking “where the pro-fat movement is going to be when people need kidney donations or livers are failing, they become immobile. Where are they going to be 20 and 30 years from now?” (The Fat Debate 2010) While this statement was offered as an attempt to justify the vituperation with which obesity was talked about on the show by suggesting the “obvious” health risks fat people presented both to themselves and others, it also gave voice to the implicit notion that “fatness” is the consequence of irresponsible “fat behavior” for which only fat people should pay the price.

During the last segment of the show reality star Kelly Osbourne weighed in ostensibly to defend the “pro-fat” panel by directly comparing the problem of obesity to drug addiction, admitting that she “took more hell for being fat than for being a drug addict” (The Fat Debate 2011). At this point, the moral links between
drug addiction and obesity became clear. Osbourne further explained that her drug addiction was fueled by her poor self-image:

I was a complete and utter drug addict from the age of 15, and I used drugs because I was insecure about the way that I looked, and then it became a vicious cycle. You feel like your whole life is falling apart when you’re fat, because you don’t fit into the same clothes that other girls do. You open up a magazine, you get told that you’re fat. But the truth is there is no quick fix. If you want to lose weight, if you want to be healthy, you have to have a life change, not a diet. You have to change everything about your life and the way that you do things, in order to become the person you want to become, but finding that motivation is the hardest thing in the world (The Fat Debate 2011).

Although it was evident throughout the episode that Osbourne was taking a defensive tack, often siding with the “pro-fat” panel and criticizing Roth and Karolchyk for their insensitive approach to the issue, the substance of her arguments, summarized above, largely supported the anti-fat position. Like Roth and Karolchyk, Osbourne too placed a premium on individual responsibility, self-discipline and self-control. The problem of obesity, like drug addiction, could be traced to a waning ethic of the self; that is, a failure to be well and to stay well. From Osbourne’s point-of-view then, while the derogatory language used to talk about those who are overweight is reprehensible, the problem as described by Roth and Karolchyck – that is, not obesity per se, but rather what Karolchyck called “obese behavior” – does indeed exist. Using kinder discourse and creating better accommodations for the large-bodied would not, from this perspective, address the core of the problem, which stems from an ethics of self in which the fundamental faculty of choice has become applicable toward protecting oneself from disease.

Thus the lesson viewers learn from this “fat debate” is that those who are “fat” or unhealthy have only themselves to blame. This reading is augmented by the corrective offered on the show: the only “medicine” for the health problems people face lies within the self – not simply through a modification of behavior and lifestyle, but also, as Osbourne suggested, by thoroughly reforming the self, committing oneself “heart and soul” to the project of embodied self-improvement.

The Missing Pieces

Of course, there were several other missing pieces to this puzzle about America’s “obesity epidemic,” the discourse of addiction and the problem of adultery – the most obvious of which was the absence of any clear biomedical definition of any of these terms. In fact, no attempt was made to parse out the medical, cultural and biosocial distinctions inherent in the concepts of addiction, obesity, health and/or illness. Rather these “problems of the self” took their meaning by being measured against the presumptive norms of the white European body (typically imagined as tall, slender and “hard”) of middle-class status, thoroughly in control of itself.
Aside from failing to distinguish the medical and cultural meanings of “health,” the show also avoided taking a broader socio-political analysis of illness as a potential public health issue stemming from social and economic inequalities rather than individual weakness. The show did not address what is perhaps the most glaring factor in the incidence of disease in the US today: the widening health and healthcare disparities between population groups. Indeed from a socio-political perspective, the “obesity epidemic,” like the problems of addiction, is a problem of the social inequalities that exist geographically, economically and racially in the US. These divisions are largely the consequences of the way our private health care system is delivered as well as of growing income inequality in the US.

Yet, today’s television experts rarely consider the economic and structural causes of illness. Rather than consider the fact that nearly fifty million Americans are without health insurance and those that do have medical coverage often have their medical claims denied, must go through laborious claim and appeal processes in order to get care and can be dropped by their insurers or have their premiums raised two-fold because they’ve gotten sick, they choose to focus on the individual, taking up a disciplinary ethic to teach guests and viewers how to help themselves. Even then, the distinction between health and wellness on one hand, and illness and disease on the other, rests largely on the ideals of a white, heteronormative middle class. The message we get from watching these shows is one of reform – not through social movement or political activism – but through the self.

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Notes

1 The show’s host – Oprah Winfrey – credited McGraw with helping her defeat the lawsuit brought against her by Texas cattlemen in 1995. The lawsuit alleged that Oprah knowingly made a false statement about the threats posed by the presence of Bovine Spongiform Encephalitis (BSA) – known popularly as ‘mad cow disease’ – in the American beef supply. After having learned about the effects of the disease on those who contracted it by eating tainted meat, Oprah said that she was “stopped cold from eating another hamburger.” This statement precipitated what later came to be called the “Oprah crash” on beef futures and inspired a group of Texas cattlemen to sue Oprah, alleging that she had violated a Texas law forbidding
false public statements about agribusiness. Oprah won the case when it went to trial in Amarillo, Texas in 1998, on the basis of the First Amendment right to free speech. Dr. Phil McGraw had served as Oprah’s court advisor throughout the trial, prepping her court testimony and serving as her personal life coach (see Dembling & Gutierrez 2003).

2 All quotes from this episode are taken from the transcripts of the show posted on the Dr. Phil website. See A Family Divided: Marty’s Confession, 2004 online: http://drphil.com/shows/show/333/ (accessed 04 August 2004).

3 All quotes from this episode are taken from the transcripts of the show posted on the Dr. Phil website. See The Fat Debate 2010 online: http://drphil.com/shows/show/1438 (accessed 06 February 2012).

References


Abstract
In the Caribbean, the practice of getting dressed matters because it is a practice of attending to the body. Under a colonial regime, black bodies were ill-treated and selves were negated. Clothing played an instrumental role in the abuse of bodies and the stripping of a sense of wellbeing. Attire was one key way of demarcating master and slave and rendering some members of society null and void. Enslaved Africans, who were forcibly brought across the Atlantic to the New World, were considered chattel or commodities rather than people and clothes functioned in a way that reinforced that notion. Yet, dress became a strategy of subversion – of making chattel, property or ‘non-people’ look like people. The enslaved recognised that, through clothes, it was possible to look and feel free. Today that legacy remains. Clothing is seen not only as that which can make a people ‘look like people’ but also feel like people – clothing sets up a specific structure of feeling. This paper pivots on notions of looking and feeling like people while deploying Joanne Entwistle’s conceptual framework of dress as situated bodily practice. The article locates its investigation in the Caribbean, examining the philosophy and practice of Trinidadian clothing designer Robert Young. The article establishes him as a source of aesthetic therapeutic solutions in the Caribbean. It argues that his clothing designs produce a therapeutic discourse on the Black Caribbean body – a discourse, which facilitates a practice of getting dressed that gives a sense of agency, self-empowerment and psychic security even if that sense is embodied temporarily; lasting perhaps only as long as the garment is worn.

Keywords: Dress, clothing, Caribbean, black body, therapy
Introduction

The planters... distributed minimal European-style clothing and cheap cloth... to diferentiate themselves from their slaves... Planters sought to civilize their African slaves but only to a point: the slaves had to remain controllable, and their clothing could not be above their status (Buckridge 2004).

Besides its unparalleled magnitude, the other particularly shameful aspect of the [Atlantic slave] trade... is that plantation slavery turned people into chattels (Lee 2002).

Getting dressed is a practice of attending to the body. It is a practice that matters in the Caribbean, a region with a colonial past characterised by the ill treatment of bodies. Under a colonial regime – which spanned the mid-17th century to the 19th century – the corporeal punishment visited upon enslaved Africans was brutal. Bodies were flogged, branded, raped and mutilated. Physical violence was routine. In writing about the cruelty of enslavement Brereton notes that a ‘heavy cartwhip was routinely carried by the slave drivers in the field, to be casually applied to the bodies of the workers (male and female) as a spur to labour’ (2010: 4). Clothing also played a role in the abuse of the body. Higman describes how clothes fit into the life of the enslaved in the former British Caribbean and, in doing so, he reveals a link between attire and bodily trauma: According to him:

The standard allowance of clothing was unlikely to survive the long hours worked by slaves in all weathers. It rotted rapidly. Thus, field slaves frequently wore only ‘a mere rag round their loins’ while at work, keeping what clothing they had for other occasions... Very often slaves wore their daily clothes to bed, even when wet (Higman 1995: 224-225).

Clothing was used to distinguish between master and slave (Buckridge 2004; Miller 2009). Garments were an instrumental part in a system of plantation slavery that, in Debbie Lee’s words, ‘turned people into chattels’ (2002: 18). Black bodies were deemed property. Yet, as Orlando Patterson argues, it is not enough to say that bodies were property because anyone can be the object of a power and property relation (1982: 21). Patterson notes, for example, that:

... an American husband is part of the property of his wife. We never express it this way of course, for it sounds quite ghastly. Nevertheless, in actual and sociological terms a wife has all sorts of claims, privileges, and powers in the person, labor power and earnings of her husband (1982: 22).

Patterson insists that the property concept in slavery must be invoked with specificity, that is, with the understanding that the enslaved were a ‘subcategory’ of owned objects (1982: 21). Therefore, when Lee observes that the Atlantic slave trade turned people into chattel or property, she actually pinpoints a turning of people into a subcategory where the prefix ‘sub’ suggests a relegation to a state of inferiority – to a position that is lower or less than people.

Today a legacy of a dichotomy between people and sub-people remains in the Caribbean and clothes are bound up in that schism. I was born in the 1970s in the Anglophone Caribbean island of Trinidad. I was raised on the island. Whenever I dressed my black body and my mother felt that I had presented myself well she
would declare: ‘You look like people’. And, I would feel – even if only in some small way – validated while simultaneously questioning my personhood. Was I not always a person? Could clothes elevate my being? My mother’s words betray a historical disorder of the self in the Caribbean; they are evidence of the capacity of clothing to remedy sometimes-unconscious feelings of a lack of self-worth and lift a person to the ontological status of ‘somebody’. If clothing can participate in mistreatment – in stripping people status – then clothes can also function in therapeutic ways that refashion people and foster self-empowerment. According to Entwistle, ‘dress in everyday life is always more than a shell, it is an intimate aspect of the experience and presentation of the self’ (2000: 10).

A re-articulation and re-presentation of self can be traced back to colonialism. Clothing became a strategy of subversion in the colonial era – a tactic of making sub-people look like people. Monica Miller writes about how sartorial semiotics was part of the transition process from slavery to freedom. She notes: ‘Slaves stole clothing not only because it was portable or their only material possession, but also because better clothing allowed them to pass more easily for freemen’ (2009: 92). Through clothes it was possible to look and feel free. Clothing therefore is seen not only as that which can make a people ‘look like people’ but it is also that which can give psychic security; clothes can also make a people feel like people – clothing sets up a specific structure of feeling.

This article pivots on notions of looking and feeling like people while deploying Joanne Entwistle’s conceptual framework of dress as situated bodily practice. This framework acknowledges ‘the complex dynamic relationship between the body, dress and culture’ (2000: 11). The article locates its investigation in the Caribbean, examining the philosophy and practice of Trinidadian clothing designer Robert Young. Data is drawn from personal communication with the designer along with responses from some of his clients. What is worthy of note in the discussion is Young’s idea of spirit wear: the notion that in dressing the body we also attend to and treat the psyche or spirit in a certain way. The article posits that his creative work is a kind of bodily practice that is situated in the socio-cultural context of a colonial heritage of disempowerment and feeling bad about self. If, as Nettleford observes, ‘the Caribbean creative artist has long addressed himself to the negation of that negation-of-self which he knows is the essence of colonial domination’ (2003: 169), then I insist that Young situates his designs in that essence and promotes a bodily practice that seeks to remedy or negate the ‘negation-of-self’.

The article asks the question: what are the sources for therapeutic solutions, which can rewrite discourses of self-empowerment? It responds to this enquiry by aiming to establish Robert Young as a source of aesthetic therapeutic solutions in the Caribbean. It argues that his clothing designs produce a therapeutic discourse on the Black Caribbean body – a discourse, which facilitates a practice of getting dressed that gives a sense of agency, self-empowerment and psychic security even
if that sense is embodied temporarily; lasting perhaps only as long as the garment is worn.

**The Black Body and Aesthetic Therapy**

The status quo tells us that we are not whole, that we are less than – so we dress up to counteract that. As a designer you cannot ignore how the black body has been perceived. It can’t be just about style: give women sex appeal and men status. I am trying to create my own script of what a human is without the trappings of a suit or skimpy dress. My work tackles imperialism; it addresses internalised colonialism. My philosophy is about self-validation through clothes (Robert Young, personal communication, February 2013).

How can clothing literally and figuratively re-dress body and self-perceptions informed by the past? In the *History of Mary Prince: A West Indian Slave* – first published in 1831 – Prince recounts her own experiences of enslavement in the Caribbean and the savagery inflicted upon black bodies. In her description of the torture and eventual death of a fellow slave named Hetty, she tells of the capacity of somatic trauma to linger in the present. She writes:

One of the cows had dragged the rope away from the stake to which Hetty had fastened it, and got loose. My master flew into a terrible passion, and ordered the poor creature to be stripped quite naked, notwithstanding her pregnancy, and to be tied up to a tree in the yard. He then flogged her as hard as he could lick, both with the whip and cow-skin, till she was all over streaming with blood. He rested, and then beat her again and again. Her shrieks were terrible. The consequence was that poor Hetty was brought to bed before her time, and was delivered after severe labour of a dead child. She appeared to recover after her confinement, so far that she was repeatedly flogged by both master and mistress afterwards; but her former strength never returned to her. Ere long her body and limbs swelled to a great size; and she lay on a mat in the kitchen, till the water burst out of her body and she died. All the slaves said that death was a good thing for poor Hetty; but I cried very much for her death. The manner of it filled me with horror. I could not bear to think about it; yet it was always present to my mind (2000: 7).

With this brutality still ‘present’ in the minds – even if unconsciously so – of those living in the contemporary space of the Caribbean, Robert Young deploys his clothing designs as a therapeutic solution. He attempts to make an aesthetic intervention by stitching up wounds that still burden body and psyche.

To understand Young’s reparative endeavour and the way in which I am using the term aesthetic therapy requires attention to the notion of aesthetics. The word aesthetics comes from the Greek ‘aisthetikos’ meaning perceptible things. This definition can be sharpened by looking at what Levinson (2003) sees as the foci of aesthetics. According to Levinson, aesthetics focuses on a perceptible quality or what he calls ‘a certain kind of property, feature, or aspect of things’ (2003: 3; emphasis in original). The concept of aesthetics also revolves around the perception of ‘a certain kind of…experience’ (ibid; emphasis in original). These two focal points are important for making sense of how Young attends to the Black Caribbean body through his creative practice, but they require further unpacking.
A Certain Kind of Quality

I will first consider the idea of ‘a certain kind of property, feature or aspect’. The aesthetic qualities, properties or features of creative objects, like clothing, can be distinguished from non-aesthetic qualities. Emily Brady understands this distinction as the difference between response-dependent qualities and primary physical qualities (2003: 18). The primary physical or non-aesthetic qualities are those of the object’s form, like line, shape and volume. Aesthetic qualities are response-dependent and they supervene on or are determined in part by non-aesthetic qualities. For example, the paintings by North American visual artist Jackson Pollock have the aesthetic qualities of power, dynamism and lyricism by virtue of his treatment of form, that is, his arrangement of spattered lines and dripped paint on canvas. We perceive an aesthetic quality of ornateness in the work of Austrian artist Gustav Klimt because of his concentrated use of shapes in the form of swirls, curlicues and arabesques. Objects come to have aesthetic or response-dependent qualities because of non-aesthetic or primary physical qualities.

The response-dependency of aesthetic qualities may suggest that those qualities are highly subjective but Brady insists that we should not be dissuaded ‘from ascribing objectivity, if limited, to [aesthetic qualities], since it is possible to identify a shared basis for judgements within many cultures, and in some cases a cross-cultural shared basis’ (2003: 19). There can be agreement on what is regarded as an aesthetic quality. In his overview of the topic of aesthetics, Levinson identifies an open-ended list of aesthetic qualities generated from a consensus view:

… there is substantial convergence in intuitions as to what perceivable properties of things are aesthetic…beauty, ugliness, sublimity, grace, elegance, delicacy, harmony, balance, unity, power, drive, elan, ebullience, wittiness, vehemence, garishness, gaudiness, acerbity, anguish, sadness, tranquility, cheerfulness, crudity, serenity, wiriness, comicality, flamboyance, languor, melancholy, sentimentality’ (2003: 6; emphasis in original).

Therefore, in addition to a dependency on non-aesthetic qualities, aesthetic qualities are determined by – or they are responses to – culture. If an aesthetic quality can have a shared cultural basis; if ‘aesthetic qualities draw on the conditions and situation of both the subject and object’ (Brady 2003: 19), then what aesthetic quality might be perceptible in the clothing designs of a designer operating within a context or situation characterised by a legacy of colonialism and the attendant breaking down and abasement of the black body? What might black Caribbeans, as subjects of Young’s work, who share a history marked by a culture of violence, perceive?

Some of Robert Young’s clients offer answers. In talking about Young’s garments, Gillian Moor, a Trinidadian journalist, singer and songwriter, shares the aesthetic qualities that are perceptible to her. In doing so, she not only illustrates her response to the non-aesthetic/physical qualities of his work, she also articulates how a cultural situation informs the way she reads and interprets his clothes.
She states: ‘Robert Young’s clothing makes me feel happy and confident. The bold designs and colours make a loud statement that contradicts the imposed meekness we’ve been taught as colonial people’ (personal communication, August 2013). Moor pinpoints aesthetic qualities of elation and self-assurance. Ruth Osman Rose, a Guyanese-born performing artist based in Trinidad, echoes Moor’s sentiments: ‘Young’s use of bright colours and the playful ways in which he combines them, as well as his use of interesting textures and shapes, make me feel vibrant, unique, confident and good about myself’ (personal communication, January 2014).

Answers from Moor and Osman Rose suggest that Young’s clothes carry out a function. Nick Zangwill (2001) uses the term aesthetic functionalism to argue that creative objects serve the function of manifesting and sustaining aesthetic qualities – cheerfulness, boldness and so on. Creative objects, with their aesthetic properties, can touch our spirit. In other words, they can function beyond their own physical materiality with metaphysical consequences, which he insists can be beneficial to us. Zangwill notes: ‘We care about art and the survival of particular works because we care about the role that works of art are charged to perform. We care about works of art and their survival because we care about their aesthetic properties’ (2001: 127). He proposes that creative works can elicit aesthetic qualities that matter to our wellness. He asserts: “Aesthetic Functionalism is metaphysically healthy’ (2001: 147). I invoke his idea here and I deploy it in the sense that creative objects – clothing in the case of this article – can stir aesthetic qualities, which can perform the function of therapy, that is, aesthetic properties can do work that is antidotal and salutary. Clothing can function as a therapeutic solution that goes beyond the materialities of cotton, lace and satin, for example, to impact the health of both the body and an inner sense of being. Wendell Manwarren, a Trinidadian actor and musician, speaks about the way Young’s garments function for him: ‘Young’s clothing fits my spirit and sits well on my self and affords me to express myself as myself time and again’ (personal communication, January 2014). Manwarren’s use of the words ‘sits well on my self’ summons ideas of well-being.

Of note, is the particular recuperative function that Robert Young’s clothing designs enact. His work is distinguishable by the technique of appliqué, which has specific primary, physical or non-aesthetic qualities. In his clothes, bits and pieces of fabric are sutured together to make a composite of strong needlework lines and areas of vivid shapes (see figures 1 & 2). These non-aesthetic/physical qualities along with a context in which black bodies were broken, and in many instances disintegrated, make it possible to perceive in his clothing designs, an aesthetic quality of restoration or recuperation. Manwarren’s views help elucidate the capacity for recovery that is connected to Young’s work. According to him: ‘Out of bits and pieces and scraps of cloth, [Robert Young] creates great works of beauty. Out of seeming nothing [Young] makes something’ (personal communication,
January 2014). The idea of nothing becoming something signals a key point of engagement in this article: that of ‘a nobody’ becoming ‘somebody.’ I give deliberate emphasis to ‘body’ here as a means of maintaining a linkage between the somatic dimension, clothing and acts of dressing. Young’s designs reflect an effort to bring together fragments and restore shattered bodies like that of Hetty as well as the splintered psyches of those living in the Caribbean today. Young’s work is a literal and metaphoric reassembling of parts to make a whole. Yet he does not seek to conceal the scars. Instead, he reframes them as rows of stitching, which emphasise ideas of repair and mending.

Figure 1. Robert Young’s designs. Images courtesy Arnaldo James.
With his clothes he treats the body. His clothing and the aesthetic quality of restoration perform the task of building structures in which black bodies can feel a sense of wellbeing for, as Entwistle writes: ‘Dress is the way in which individuals learn to live in their bodies and feel at home in them…dress in everyday life cannot be separated from the living, breathing, moving body it adorns’ (2000: 7 & 9). If dress and body are inseparable, then by sewing together bits and pieces Young also stitches together a fractured sense of self and sews up corporeal pain. In reflecting on his context and work, Young describes the situation in which he practices and recalls feedback from clients:

We have a terrible history of darker bodies. Dress in a postcolonial place carries so much messages with the different bodies that wear clothes – who the person is and so on. People talk about how good they feel when they are wearing the clothes I have designed. It is affirmation of self. My work is about restoring our relationship to ourselves (personal communication, February 2013).

A Certain Kind of Experience

Notions of aesthetics are bound up with certain kinds of qualities or features but they are also concerned with a certain kind of experience. Aesthetic experience can be approached from internalist and externalist viewpoints. An internalist stance considers the features of experience, in other words, it is a perspective, which attempts to find what is common in experiences such that they might be labelled aesthetic. Proponents of internalism ask: what is in an experience that makes it an aesthetic one? Yet, criticism by those like George Dickie (1965) have shaped the debate on aesthetic experience by insisting that an internalist approach fails to distinguish between the features of experiences and the primary physical qualities we perceive in creative objects. Therefore, in contradistinction to the internalist take, an externalist view foregrounds the experience of the primary
physical qualities or the formal elements of creative objects: line, shape, mass, colour and so on. The configuration or form of the creative object, then, feeds our experience. In *The Aesthetic Point of View* Beardsley argues that aesthetic experience is the experience of form. We return once again, then, to non-aesthetic qualities for the realisation of aesthetics. Non-aesthetic qualities not only help determine aesthetic qualities, they can also give rise to aesthetic experiences.

The formal components of Robert Young’s clothing: his tendency toward strikingly bright colours and forms with large volume furnish an experience of greatness – the wearer embodies the force of those formal elements and, as Young explains, the clothes can arouse an experience of wanting to exude a radiance that is more intense than the garments themselves: ‘While wearing them, my clothes force or push you to be brighter than the clothes’ (personal communication, February 2013). With a legacy of the restraint and suppression of black bodies, the reimagining and refashioning of clothing as a means for bodies and people to shine, is significant.

His generous use of fabric to produce clothing silhouettes or forms that are sizable creates an experience of self-awareness or self-notice; an experience of calling attention to self – an experience in which attention is directed at the wearer. His designs give prominence to bodies once regarded as chattel or sub-peoples; bodies in which the idea of inferiority has been passed on like genetic code. What Young calls his ‘attention skirt’, is one example of a design that occupies space in a way that draws gazes (see figure 3). Young describes the piece: ‘I use plenty fabric – sixteen yards – to make that skirt and it does not pass your knee’ (personal communication, February 2013). According to the designer, his clothing creates a ‘look meh’ experience; one that he insists is not about arrogance but rather, an experience in which the clothes allows the wearer to articulate, as he puts it: ‘Look at me. I am a whole human being’ (personal communication, February 2013). Young talks about the psychological therapy or remediation that his clothing undertakes:

> My clothing is either something you like or you have a discomfort with it because it shows you up too much and you have to be ready for that. My work lets you be seen in a different kind of way – amazement perhaps. My clothing assumes that bodies need to be celebrated and thought about in a different kind of way. Experiencing my clothes is not like putting on a typical suit. A suit is a different business. A suit is a pretence. You look like a smart man or politician but you don’t have to defend that look as much. With my clothes, you have to defend, for example, a Nehru jacket with colourfull appliqué on it. When you have to do that you become aware of and appreciate your body and your being. In this way, my clothes have an un-colonising nature (personal communication, February 2013).
The matter of creating clothes that can make the wearers have an experience of looking like people and feeling like people is strongly encapsulated in his stained glass window dresses – designs in which the form is composed of vibrantly coloured pieces of fabric (see figure 4). They are conspicuous garments. Young shares that fellow Trinidadian clothing designer Nigel Eastman calls these designs the ‘Who-she-feel-she-think-she-is? Dress’ (personal communication, February 2013). It is noteworthy that Eastman uses the word ‘feel’. Clothes can set up a structure of feeling. These dresses can make the wearer look and feel like ‘somebody’ and when they clothe a black body they can incite indignation, in other words, they can provoke the viewer to ask – as Eastman’s title of the dresses sug-
gests – how dare she transgress a subordinate ontological state established by history and elevate herself to the category of ‘people’? Robert Young’s creative practice operates within this mentality and languaging where the black body is still understood and spoken about in ways that denigrate it. His work responds to that context by attempting to treat it. He observes: ‘Even our language brings each other down so there must be clothes that address that’ (personal communication, February 2013).

Figure 4. The Who-she-feel-she-think-she-is? Dress. Image courtesy Arnaldo James.
**Spirit Wear as Therapy**

Key to Robert Young’s deployment of clothing for validating bodies and making wearers feel better about themselves is his idea of spirit wear. Young proposes that in treating the body through dress, one can attend to the spirit of the person. He notes that despite the visibility of flesh, we may conceptualise ourselves as primarily spirit: “My idea of spirit wear considers ourselves as spirit in the first instance – I am offering that as a possibility through my clothing” (personal communication, April 2013). He draws inspiration for this concept partly from the way dress is understood in the philosophy of the Spiritual Baptist Faith in the Caribbean – specifically, the Spiritual Baptist religion, which has an Orisha orientation.

This strand of religious practice combines Christianity with Black African tenets. It is a syncretic religion born within the colonial context of contact among Europeans and Africans in the Caribbean. Members of the faith wear what are called spiritual clothes, which they believe can do the work of defending the spirit from supernatural attack. While serving as protection, the garments worn by Spiritual Baptists are also believed to do the work of psychotherapy. For example, in her study of Spiritual Baptists, Carol Duncan observes:

> “... the head-tie serves as a visible sign of identity of a Spiritual Baptist woman, and it can function...in curative and restorative ways...the head-tie [is used] to signify a binding of the head as a securing of the woman’s consciousness. This practice is reminiscent of African-American Yoruban priestess and spiritual counselor Iyanla Vanzant’s entreaty to “save yourself” by holding the head with one hand on the forehead and the other at the back of the head during a potentially consciousness-changing moment such as contentious, heated exchanges.... I interpret this gesture as a symbolic act of “holding the head,” which is akin to using the head-tie to quite literally ‘keep it together’ in potentially ‘mind-blowing’ situations (2008: 237-238).”

The colour of the clothing worn by Spiritual Baptists is also symbolic. Colours can invoke the power or energy of African deities and their Christian counterparts. In his examination of African religions in Trinidad, Frances Henry talks about sacred colours. Red, for instance, can be associated with the African deity known as Ogun, the god of war or his Christian equal, Saint Michael. Red is also connected to Saint Jerome or the African deity Shakpana who drives away disease (Henry 2003: 22&24). Robert Young injects this insight into his clothing. He shares: ‘Colour is significant in Orisha business. Vibrations and messages are transferred from colours. I try to pull that tradition into the clothes I design’ (personal communication, February 2013).

Echoes of Spiritual Baptist dress are evident in Young’s work. For example, he uses red to tie the waist in a manner that is similar to that of the garments of Spiritual Baptist women (see figure 5). In adorning the body, the colour red is used as battle armour, which can embolden and strengthen the spirit, making a person feel safe and poised to conquer whatever life brings. Young describes the impact of his clothes: ‘My clients say that when they put on my clothes they feel strong, secure
and self-assured’ (personal communication, February 2013). Through his referencing of Spiritual Baptist black tradition – a tradition, which emerged in the Caribbean – Young demonstrates dress as situated bodily practice; he connects dress and bodies, understood as spirit, to a specific culture. By using clothing to lift the spirit or boost self-confidence, Young points to a spiritual dimension to looking and feeling like people. The application of clothes to the body constitutes an administering of therapy to the spirit.

Figure 5. A Spiritual Baptist church member and one of Robert Young’s designs. Images courtesy Arnaldo James.

Robert Young’s concept of spirit wear also attempts to rescue dress in the Caribbean from attachments to the specialised category known as resort or cruise wear – a clothing style that connotes ‘maillots and caftans to fill the steamer trunks of wealthy women sailing off for winter holidays’; a style ‘inspired by leisure time’ (Mistry 2010: n.pag.). For Young, the notion of resort wear is tied to what he sees as servitude: the attending to vacationers at recreation sites in a way that reverberates with the corporeal subjugation of a colonial past. Tourists become the present-day ‘people’, while bartenders and waitresses in tropical places like the Caribbean slave away under a neo-colonial order. According to Young, resort wear does not acknowledge the bodies that live and work in the Caribbean. Young explains his view:

Spirit wear is reactionary. It responds to the idea of resort wear. For me, resort wear is an assumption of what is worn in an island like ours but it is a definition that
comes from those who do not live in our islands. Resort wear is not even for us to wear – our day-to-day life is not resort living. Resort wear does not cater to and recognise us. It is for people coming here [to the Caribbean], from a Northern metropolis, to relax, to rest. Resort wear is dress to lie on a beach or drink a cool beverage. We do rest on beaches but that is not a full reality of who we are. Spirit wear takes into consideration those who live in the Caribbean; it takes into consideration their resilience in the face of a genocidal past and their zest for life (personal communication, April 2013).

If resort wear is for ‘people’ – that is, for persons visiting the Caribbean for leisure and pleasure – then Young’s work is a remedy or counter argument that makes Caribbean inhabitants look and feel like people through clothing that attempts to attend to the fullness of the spirit of who they are: a multidimensional spirit that transcends fun in the sun.

Conclusion

This article has tried to demonstrate dress as a means of rewriting a script or discourse of self-empowerment and wellbeing. It links the notion of ‘people’ to ideas of confidence, security and feeling good about self. By specifically examining the work of Trinidadian clothing designer Robert Young, the article posits him as a source of therapeutic solution for recasting a structure of feeling about black bodies in the Caribbean. It establishes Young’s aesthetics of dress, not as a commercial fad but rather as a bodily practice that is embedded in a history and culture that calls for treatment with a look and feel – a context that requires an aesthetic therapy. Young aptly sums up the idea of clothing as a mediating, reparative force: ‘I have deliberately thought about clothes and the kind of intervention I can make with bodies in this [Caribbean] space because those who live here want to look and feel a certain way’ (personal communication, February 2013).

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Notes

1 Robert Young lives and works in the Caribbean island of Trinidad, where he has been practising as a clothing designer since 1986. He designs under the label called The Cloth [www.facebook.com/theclothcaribbean].

2 There have been some attempts to move the idea of aesthetic experience beyond the boundaries of form. Yet, James Shelley (2013) has described those efforts as ‘formalism-and’ and ‘formalism-or’ theories, where form still receives attention to differing degrees.

3 ‘Meh’ is the Trinidad English Creole way of spelling and pronouncing the word ‘me.’

4 In Trinidad, a smart man is someone who is cunning or deceptive – someone involved in fraud, usually in the context of white-collar crime or corruption.

5 The Orisha religion in Trinidad is derived from religious beliefs among the Yoruba people of Nigeria. Orisha is part of a strand of the Spiritual Baptist Faith in Trinidad. Stephens (1999) notes that the Spiritual Baptists in Trinidad – and the sister island of Tobago – have developed in different directions. One strand insists that it is entirely based on Christianity. A second strand weaves Christian, Cabalistic, African and Hindu beliefs. What Stephens identifies as a third strand, combines Roman Catholicism with a strong Orisha slant. It is to this third strand that I refer in this article.

References


Inner Peace and Global Harmony: Individual Wellbeing and Global Solutions in the Art of Living

By Stephen Jacobs

Abstract
This paper explores the discourse in the Art of Living (AOL), a Hindu derived transnational meditation movement, which suggests that solutions to global problems are best addressed at the individual level. Ethnographic fieldwork, qualitative interviews and an analysis of published material suggest that the primary concern of the AOL is the reduction of stress and anxiety for the individual practitioner. This reduction of stress not only means that the individual practitioner develops ‘inner peace’, but also contributes to global harmony. AOL is an exemplar of ‘therapeutic solutions’, which are characterized by disillusionment with established institutions and a quest for inner meaning. AOL articulates this therapeutic solution, not only in terms of narcissistic needs, but links this quest for inner meaning to wider social and global concerns.

Keywords: Art of Living, spirituality, theodicy, Hinduism, meditation
Introduction

This paper is an exploration of the therapeutic discourse of the Art of Living (AOL). While AOL (2013a) represents itself as ‘a not-for-profit, educational and humanitarian NGO (Non-Governmental Organisation) engaged in stress-management and service initiatives’ it is problematic to categorise AOL. It can be considered to fall within a number of different categories, all of which indicate some aspect of AOL, but no single descriptor can fully capture this complex global movement. For example AOL can be considered as a self-help movement, a type of meditation, a new manifestation of Hinduism, and a globalised NGO concerned with a variety of social problems. There are three interrelated ways of characterizing AOL: a Hindu-inspired meditation movement (Williamson 2010); alternative spirituality (Heelas 1996 and 2008; Heelas & Woodhead 2005; Partridge 2004 and 2005); and a therapeutic discourse (Rieff 1966; Moskowitz 2001; Illouz 2008).

While participants 1 will assert that AOL is not Hindu, there is no doubt that some of the practices are derived from Hindu traditions. Consequently Williamson’s concept of Hindu-inspired meditation movement is useful in locating AOL. Williamson (2010: 4) indicates that: ‘while the religion of Hindu-inspired meditation movements certainly wear some of the garb of Hinduism, Western traditions of individualism and rationalism also influence the style and ethos of these movements’. AOL can also be understood in terms of Paul Heelas’s concept of ‘self-spirituality’. Heelas (1996: 2) identifies self-spirituality as a large and disparate number of movements which suggest that, ‘the initial task is to make contact with the spirituality that lies within the person’. The term spirituality is often used in AOL discourse. For example the founder and figurehead of AOL Sri Sri Ravi Shankar2 (1999: 2) suggests, ‘Essentially this quest – Who am I? What is my nature? – is the beginning of the spiritual journey’. However for Sri Sri Ravi Shankar spirituality is not solely about the spirituality within the individual, but is also implicated with social justice. Sri Sri Ravi Shankar (2011a) suggests, ‘Spirituality can bring social change. It is spirituality that can bring a sense of responsibility’. By therapeutic discourses, I mean those discourses that are based on what Nicholas Rose calls ‘psy’ which includes psychiatry, psychology and cognate disciplines which explain our existence as ‘individuals inhabited by an inner psychology that animates and explains our conduct’ (Rose 1998: 3). ‘Psy’ has not remained confined to the cantonment of professional practice, but as Eva Illouz (2008) observes has infiltrated many aspects of popular culture. Consequently problems are represented as our own inner failings and the teleology of existence is considered to be personal self-fulfillment. Rieff (1966: 12) argues that therapeutics propose techniques ‘with nothing at stake beyond a manipulatable sense of well-being’. For example, the new International AOL centre in North Carolina
USA is called the Centre for Meditation and Well Being and offers ‘self-
development and wellness programs’ (Art of Living 2013b).

AOL was founded by Sri Sri Ravi Shankar in 1981. It is now a global network, claiming to have a presence in over 150 countries. The primary practice of AOL is a rhythmic breathing technique known as *sudarshan kriya*, which according to the AOL official blog, ‘facilitates physical, mental, emotional, and social well-being’ (Art of Living Universe, 2010). Sri Sri Ravi Shankar (2013) explains:

Su means proper, darshan means vision and kriya is a purifying practice. The Sudarshan Kriya literally means a purifying practice, whereby one receives a proper vision of one’s true self. The practice is instrumental in creating a sense of harmony in the body, mind and spirit.

*Sudarshan kriya* is promoted as a way of becoming stress free and improving the quality of life. However, this sense of subjective well-being and the possibility of improving the quality of life for the individual are articulated with global concerns. One of the major tropes of the AOL is that developing one’s own individual and internal well-being will contribute to solving global problems. The practices taught by the Art of Living will have a transformative effect on the individual practitioner, which inevitably has a positive impact on the world at large – inner peace will bring about global harmony. Conversely, AOL has also developed an ethos of concern for others, which manifests in the discourse of service. This discourse of service suggests that helping others has therapeutic benefits. Working towards global harmony contributes to a sense of subjective well-being. In other words AOL suggest a fundamental interconnection between the inner life of the individual and the external social environment. Creating a sense of harmony at the level of body mind and spirit concomitantly transforms the social and global context and visa versa in a mutually reinforcing dynamic.

A theme that comes up again and again in AOL literature, in the discourses of Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, and in conversation with participants is the suggestion that AOL is concerned with fundamental human values. When asked why she thought that AOL managed to attract people from very different cultures, a senior teacher who now travels around the world suggested:

Because it [the techniques of AOL] works. Fundamentally it is universal knowledge, universal values. The whole thing is based on universal wisdom and essential human values. All cultures, creeds and whatever have a resonance with that.

Lola Williamson in her discussion of Hindu-inspired meditation movements suggests that these movements lie ‘combine aspects of Hinduism with Western values ‘ and consequently lie ‘at the conjunction of two world views’ (2010: ix). This synthesis of Hindu ideas and Western values can be identified in AOL. On the one hand the repetition of Hindu *mantras*, devotional singing (*kirtan*) and the use of various hand gestures (*mudra*) are all significant aspects of AOL practice. Every Monday morning on the ashram in Bangalore a complex Hindu ritual, called *Rudra Puja*, is performed. *Sudarshan kriya*, the core practice of AOL, is a type of
pranayama (literally control of the breath), which is a central feature of what might be called traditional yoga. On the other hand Western concepts of individualism and rationality are also significant tropes in AOL discourse. Furthermore, many of the Hindu derived aspects of AOL have largely been disconnected from the quest for liberation from the wheel of transmigration and metaphysical speculation, and re-articulated in terms of reducing stress. For example the AOL website suggests the rationale for performing Rudra Puja in the following terms:

The world is a play of energy: negative and positive. When we pray to Shiva – the Lord of transformation – the entire negative energy around us in form of disease, depression, and unhappiness gets transformed into peace, prosperity and joy. Then peace surrounds us in body, mind and soul. (Art of Living, 2013c)

This interpretation of the Rudra Puja can be linked to the subjective turn in modern culture. The subjective experience of ‘peace, prosperity and joy’ is what validates the performance of the ritual, and not the sacred hierarchy in which the deity Shiva is regarded as an external and transcendent form of authority.

Creating a Sense of Individual Wellbeing

The proliferation of self-spirituality, in what Heelas and Woodhead (2005) have identified as a ‘spiritual revolution’ is linked to the concepts of the autonomous self, individual choice, and personal fulfillment. These concepts can be subsumed under the generic term individualization, which Zygmunt Bauman (2000: 31) suggests, ‘consists of transforming human identity from a “given” into a “task”’. This task of identity making has produced what Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim (2001: 7) have termed ‘a tyranny of possibilities’. This tyranny of possibilities seems to have given a particular urgency to the perennial questions of ‘who am I and what do I want’. At the same time there has been a general disillusionment with the traditional institutions and ideologies, which in the past had provided credible responses to these existential questions. This has created a context for what Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2001: 7) have identified as ‘a market for answer factories’. Many of these answer factories are purveyors of therapeutic solutions to the existential anxiety raised by the fundamental and perennial questions of identity and meaning. The term therapeutic solutions suggests a gamut of techniques proposed by the various answer factories that are solely intended to produce a sense of wellbeing. This sense of wellbeing is often couched in terms of being in harmony with both one’s inner self and the world. These therapeutic answer factories, exemplified by movements such as AOL, can be seen as a response to what Kieran Flanagan (2007: 5) has called ‘the limits of disbelief’. The subjective turn and the disillusionment with grand-narratives have been instrumental in prompting individuals who feel isolated and alienated in this postmodern context to seek alternative providers of meaning, connection and authority.
The therapeutic solutions offered by groups such as AOL, which although derived from the Hindu religious tradition, tend to downplay the quest for liberation. Consequently, as Philip Rieff (1966: 16) points out ‘therapeutics requires no doctrine’ and the credo of therapeutics ‘I feel’ has superseded the ‘I believe’ of religions. Personal experience, rather than faith, validates the therapeutic. Many members of AOL, for example report that they had very powerful experiences on doing sudarshan kriya for the first time, and/or suggest that AOL has transformed their lives. One senior teacher who has been an active member of AOL for over seventeen years indicated that her first experience of doing sudarshan kriya made her feel ‘more and more myself’ and that she felt ‘very beautiful from inside and so comfortable with myself’. These feelings were not something that she had had at any other point in her life. After this experience she went on to do a five-day meditation course, which involved keeping absolutely silent. She observed that after taking this course:

Something in me was getting more and more pure, more and more open and clearer. I can now understand things better, I am able to handle situations better. I am not getting carried away with my emotions, which I used to. So I was finding a concrete change within myself.

Furthermore, she indicated that other people observed a change for the better in her. Later on as a teacher in AOL, like many of the other teachers I spoke to, she indicated that she noticed transformations in many of the people that she taught. As with many of the holistic activities discussed by Heelas and Woodhead (2005: 29) the focus of AOL practice is ‘on enhancing the quality of subjective life’.

Look through the literature and listen to what participants say about AOL, and you are very hard pressed to find any clear doctrine. In fact one could argue that the doctrine of AOL is anti-doctrine. A full time committed member from South Africa who was working on the ashram in Bangalore told me:

I have never ever in all the years [that I have been involved in AOL] heard a teacher say ‘you have to believe this or you have to follow this’… The beauty of AOL is that there is no indoctrination, there are no rules.

The emphasis is on technique, rather than doctrine. The Sanskrit term sadhana, which in Hinduism traditionally refers to the practices and disciplines required to achieve liberation from the cycle of transmigration, is used by AOL to indicate the techniques to transform life in the here and now. One AOL teacher typically suggested that AOL is not about belief but that, ‘regular and consistent practice does change the way that you think and feel for the better’. Later on she suggested, ‘it is not my goal to get enlightened. I am doing this because right now here in this lifetime those moments of complete bliss are so wonderful’.

The attenuation of doctrine and the emphasis on practice are associated with the idea that AOL is not a religion, but spirituality. Religion is associated with institutional forms, and is often regarded as anachronistic, irrelevant and hypocritical, whereas spirituality is articulated in terms of personal authentic experience.
This suggestion that religion is about external practices and therefore rather superfical, while spirituality signifies the core values that underlie all religions is a common theme in those therapeutic solutions that can be said to have a religious dimension. Sri Sri Ravi Shankar in a frequently cited aphorism suggests that, ‘Religion is like the banana skin and spirituality is the banana. People have thrown away the banana and are holding onto the skin’ (Sri Sri Ravi Shankar 1999: 3). Consequently AOL can claim to transcend all religious differences and be relevant to people of all faiths and none. However as Jeremy Carette and Richard King (2005: 31) point out, the term ‘spirituality’ is ‘a vague signifier that is able to carry multiple meanings without any precision’. Certainly, from talking to participants in AOL and reading their literature, the idea of spirituality tends to be rather vague. Expressions like ‘spirituality is being comfortable with your self’ as one informant suggested, or as another participant indicated, ‘spirituality is the sense of who you are and your connection with the bigger picture’, are commonly used.

There is a clear correlation between discourses about spirituality and what Christopher Lasch (1991: xvi) has termed ‘psychological man’, who is ‘haunted not by guilt but by anxiety. He seeks not to inflict his own certainties on others, but to find meaning in life’. A central question is to what extent is ‘psychological man’, haunted by anxiety and on a therapeutic quest, purely a narcissistic individual only concerned with his or her own wellbeing? Many commentators suggest that the answer factories that fall under the generic, albeit vague, rubric of spirituality are simply manifestations of consumer culture selling therapeutic solutions to alleviate anxiety, and that this is ultimately the antithesis of a Durkheimian understanding of religion as binding people into a coherent moral community.

Jeremy Carrette and Richard King (2005) argue that New Age Spiritualities are no more than another type of transnational capitalist corporation simply selling a product. The good life is achieved through consumer products, which not only includes the latest technological gadgets, the most effective beauty products, exotic holiday destinations, and the most in vogue style, but also the latest fad in therapeutic solutions. These therapeutic solutions are simply selling products in response to the consumer mantra ‘Because You’re Worth It’ as the L’Oréal advertisements constantly remind us. Steve Bruce (2006: 43) argues that these New Age Spiritualities not only fail to challenge the inequalities of society, but fundamentally do not transform the individual – the banker who practices yoga and meditation still is a banker (with his/her excessive pay). Carrette and King argue that spirituality can be characterized as ‘cultural prozac’ that only provides ‘transitory feelings of ecstatic happiness’ but fails to address ‘the underlying problem of social isolation and injustice’ (2005: 77).

There are many answer factories that sell therapeutic solutions as another product that will solely make the consumer feel better about themselves, in the same way as purchasing a shampoo or new car are marketed as making us feel...
good. There are Ayurvedic spas offering to pamper you. You can purchase meditation machines that promise an easily achievable state of deep meditation by listening to recorded sounds through headphones and simultaneously looking at pulsating lights while wearing glasses equipped with LEDs. There is definitely a market for quick fixes for the perceived stresses of modernity. AOL promotes itself as a technique for eliminating stress. One gets involved in AOL by going on one of their many courses, which are sold as ‘practical wisdom for improving the quality of life’ (Art of Living, 2013d).

AOL runs numerous courses, none of which are particularly cheap. One first has to take the introductory course, which is called ‘The Art of Breathing’, but recently rebranded as ‘The Happiness Course’. In this course, which is generally lasts two and a half days, participants are taught the technique of sudarshan kriya. Having undertaken the introductory course it is then possible to take a number of what AOL calls ‘Graduate Courses’. The Art of Silence Course is a four or five day residential course held in one of the AOL centres. Most of this course is held in silence, which ‘provides optimal conditions for going deep within, quieting our mental chatter and experiencing deep rest and inner peace’ (Art of Living 2013e). ‘The Art of Meditation Course’, which is also known as Sahaj Samadhi Meditation, which ‘almost instantly alleviates the practitioner from stress-related problems’ (Art of Living 2013f). At the end of these courses it is emphasized that the course is not simply a one-off, but that one should repeat the courses on a regular basis.

AOL also has a vast commercial enterprise. Through its various websites and outlets AOL sells a wide range of products. There is an ever-expanding literature produced by AOL. This literature includes: discourses by Sri Sri Ravi Shankar; his commentaries on various Hindu texts such as the Bhagavad Gita; and confessional biographies by devotees which recount how the author’s life has been transformed through participating in AOL. AOL produces and markets CDs of Hindu devotional music, many of which have been rearranged in more contemporary musical forms. For example AOL have produced a CD entitled Cosmic Trance: Bhajans for Youth, which sets Hindu devotional songs and chants to an electro dance beat. CDs of guided meditations and yoga DVDs are also available. The DVD of Sri Sri Yoga indicates on its back cover: ‘Energize your body, relax your mind with this short and powerful 20 minute sequence of Yogasanas’. AOL also produces a range of ayurvedic products and cosmetics. Ojasvita, for example, which is a chocolate-flavoured herbal energizer drink, is promoted as giving ‘power and vitality’.

While there clearly is an aspect of the ‘Because You’re Worth It’ syndrome in AOL discourse, I will argue in the rest of the paper that AOL is not merely a therapeutic consumer product, or cultural prozac to use Carrette and King’s term, sold to make individuals feel good about themselves, but can inspire some members to actively engage with the world. This concern for others may be identified as en-
gaged spirituality. This term derives from the concept of engaged Buddhism, which suggests that ‘the transformation of the self and the transformation of the world [are] indivisible’ (Network of Engaged Buddhists 2013). Engaged spirituality leads to a collective sense of identity that cultivates a community of believers and can contribute to creating a sense of obligation to those outside of the community.

In order to argue that AOL constitutes a mode of engaged spirituality, and to dispute the simple cultural prozac hypothesis of Carette and King, which would suggest that participation in AOL is no more than the purchase of transitory well-being, I will refer to Colin Campbell’s concept of theodicy. Campbell (2007: 166) defines theodicies as ‘cultural systems that specifically serve to meet the universal human need for meaning at the highest level’. Campbell argues that theodicies have both ‘a cognitive component’, which is a systematic explanation of reality, and also ‘an emotional component’. Theodicies are not only about sense-making, but also about feeling. Campbell (2007: 167) suggests that:

Theodicies typically offer a framework of meaning that enables individuals both to experience catharsis and, more specifically, to translate such negative feelings as fear, anxiety, and despair into positive ones of calm, confidence, optimism, and contentment.

These two components of theodicies can clearly be identified in AOL discourse. AOL teaching clearly has a cognitive component linked to the emotional component. For example, Sri Sri Ravi Shankar (2006: 14) suggests that, ‘Many people have a problem of letting go of control, causing anxiety, restlessness and soured relationships’. So here Sri Sri provides an explanation for anxiety and a formula for emotional catharsis. Through the practices (sadhana) of AOL the participant will feel less need to control the external context, and therefore transform the negative emotions of anxiety and restlessness into a sense of wellbeing, and consequently will be able to establish better relationships with others.

Campbell goes on to suggest that ‘people desire meaningful experiences in addition to a meaning for their experiences’ (2007: 168). Clearly sadhana, as a set of therapeutic practices in AOL provides meaningful experiences for the individual participant. Many participants in AOL suggest that life before AOL did not have much meaning, and that their involvement with AOL provided something that was missing in their lives. A member of AOL who now works full-time on the ashram in Bangalore, indicated that a few years previously he reflected on his life as a successful creative writer for a major advertising company. This reflection led to him thinking that there must be more to life than work, marriage and children. This informant had taken the Part One Course, and was doing some volunteer work for AOL in his spare time. He suggested that his participation in AOL ‘was giving him more happiness than the small cubicle that I was sitting in [at work]’. He reflected that at the time he felt that he needed ‘to do something more con-

[880]
structive, more fulfilling, more satisfying, and this [full time participation in AOL] gave me that’.

Campbell also suggests that theodicies have a moral component and some indication of how to act in the world. This suggests that meaningful experiences are not only about individual personal transformation, but also can include an urge to ‘put the world to rights’. Campbell argues ‘that this need is, in turn, closely correlated to have proof of one’s own significance’ (2007: 168). Effective theodicies ‘Supply a credible interpretation of life’s vicissitudes while also providing a purpose, that is to say, it will be experienced as both convincing and inspiring (Campbell 2007: 170). This purposive and moral dimension of theodicies finds expression in AOL discourse in what members and the literature refer to as satsang, which roughly translates as ‘good company’ and ‘seva’, which can be translated as ‘service’.

A Global Satsang: The Communal Aspect of AOL

Satsang, although a traditional Hindu practice, has become increasingly significant in many contemporary Hindu and Hindu-inspired meditation movements. Satsang has three interconnected connotations: being in the company of the guru, the association with fellow devotees, and a group of people gathered together for devotional purposes. The third connotation indicates a congregational aspect to Hinduism, and is a prevalent practice in many contemporary Hindu ashrams (see Jacobs 2010: 44-45). Every evening on the AOL ashram at Bangalore there is a satsang, which consists of devotional singing and a discourse, normally based around Hindu texts. Many AOL events are promoted as satsangs. In May 2011 an event was held in a Hindu temple and community centre in Birmingham, UK with one of the senior AOL teachers, which was advertised as ‘Satsang with Rishi Nityapragya’. The flyer indicated that the event would be, ‘Life transforming practical wisdom, deep blissful meditation as soul stirring melodies’. Rishi Nityapragya is regarded as one of the best singers in AOL, and the evening consisted of a short talk about the nature of happiness, singing of Hindu devotional songs (bhajans) and a question and answer session. The event finished with a short guided meditation.

The communal aspect of satsang brings into play Durkheim’s functional understanding of religion as binding individuals into a single moral community. A great deal of emphasis is placed on the concept that AOL is ‘a one world family’, and that it has centres in more than 150 countries. Many committed members of AOL indicate that they feel a connection with other members of AOL, no matter where they are from. This sense of a collective identity was exemplified in the 30th Anniversary of AOL, held in Berlin in July 2011. Superficially the Berlin event was like any world music festival such as WOMAD, with performances by musicians and dancers from various parts of the world, and food tents serving
various national cuisines. A number of artists sang traditional Hindu devotional songs, but often in a Western style. One of the most popular was an Argentinean duo called the So What, who organise what they call Yoga Raves.\textsuperscript{12} So What performs Hindu devotional songs utilising various western popular musical conventions, such as dance beats and hip-hop.\textsuperscript{13} So What’s vision is that their performances, in Berlin and other venues:

Will bring the spiritual element back to celebration and the way we have fun, offering a drug free alternative for our youth to gather and release their energy and tension. In the words of Art of Living Founder Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, ‘from the intoxication that depletes the energy to intoxication that brings enlightenment’. (Yoga Rave, n.d.)

The World Culture Festival was designed as a grand spectacle. It was a rather ambitious, but deeply symbolic strategy to use the Berlin Olympic Stadium, which has the capacity to accommodate over 110,000 people. AOL in the promotional material on the web indicated that they anticipated 70,000 people to attend. It was an unusually cold, wet and windy July, and often the stadium looked less than a quarter full. However, AOL claim that 50,000 people attended the event (Nambiar 2011: 3). The other spectacular aspects of the event were various performances such as a grand guitar ensemble with 200 guitars, and a hoped-for 1,000 people participating in a Bulgarian folk dance.

On another level the World Cultural Festival was a New Age gathering focused on self-spirituality. A compère in one of the world pavilions where music and dance performances were taking places introduced the acts with a plethora of therapeutic aphorisms such as: ‘Feel connected to your inner silence. This inner silence is the core of our being. It connects us all. Do you feel connected to each other?’ There was a yoga pavilion, where attendees could take lessons in yoga and meditation. Numerous flyers were handed out advertising all sorts of holistic therapeutics, such as the Love Peace Harmony Institute, which offered to ‘awaken the healing power of the soul’; New Age Travel companies offered Ayurvedic vacations etc. There was also a large marquee selling DVDs, CDs and books about AOL.

On a third level, the World Culture Festival resembled a quasi-political rally. In between the cultural performances in the main arena there were numerous speeches by various dignitaries. These speeches all stressed the way in which AOL brings harmony at an individual and a global level. For example, Professor Ruud Lubbers, a former Prime Minister of the Netherlands suggested that:

All people of this world are connected to each other and to nature in its magnificent diversity. We all have a common destination and that is to live in harmony with ourselves, with our neighbourhood, with all peoples and with nature. (Lubbers 02/07/2011)

What these three aspects of the World Culture Festival – the cultural, the spiritual and the quasi-political – all had in common was an emphasis that global security
was contingent upon inner harmony. Sadhana – the therapeutic practices of AOL is not only presented as the ultimate panacea for individual existential anxiety, creating a subjective sense of wellbeing, but also is regarded as the foundation for curing global ills. Sadhana is therefore perceived to operate on three interconnected levels of being – the individual, the community of believers and the global. Satsang could therefore be said not only to encompass the moral community in the Durkheimian sense, but also implicitly suggests a much more universally inclusive sense. The implication is that if you connect with your own inner self, you will realize the innate connection that you have with all of creation. Therefore AOL sadhana not only creates an individual sense of wellbeing, but also is instrumental in evoking the concept of a global satsang, expressed in terms of ‘a one world family’.

**Seva: Concern for Other’s Wellbeing**

This link between the subjective existential sense of wellbeing with the global environment is captured by a comment made in an interview with a senior member of AOL in the UK: ‘When you feel happy within yourself and more at ease with life, and you are less stressed, you are more inclined to naturally want to help other people’. This observation alludes to the third important aspect of AOL praxis, which is called seva, which Gwilym Beckerlegge (2006: 1) defines as ‘religiously motivated service to humanity’. Although the term seva originally referred to service in and for a temple, and Beckerlegge (2008: 783) suggests was virtually a synonym for ritualistic offerings to a temple image known as puja, it has now acquired a connotation of charitable work.

The concept of religiously motivated service can be traced to two ancient Hindu antecedents. First are the criticisms of Hindu society by the religious poets and mystics such as Kabir (1398-1448) who were founders of a diverse set of groups, which are collectively referred to as the bhakti movement. Despite the great diversity of these groups, all suggest that liberation is available to all regardless of caste or gender. Some commentators have argued that the bhakti movement acted as an important stimulus for a demand for social justice (see Beckerlegge 2006: 8). The second antecedent for the perception of seva as service to humanity is the concept of karma yoga. The idea of karma yoga, which is most clearly articulated in the important Hindu text *The Bhagavad Gita*, suggests that actions should be performed for their own sake and not for the hope of any reward. However Swami Vivekananda (1863 -1902), who founded the Ramakrishna Mission, was the first important Hindu advocate of organized service to humanity as central to the religious life (see Beckerlegge 2006). Since the active and organized involvement of the Ramakrishna Mission in humanitarian projects at the end of the nineteenth century, seva as signifying philanthropic and charitable activity, and as an inher-
ent aspect of spiritual practice (sadhana) is now central to most Hindu and Hindu-inspired meditation movements.

In AOL seva is regarded as an important dimension of sadhana and has two aspects. The first aspect pertains to service to the organisation itself. This includes doing some sort of chore. For example when you do the Advanced Course at the International HQ in Bangalore, all participants are expected to do some work – normally either in the kitchen or helping clean the accommodation. Seva also includes teaching courses and any of the tasks required to maintain and expand a complex multi-national organization. However, seva also involves various charitable ventures. In 1997 Sri Sri Ravi Shankar founded a sister organisation to AOL called the International Association for Human Values (IAHV), which styles itself as an international humanitarian and educational NGO. The mission statement of IAHV describes itself as ‘a global platform for humanitarian initiatives that solve problems by uplifting human values’ (IAHV 2012). It does this through a number of projects, most of which are primarily promoted in terms of reducing stress for various groups, such as soldiers returning from war, prisoners, victims of natural disasters and school children.

For example, the YES for Schools project is characterised as ‘breathing life into education’. It offers young people ‘practical tools and life skills to manage stress and emotions’. YES, which is an acronym for Youth Empowerment Seminar, involves going into schools and running a thirty-hour course. The course has three aspects focusing on a healthy body, a healthy mind and a healthy lifestyle. Under the heading of a ‘healthy mind’ the Yes for Schools’ web site (2011) indicates that it teaches ‘Targeted breathing techniques that reduce stress, anger, anxiety and depression; improve focus and concentration; and enhance learning ability’. Yes for Schools proposes ‘Changing our schools one student at a time’. In other words social change and wider changes are contingent upon individual transformation, which is achieved through the techniques of AOL.

AOL, and in particular the sister organization IAHV are involved in bringing practical benefits to people in disaster areas around the world. IAHV projects include providing material aid and care for victims of disaster such as the Haiti earthquake in 2010 and Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Many of the crisis interventions also involve development projects, such as rebuilding schools, and creating community gardens for growing food. However, the main focus is on alleviating trauma and reducing stress through teaching AOL techniques. According to Sri Sri Ravi Shankar (2012b), ‘Unless the trauma is released, food and medicines will not work. People cannot eat or sleep because their mind is full of the terrible tragedy that has befallen them’. In a similar vein the European director of Prison SMART (Stress Management and Rehabilitation Training), the IAHV programme that works with offenders pointed out that in a recent survey of prisoners in a pilot project in a UK prison over 90% of the prisoners who took the programme reported that they felt hopeful about their future and over 70% indicated that they were
now better at controlling their tempers. At the annual meeting of IAHV UK volunteers held in London in January 2014, the director indicated that making a significant change in the inner lives of individual prisoners had the potential to make a significant transformation in the prison environment and make a major contribution in reducing the likelihood of reoffending. Consequently there is a clear connection between the amelioration of stress at the individual level and the transformation of society.

Seva is not only about service to others, but also has therapeutic benefits. Sri Sri Ravi Shankar suggests that the more you serve other people the happier you yourself will feel, conversely ‘if your goal is just to please yourself, depression is sure to follow’ (Sri Sri Ravi Shankar 2006: 62). In response to a question about how to improve one’s experience of meditation Sri Sri Ravi Shankar responded:

If you are not having good experiences in meditation, then do more seva you will gain merit and your meditation will be deeper. When you bring some relief or freedom to someone through seva, good vibrations and blessings come to you. Seva brings merit; merit allows you to go deep in meditation; meditation brings back your smile. (Art of Living 2013g)

One of the exercises that participants are asked to do on the introductory course is to perform ‘a random act of kindness’. This involves performing some small altruistic act in a spontaneous way, preferably for a stranger. When the course reconvenes, participants are asked about how they felt about this task, and it is suggested that although an altruistic task should be carried out without any expectation it can create a sense of wellbeing.

Conversely one must feel good about oneself in order to be able to serve others. For example the mission statement of the IAHV (2006) suggests ‘that unless the individual's spirit is lifted, one cannot be an instrument for positive change in society’. This suggests a dialectic relationship between individual wellbeing and social service: feel good about yourself and you will be naturally be inclined to help others, serve others and you will feel better about your self.

Conclusion

AOL has grown into a highly successful transnational movement. One of the reasons for its success is that its anti-doctrine doctrine is clearly commensurate with the postmodern disillusionment with grand narratives. However, as Campbell (2007: 168) argues, there seem to be innate human compulsions to imbue life experiences with meaning and at the same time to seek meaningful experiences. For many people neither traditional forms of religiousness nor science seem to supply adequate narratives to explain the vicissitudes of life or provide meaningful experiences. Disillusionment with both traditional sources of meaning and the institutions of modernity has led to what Roof (1999: 9) describes as an ‘effusive quest culture’ in which increasing numbers of people seek meaning and meaningful
experiences in alternative arenas. In response to this ‘effusive quest culture’ there has been a proliferation of answer factories that aim to provide both credible responses to existential concerns and significant experiences for the individual. Many of these answer factories, such as AOL, may be considered as theodicies, supplying both meaning and meaningful experiences in the face of a perceived tyranny of possibilities where the ‘melting power’ of modernity (Bauman 2000: 6-7) has dissolved all certainty.

Those theodicies that have a quasi-religious dimension can be classified in terms of what Heelas (1996) has identified as self-spirituality. Self-spirituality can be understood as a form of therapeutics which promotes various techniques that promise the individual a sense of personal fulfillment and wellbeing. Many people, particularly after the romanticisation of Eastern culture by the counter-culture, turned East (see Cox 1979) to find various therapeutics techniques in yoga and meditation, and this led to the proliferation and popularity of Hindu-inspired meditation movements. However it is simplistic to view these movements, as Carrette and King (2005: 87) have suggested as only ‘colonising and commodifying Asian wisdom traditions’, in order to enable the individual to feel better about themselves physically and/or psychologically. While the quest for liberation and complex metaphysical speculation are often very attenuated in these therapeutically orientated Hindu-inspired meditation movements, individual wellbeing is not the exclusive or necessarily the predominant preoccupation of participants. Movements such as AOL might be classified as engaged spirituality, which perceive that individual wellbeing and global harmony are inherently linked. In AOL, the concepts of satsang (community) and seva (service to others) evoke a sense of connection and ethical concern for others, not only in the Durkheimian sense of a moral community, but in the global sense encapsulated in the AOL maxim of ‘a one world family’.

Two factors contribute to the success of AOL as a theodicy for many seekers of meaning and meaningful experiences. Firstly, AOL operates at both an individual and global level, suggesting solutions to both individual existential needs and global concerns. Secondly, AOL provides these personal and universal solutions without fixing these solutions within a rigid grand narrative. AOL functions as a symbolic resource that enables people to select whatever aspects suit their personal disposition. AOL discourse enables the devotee to be both the pampered individual and altruistic global citizen. You can do this by being a Hindu, a Muslim, a New Ager or even an atheist without compromise as AOL claims to transcend and include all particularities of culture and faith. Consequently, AOL can be perceived as a therapeutic solution that provides a range of practices that can provide a renewed sense of belonging and purpose in the uncertainty of the postmodern context. It creates a sense of belonging through a reinterpretation of the Hindu concept of satsang. The notion of satsang is not so much a community of believers, but a transnational network of practitioners, who share a vision of a ‘stress
free violence free society’. Purpose is provided through a reinterpretation of the concept of *seva*, in which helping others help themselves, ultimately contributes not only to creating a better world, but also to the individual’s wellbeing.

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**Notes**

1. There is a problem of determining the best term for people who engage with AOL practices, and indeed there is no consensus in AOL – some people feel that they are devotees, followers, or believers while others suggest that they are members. Rather than trying to coin some obscure neologism, I will simply use the neutral and deliberately vague term ‘participant’, with the implication that different individuals participate in AOL in quite different ways.
2. Not to be confused with the famous sitar player Ravi Shankar. There are some anecdotal accounts that suggest that Sri Sri Ravi Shankar uses two honorifics to distinguish himself from the musician.
3. The property and over 300 acres of land in the Blue Ridge mountains were purchased by AOL in 2011 and was formally inaugurated by Sri Sri Ravi Shankar in 2012.
4. I have not used the academic convention of using diacriticals for transliterations of Sanskrit terms, but have used the transliteration and spelling adopted by AOL.
5. My thanks to one of the anonymous reviewers for this suggestion.
7. At the end of the Art of Silence Course that I attended in August 2011 in Bangalore, the teacher asked participants how many Art of Silence Courses participants had attended – a great cheer went up for an individual person who had participated in more than twenty Art of Silence courses. The teacher then indicated that we should attend an Art of Silence Course every six months.
9. Ojas is a Sanskrit term that roughly translates as spiritual energy – it is particularly used in yoga to refer to the energy created through sexual abstinence.
10. For a full list of AOL products see the online store at [http://www.artoflivingshop.eu/](http://www.artoflivingshop.eu/)
11. My emphasis.
13. There is a long tradition of synthesising Eastern devotional music and western popular music. For example *Musti Musti*, a CD released in 1990, is a collaboration between the Sufi singer Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan and the Canadian composer and guitarist Michael Brook. World music festivals often have artists who play devotional music as performance. Purna Das Baul, a musician in the Bengali devotional tradition known as the Bauls, is very popular on the world
music circuit at festivals like WOMAD. However musicians like Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan and Purna Das Baul, although they come from devotional traditions, record and play to entertain Western audiences. In other words, the music becomes an aesthetic rather than a religious performance.

The statistical data from this survey can be found in The Prison SMART UK 2013 report available at www.iahv.org.uk

References


Videos and Music
Reconceptualising Well-being: Social Work, Economics and Choice

By Graeme Simpson & Ani Murr

Abstract

In this paper we examine the intersection of well-being, agency and the current political and economic structures which impact on social work with adults and in doing so contribute to ‘interpreting and mapping out the force fields of meaning production’ (Fornäs, Fredriksson & Johannisson 2011: 7). In it we draw upon Sointu’s (2005) work which identified the shift from conceptualising well-being in terms of ‘the body politic’ to conceptualising it in terms of ‘the body personal’ and identified parallels with understanding well-being in English social work. There has been a shift in the nature of social work in the United Kingdom in how the question of agency has been addressed. For many years this was through the traditional notion of autonomy and self-determination (Biestek 1961) and later collective approaches to welfare and services (Bailey & Brake 1975). The development of paradigms of mainly personal empowerment in the 1980s and 1990s (Braye & Preston-Shoot 1995) saw social work become less associated with collective engagement in welfare and more concerned with the enhancement of individual well-being (Jordan 2007). Whilst the rhetoric of well-being, in contemporary English social work, continues to include autonomy and self-determination, this is focused primarily upon the narrower concepts of independence and choice (Simpson 2012).

The UK Department of Health’s A Vision for Adult Social Care: Capable Communities and Active Citizens (DoH 2010) is the template for national social care policy to which all Local Authorities in England had to respond with an implementation plan. This paper draws on a documentary analysis of two such plans drafted in 2012 in the wake of an ‘austerity budget’ and consequent public expenditure reductions. The analysis considers the effect of economic imperatives on the conceptualisation of individual choices and needs in the context of Local Authorities’ responsibilities to people collectively. A concept of ‘reasonableness’ emerges, which is used to legitimize a re-balancing of the ‘body personal’ and the ‘body politic’ in the concept of well-being with the re-emergence of an economic, public construction. Our discussion considers why this is happening and whether or not a new synthesised position between the personal and political is being developed, as economists and policy makers appropriate well-being for their ends.

Keywords: Well-being, wellbeing, social work, choice, neo-liberalism, adult social care, austerity
Introduction: Sointu and her Exploration of a Shift in the Conceptualisation of Well-being

Sointu (2005, 2011) argues that the meaning of well-being is constructed and reconstructed through social practices, which reflect and shape the value given in society to subjective and objective goods; individual and collective agency; and, to responsibility. Sointu (2005) identified a shift in use from ‘the body politic’ in the mid-1980s, to ‘the body personal’ in the 1990s.

This ‘move towards perceptions of wellbeing as related to personal lives’ (Sointu 2005: 261) and away from economic well-being through a strong national economy, is identified through the emergence of newspaper articles which presented personalised, biographical accounts of people (mostly women) enhancing their well-being through the use of therapeutic experiences, which were increasingly commercialised to appeal to subjects constructed as self-responsible consumers. This is related to the rise of the consumer culture and a subject who can be understood as a self-responsible person in search of personal well-being. Importantly she argues that, once self-responsibility has become a norm, it can also become ‘the primary means of governing individuals’ (ibid.: 262) as the self-responsible individual becomes expected to make ‘healthy choices’ about their ‘personal lifestyle’ based on the assumption that ‘people want to be healthy, and ... freely seek out ways of living most likely to promote their own health’ (ibid.: 263). Thus, socially constructed expectations about the roles, responsibilities, duties and rights of citizens become significant factors in governance.

Drawing upon Sointu’s work, we are concerned to examine the contemporary meaning of well-being and the inter-relatedness of agency, consumerism, markets and governance in the context of adult social care in England.

Towards an Understanding of Well-being in Social Work

Much of the research into well-being attempts to quantify and measure it, and different terms are used, often interchangeably. Schalock (2004) prefers the term ‘quality of life’, whilst Cummins (2005: 335) argues that ‘subjective well-being’ is now the ‘generic descriptor’ although a range of terms including ‘happiness’, ‘subjective quality of life’ and ‘life satisfaction’ can be identified. In summary, well-being attempts to hold in tension ‘everyday meanings’ of ‘happiness’, ‘good health, and ‘prosperity’ all of which have contested meanings. Thus a ‘ubiquitous term’ disappears on further examination, ‘like a cultural mirage’ (Ereaut & Whitting 2008: 5).

Within the debates about well-being and the application to social work, three approaches can be identified. First, whether well-being is rooted in the quality of personal experiences; second, whether it is rooted in peoples’ own choices; or,
whether it emerges from identifiable objective criteria such as achievement, understanding and happiness (Benton & Craib 2001).

Social work in its traditional case-work form (Biestek 1961) emphasised helping within a ‘therapeutic relationship’, developing ‘well-being’ in relation to ‘the body personal’. It has, however, a lengthy history addressing the social, economic and political conditions in which people live (Price and Simpson 2007). Sointu’s ‘body politic’ and its involvement in these conditions is indicative of social work’s implicit concern for people’s well-being. This concern has frequently taken the form of political engagement and agitation, as Attlee (1920: 27) argued:

[T]he social worker is one who feels the claims of society upon him more than others, he brings to all his work this conception of his duty as a member of a civilised society to make his contribution to the well being of his fellows.

The ‘radical’ social work of the 1970s (Bailey & Brake 1975) continued throughout the 1980s often connected to broader social movements. This approach focused upon social structures and a politically engaged social work (Langan 2002). This focus continues with the contemporary concept of anti-oppressive practice (Dalrymple & Burke 1995), premised upon identifying and challenging social structures which have a negative impact upon people’s lives.

Historically, social work embraces the different meanings inherent within the concept of well-being. The more recent rise of person-centred approaches may be seen as a turn to what Sointu termed the body personal. Current person-centred approaches are built upon the resources individuals have for self-understanding and for altering their self-concept. By self-directed behaviour individuals could move towards self-regulation and their own enhancement (Howe 2009).

Whilst the focus upon individuals and relationships remains significant, Jordan (2007: vi-vii) sets well-being for social work firmly in the context of ‘quality of life’ and ‘relationships’ within social structures:

People’s unhappiness is far more connected to their physical and mental health, and their relationships with others, than to their material circumstances. What hurts about being poor is not so much the absence of comforts and luxuries, but the stigma of official surveillance ... and the damage to personal relations.

Whilst Jordan identifies links between people’s unhappiness (poor well-being) to their experience of poverty within social structures, Howe (2009:176) identifies the potential inability of social structures to deliver feelings of well-being to those materially better off:

The emphasis on being responsible for your own success (or failure) in a climate of aggressive, competitive self-interest increases levels of stress. There is always someone who seems to earn more and possess far more things than you do. This is a recipe for dissatisfaction and reduced happiness.

Thus within social work there remains a close alliance between the body politic and the body personal. Ferguson (2008) has sought to reclaim relationship social work as a radical project because of the links between the socio-political context
of poverty and wealth, and personal well-being. Jordan (2008) argues that social work, being both person-centred and focussed on structures, is one of the originators of the trend towards personalised interventions addressing both the body personal and politic.

We suggest that the provision of health and social welfare through the first decade of the twenty-first century reflects this wider cultural understanding of well-being as a therapeutic commodity. Mirroring Sointu’s analysis of the rise of alternative and complementary well-being services, a market economy for the provision of social care services was developed which, valuing consumerism, promoted more choice and greater control for service users culminating in devolving ‘purchasing power’ to those in need of services through, for example, direct payments and personal budgets (Lymbery 2012). It is to governance and well-being that we now turn.

**Well-being in ‘Governance’**

The earlier discussion about social work sees it as a profession which can promote well-being at all levels. Social work, however, operates within a clearly defined legal and policy framework – in other words it is an element of national and local Governance, or as several commentators have suggested a mechanism for regulation and control (Jones & Novak 1993).

Ereaut and Whiting’s analysis (2008) noted that the meaning of well-being follows ‘a general cultural move towards the project of the self in which individuals are encouraged (some would say “required”) to assume increasing personal responsibility, say for their illness or wellness’ (2008:13). In governance documents, it is used interchangeably between one component of well-being and its whole; between referring to individuals and referring to the well-being of society, or groups within society; between well-being as something neutral and something positive; between being static or a journey; between an end in itself or as a means to another end.

In a similar vein, the New Economics Foundation (NEF 2008: 4) breaks well-being down into personal and social. It states that the five main components of personal well-being are emotional well-being, a satisfying life, vitality, resilience & self-esteem, and positive functioning including autonomy, competence, and engagement. The main components of social well-being are supportive relationships, trust and belonging.

Simpson (2012: 624) examined well-being in terms of professional training and the policies within which social work with adults takes place. He argued that well-being is implicitly present, yet subservient to the overriding concept of choice and independence. These dominate the provision of services under the personalisation agenda, premised on neo-liberal policies (Houston 2010). Sointu’s (2005: 2011) application of a turn towards the personal can be seen in social work
as it shifts from a general concern with social conditions and economic prosperity to a more personal concept of health and ‘feeling good’, often characterised in social work provision by having ‘choice and control’ (Duffy 2010). This is concerned with ‘agency’, where traditional debates have seen this as either individual or collective. Callinicos (2004) argues that this is a false dichotomy, since to conceive of agency without structure – or even structure without agency – is to miss the point. For our discussion social work is an activity, which embraces the notion of the person and society (Taylor-Gooby 2008). Emphasising individual agency, without an analysis of the social, political and economic framework creates depoliticised practitioners and service-users (Simpson & Connor 2011).

The shift towards personal well-being is situated in neoliberalism, that is a change in the nature of global capitalism characterised by lower taxation, lower levels of welfare provision and an emphasis upon individualism and profit, which lead to greater disparities between rich and poor (Wilkinson & Pickett 2010). The shift towards personal well-being served as a cultural and political device to mask economic policies, gaining pace in the UK during a time of relative prosperity under New Labour which paradoxically led to higher levels of service provision through public expenditure as well as inequality.

A change in Government in 2010 coupled with the continuing economic downturn, resulted in considerable reductions in public expenditure and alongside this, the Government introduced a ‘happiness index’. Duncan-Smith (2011) argued that ‘levels of family income are just an approximate … measure of well-being. I do believe that increased income and increased well-being do not always follow the same track’. The UK Office for National Statistics’ [ONS] ‘happiness index’ (ONS 2012: 1) asks four key questions, none of which relate explicitly to people’s social and economic situation, focusing instead upon feelings of personal happiness and satisfaction with life. Interestingly, the Cabinet contains a high number of millionaires with an estimated combined wealth, in 2012, of £70m (Hope 2012), and it is easier for those who are in a comfortable financial position to make such comments. This ‘distance from necessity’ differentiates the working and middle classes (Bourdieu, cited in Cockerham 2005: 56) and is clearly at play in the economic and social factors we discuss.

We therefore suggest that a dialectic is at play. Services are being reduced, as are levels of income and expenditure yet the emphasis in Governance promotes ‘well-being’, deflecting attention away from the ‘economic’ basis, and emphasising the depoliticised arena of ‘feeling good’ as a goal for all citizens, irrespective of income level.

This is the background to our research, which examined emerging policy documents following the public expenditure reductions in the 2012 Budget. We examined the extent of a rebalancing of well-being as an individualistic (personal), and an economic (social or public), state. Whilst this is not a new phenomenon, through examining a potential re-emergence of an economic or public construc-
tion we consider why the time is ripe for shifting well-being back to ‘the body politic’, whether a new synthesised position between the personal and the politic is in the making.

Rationale and Method of Study

Drawing on the dynamic tensions inherent within ‘well-being’ and social work, we examined the responses of two Local Councils (both in overall control) to the central government policy, articulated in the UK Department of Health’s *A Vision for Adult Social Care: capable communities and active citizens* (DoH 2010), to explore how aspects of well-being are currently being configured.

We analysed the content of documents produced in 2012 by two Councils in the English Midlands, where they set out their strategy for implementing the policy following their public consultation exercises. Although these documents are in the public domain and freely accessible, we have maintained the anonymity of the Councils since, at the time of writing, the policy documents are approaching their final stages prior to implementation. Accordingly we have referred to the Councils as A and B.

We chose a content analysis approach, exploring language through word searches and considering the meaning of the frequency and positioning of words within the text. Analysing language in this way ‘connects the micro (specific features of language use) with the macro (cultural and social meaning and action)’ (Ereaut & Whiting 2008: 2). We were mindful that content analysis is concerned with ‘data reduction’ given that much information is thrown away in the search ‘to see the wood through the trees’ (Robson 2002: 358). Our purpose was scoping the language to explore the use of ‘well-being’ in the construction of local social problems and solutions in response to a national policy.

We chose words which reflect the ideas and values linked with well-being in recent social policy, including the promotion of autonomy through the allocation of personal budgets, to explore the extent to which these links are still prevalent and whether or not changes are perceptible. In the analysis we consider and make explicit the manifest content – i.e. the content which is ‘physically present’ – and the latent content – in terms of inferences and interpretation we draw from the positioning and proximity of words (Robson 2002).

Findings

I. Well-being, Independence and Choice

Well-being was used infrequently in the documents, but when it was, both Councils used the term as if the meaning is clear to all. Council A referred to Health and Wellbeing Boards, a corporate coming together of traditional ‘Health and
Social Care services’. This use appears underpinned by an operationalized sedimentation of the term in which ‘joint health and wellbeing strategies’ are drawn up, targets set, and outcomes measured. It also used ‘well-being’ in the philosophical sense of the ideal conditions for a ‘good life’ in assertions about ‘The Borough [our italics] we want for health and well-being’. Thus, it is well-being for all which is sought.

Council B uses the phrase ‘independence and well-being’ with an unproblematic acceptance that they fit together and extend each other, consistent with a taken-for-granted meaning emergent in social policy in the past decade (Howe 2009; Simpson 2012).

Well-being is frequently associated with independence, and the exercising of choice is often taken as evidence of independence (Simpson & Price 2010). Both Councils positioned ‘choice’ at the start of the documents and in sections dealing with either ‘priorities’ (Council A) or ‘principles’ (Council B). This positioning foregrounds choice, and associates it with what the documents’ authors consider important.

A stated priority for Council A is that ‘older people and vulnerable adults will maintain their independence for longer and will have greater choice and control over their care, regaining their independence earlier where this can be achieved’. Council B emphasises ‘people’s rights, choices and inclusion’ and the Council values interventions which enable people to have ‘more choice and control and flexibility over the services they receive’. Throughout both Councils’ documents, as independence is taken for granted as intrinsic to ‘well-being’, so independence is linked to choice and control. Whilst Council A uses the word ‘choice’ to refer to the activity of residents or service users who are making decisions about their care, their document also refers to the Council’s ‘preferences’ which are to be used by social workers when involved in decision-making:

The Cabinet endorses the approach of supporting people within the borough and returning them from out of borough into a community placement in preference to a residential placement, if such a placement meets their needs.

The report is silent on how differences between residents’ ‘choices’ and the Council’s ‘preferences’ would be resolved, with an implicit assumption that ‘bringing people home’ would be a ‘good thing’ naturally promoting their ‘well-being’.

The use of ‘choice’ in these documents supports an understanding of ‘well-being’ premised on independence and individualism. It is not always clear whether this concerns the choices people make or the things from which they can choose. Furthermore, the documents begin to show that people have choice, but what they choose might not be prioritized by those who implement those choices.

Council B’s discussion of national eligibility criteria for receipt of services, infers that it meets its responsibility to make provision where independence is threatened. The draft policy document makes the balancing of individual need
against budget constraints transparent stating that ‘maximum independence and privacy is achieved with each individual within the financial limits of the resources available’.

Furthermore, the document asserts that Council B might offer ‘different ways of meeting need from the service user’s first choice’ (our italics). The economic limitations in determining service provision and resource allocation are particularly stark:

... to balance potentially conflicting responsibilities the County Council has decided to establish a usual maximum expenditure. […] In circumstances in which a support plan to meet need and manage risk in the person’s home exceeds the usual maximum expenditure alternative care arrangements would be considered. This might include offering different alternative care arrangements from the service user’s first choice.

Choice here is not concerned with ‘empowering’ people to exercise choice and control over the services they receive (Harris 2003) but is more measured, with peoples’ preferences reflected, rather than their choices honoured. The potential for tension between service-users and the Council remains, acknowledged by ‘a balance between the Council’s resources and people’s preferred support plans’ with individuals having their preferred support if they supplement any shortfall left by insufficient Council funding. This then connects to another cluster of researched terms.

II. Budgets and the Responsible Citizen

Both documents contain frequent references to ‘personal budgets’, ‘individual budgets’ and ‘budget allocation’. Council A extends the personalisation policy thus: ‘entitlements expressed as services have been superseded by entitlements expressed as personal budget amounts’. The document continues to advance ‘the body personal’ in its presentation of a system of personal budgets developed from the values of independence and autonomy, choice and control shared by ‘well-being’, and also takes us towards the ‘body politic’ when setting out its management of resources. Under the heading ‘Financial Implications’, Council A asserts that the risk of economic failure will be mitigated by the ‘strict’ controls and ‘balance’ which will apply to budget management striving for a ‘balanced budget’.

Council B’s document refers to such considerations in its ‘Statement of Purpose’:

Public funding for social care should be allocated in a way that both meets individual eligible need and also takes account of the overall demand for resources and consequent budgetary considerations.

Council B is unambiguous that individual preference must be balanced against Council responsibilities to make effective and efficient use of resources. Furthermore the guidance to social workers notes that the Council takes an approach to arranging services which balances the needs of individuals with the needs of all those for whom it has a responsibility. Therefore, in their professional activities
social workers are to be mindful of their employers’ fiscal responsibilities, arguably privileging those responsibilities above the needs of individual service-users, reinforced by clear ‘principles for decision making … and a framework for identifying the usual maximum [our italics] expenditure of a care package to support an individual in their home’. These statements would, or at least should, present social workers with ethical dilemmas.

Council B’s document clearly presents the dilemma it faces in meeting increasing demand in a time of decreasing financial resources. It assumes a utilitarian consensus that it is ‘reasonable’ and ‘common-sense’ to weigh the needs of the few against the needs of the many. There is a balance to be maintained:

_This [our italics] County Council is committed to supporting people to live full and independent lives within their local communities. Where people are eligible for social care support the aim is to support them in a way that reflects their preferences and the outcomes they wish to achieve. However this needs to be balanced against this [our italics] County Council’s responsibilities to make best use of available resources._

People’s preferences, rather than choices about support, are reflected and, crucially, Council B identifies itself as a responsible Council because it seeks to balance effectiveness with efficiency, central elements of neo-liberal policies (Le Grand 2007).

Service-users should be central to policy (Beresford & Carr 2012) and for at least one Council their needs are being, at best, balanced against or, at worst, made subservient to economic demands. The language around service-users was analysed to examine the relationship between people and policy.

### III. Service User, Client, Resident or Citizen

Council A refers to ‘service-users’, ‘clients’, ‘residents’ and ‘citizens’ without distinction, whereas Council B only refers to ‘clients’ and/or ‘service users’. Both Councils’ policy aim is to reach a position where those who need services can engage with the market, thereby purchasing services that help them achieve their planned care outcomes.

Council A alludes to a philosophical understanding of ‘well-being’ as an idealised ‘good life’ and the Aristotelian view of a citizen’s journey to self-fulfilment, in accord with social work’s contribution to well-being (Jordan 2007). This vision of the citizen’s journey as one of self-help includes an allocation of a personal budget ‘where needed’. The Council claims that the financial implications of adult social care policy will maintain or improve outcomes for citizens whilst reducing costs. Citizens receiving funding for adult social care provision will receive their monies through an allocation formula, which introduces a distinctly ‘economic’ conception of citizenship.

Thus for Council A, alongside the philosophical goal of well-being for the Borough there is the economic imperative to balance the books. In the specific
context of services, Council A ceases referring to citizens and prefers ‘service users’ who choose their ‘service providers’, thereby establishing a contractual relationship based on a duality between ‘users’ and ‘providers’. The distinction is between ‘actual’ service users, that is people for whom a budget is needed, in contrast to ‘self-helping, self-serving, self-directing’ citizens.

**Discussion: Well-being, Choice, Balance and Social Work**

From our analysis of the documents we make one observation and identify the emergence of two themes which are significant in determining how well-being is undergoing a reconceptualisation.

First, through the study of well-being in these documents it is clear that, on the few occasions the word itself is used, its meaning still ranges across the philosophical, the body personal and, implicitly, the body politic. The more philosophical use of the term is evident in its conjunction with citizenship. The evidence suggests that, whilst well-being remains associated with ‘the body personal’, conveying an underpinning assumption that self-help, self-directed choice and independence are commonly shared values in society and constitute proper goals for health and social care provision, it has also become increasingly sedimented in the language of governance through ‘health and wellbeing’ terminology. Overall it appears that ‘well-being’ is integral to hegemonic structure, providing a linguistic cloak for less benign developments in which well-being begins to acquire what Hall (1988: 44) argues is a ‘symbolic power … the horizon of the taken for granted’. To this end, well-being becomes a paradox: politically and culturally important, yet devoid of definition; part of the invisible constructs of everyday speech in that its meaning is never specified, but always assumed. This is deeply significant in understanding the emergent themes.

The documents reveal a significant reconceptualising of choice, in ways which are clearly articulated, representing both a change of policy and a significant challenge to social workers and other social welfare professionals who have come to regard choice as both empowering and liberating. Duffy (2010) is a major proponent of this arguing that social workers need to understand the philosophical underpinning of choice, and suggesting that critics, such as Ferguson (2007) and Houston (2010) are unduly fixated upon the economic aspects of the personalisation agenda. Our findings would suggest that the economic imperatives are now being clearly articulated and that the premise of the economic factors have also changed. It is no longer the appeal to a rational economic being, much vaunted by neo-liberals which dominates, but rather choice is now restricted by economic imperatives and expenditure limits.

It could be argued that empowering people to make choices was never intended to, nor indeed ever did, mean that such choices would then be honoured, although we would suggest this was implied in policy. Our analysis of these documents...
detects a trend of Councils becoming transparent in stating that some people’s first choices may not be honoured, where a shortfall between the first choice and the council’s preferred alternative cannot be made up. In the clash between individual choice and a Council budget, choice is reframed as preference. The personal well-being of an individual (previously constructed in social policy as independence, choice and control) seems to weigh less in the balance with the economic well-being of the Council. Different kinds of ethics underpin different kinds of philosophical well-being and, as stated earlier, well-being is premised on the nature of what is ‘good’ for people. By focusing upon every residents’ well-being, in a utilitarian way, it becomes possible to use the concept of well-being to underscore changing economic realities.

The second theme identified is ‘balance’. The context for the shift in offering service-users choice articulated as ‘preferences’ appears to be an economic one. In the current economic climate of ‘austerity measures’ and the ‘demographic time-bomb’ of increasing numbers of elderly people with social care needs, some councils appear to find themselves needing to address the desire to balance their responsibilities explicitly.

In the documents, balance became a metaphor upon which to draw. Kirmayer (1988: 57) argues that ‘when values are explicit, they may be openly debated but rhetoric uses metaphor to smuggle values into discourse that proclaims itself rational, even-handed and value-free’. Something which is balanced is equally apportioned, fair, and stable, guarding against inequity and instability. The metaphor of balance is called on in the rhetoric of the documents to convey a utilitarian-style value which asserts that, whilst service users are required to be self-responsible, it is taken for granted that people will recognise the common sense approach of councils by which they must ensure that budgets are balanced to fulfilling their responsibilities. Individual independence and autonomy is then limited. In times of relative prosperity well-being can be associated with the individual, with the body personal, but in times of austerity it once more becomes associated with the collective and the body politic, albeit with a different emphasis. Underpinning the metaphor of balance is the notion of a ‘responsible council’ as one which successfully manages its finances and does not overspend and go over budget. The ‘balance’ here is not the scales of justice but the book-keeper’s ledger. Appeals to well-being in this regard become the tool of the accountant, not the social worker and, most certainly not the service-user.

**Conclusion: Implications of the Study**

As the Councils’ policy documents could be read as instructions for how their professionals are meant to behave, and social workers are likely to be at the forefront of implementing these changes, our initial findings point to social work find-
ing itself once again potentially compromised, in this case by a focus upon individual well-being articulated through a limited conception of choice.

Social work is once more at a cross-roads, faced with choices about how to respond to these developments. Social work needs to reclaim its historical agenda developed around the body politic and engage not only with service-users, but also with the strictures of developing policy. It should be aware of the history of its language being co-opted by others, resulting in it being pushed into actions which do not accord with its socially liberal aims (Scull 1983; Simpson & Price 2010).

A discernible catalyst for the rebalancing between an economic/objective understanding of well-being and a personal/subjective one is the change in economic fortunes in recent years from prosperity to austerity. There is no room for the redemption of a council with debts. Similarly service-users who rely on services are now faced with hostility from other ‘residents’. Services are effectively competing with each other and the public for supremacy, and the policy, begun in 2010, of removing ring-fencing has intensified this. Presenting such political arguments as ‘reasonable’; ‘fair’; balanced; and promoting ‘well-being’ aims to establish a specific hegemonic structure, embedded within cultural expectations, which reduce complex social and economic debates to taken-for-granted assumptions. This brief study suggests that this is occurring across Councils in the Midlands, and, most likely elsewhere.

It is our conclusion that in England we are experiencing a cultural turn, which is being developed through local policies with social workers likely to be the people who will be implementing such policies. Oppositional groups such as Disabled People Against Cuts (2013) and the Social Work Action Network (2013) are, by definition, small. The ‘body politic’, comprising of other ‘residents’ and politicians, is engaged in a more or less coherent set of policies designed to reshape well-being in the form of the fairness of a ‘reasonable’ council. At present, in England, this reconceptualising of well-being appears to be holding sway.

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References


Thematic Section:  
Sustainabilities

Edited by  
Carina Ren, Tom O´Dell & Adriana Budeanu
Sustainabilities in the Cultural Economy

By Carina Ren, Tom O’Dell & Adriana Budeanu

How does sustainability manifest itself when examined from within the broad field of the cultural economy? This was the pivotal question of the call for contributors originally sent out for this special issue of *Culture Unbound on Sustainabilities*. The reason for “multiplying” the concept of sustainability was a wish to critically address and examine its multiple applications and tensions through different disciplinary lenses. By looking at how the three pillars of “people, planet and profit” intertwine, or as also noted in several of the contributions, remain detached, we were eager to capture and address the concept not as a coherent entity, but rather as multiple – as a matter of sustainabilities.

As sustainability has become an increasingly recognized or even essential label, some would say add-on, for tourism and retail products, corporate and educational profiles, development policies and place brands, the concept is also becoming increasingly (or at least more visibly) entangled in paradoxical and controversial relationships, which render clear that it is far from an uncontested or easily applicable term. Also, multimedia exposure reveal time and again the difficulties or ambiguities, for instance, in producing, tracing and trusting organic produce or “green” retail products, responsibly investing public and private funds, or in maintaining a balanced triple bottom line. The question is whether the difficulty of handling the concept is equivalent to its failure. Is what we are seeing in the media an early sign of its future disappearance? Are the current “cracks” a sign of the concept’s pliability or a sign of its collapse?

With this special issue, we wish to contribute to the ongoing interrogations into the usability and value of sustainability as a concept. What does it actually do to organize or focus a common effort for the people, profit and planet which it claims to include into its equation? Ultimately, we hope that the ongoing investigations and testing of its manifold and disputed features, uses and manifestations, its pliability, continuous reshaping and boundaries may lead to new ways of transgressing the limits of this notion so widely (mis)used in today’s society.

The Contributions

The present special issue is composed of four articles, which all revolve around the concept of sustainability. However, and nicely fitting the special issue title of Sustainabilities, they do so very differently. While three of the articles devote particular attention to its linkage to environmental issues (Kopnina; Smythe; and...
Johnson), it’s attachments to questions of economy (all be it as an aspect of the social) (Smythe) and it’s socio-cultural implications (Johnson), a fourth (Fuentes) is concerned with how green consumers are enacted through a sustainability centered marketing strategy. In the following, we will introduce the contributions and reflect on how the contributions as a whole inform us on the concept of sustainability,

In the article *A Historian’s Critique of Sustainability*, Smythe proposes – as the title suggests, to critically challenge “the three-pronged diagram that integrates economic, social and environmental factors of planning and decision-making” (p. 914). Through the classic humanistic approach of examining origins, in this case of the sustainability framework, she shows how scholars and professionals are more bound “by past formulations of society, economies and the environment than they realize” (p. 914f). In her critique of the sustainability model, Smythe calls for a new holistic sustainability paradigm, which does not isolate the economy, but rather integrates it back into the social, where – she argues - it rightly belongs.

In *Contesting “Environment” Through the Lens of Sustainability: Examining implications for environmental education (EE) and education for sustainable development (ESD)*, Kopnina reversely discusses the implications of seeing not the economy, but the environment as a social construction, that is a culturally and socially mediated concept. Showing how this approach limits the understanding of nature to its human perception, she further elaborates on how nature is commodified and rendered instrumental in environmental education. As she argues, education must be re-instated as being for and not of nature, in order to sustain nature.

By the third article, *Work at the Periphery? Issues of Tourism Sustainability in Jamaica*, the alert reader begins to discern why sustainability has been so difficult to delimit or define, as Johnson directs our attention to the third “leg” of sustainability, namely the social, hereby completely shifting the perspective upon sustainability. Johnson does so by means of an ethnographic exploration of the impact of the all-inclusive resort on local communities and economies. By focusing on tourism related local impacts and responses, which specific communities stand confronted with, Johnson seeks to address the contested term of sustainable tourism from a socio-culturally or local economic point of view.

After a three tiered tour de force, sustainability stands before us as a highly malleable – some would say ambivalent, concepts as they all question, as Kopnina puts it, “whether the objective of balancing (the) social, economic and environmental triad is achievable” (p. 933). In the fourth contribution, Fuentes shifts the attention away from the difficult questions of defining the concept or balancing its components through a performative approach to the concept. He does so by asking not what sustainability is, but rather how it works, in the present case as part of the enactment of the green consumer. Through an analysis of the sustainability strategies by which so-called green retailers market their products, Fuentes
describes the coming together of a knowledgeable green connoisseur, a green hedonist in search of the good life. This consumer, as noted by Fuentes, is neither rebel nor activist. In the described case, the consumer is not political, but rather a pleasure seeker with a green conscience.

As argued by Smythe in the present volume, simply bringing society, economy and environment “together in a polygon has not created and cannot create sustainability” (p. 915). The current contributions display great disparity in academically addressing and describing the polygon, for instance by turning to deep ecology (Kopnina) or to the social deconstruction of economy as external to society. However, all contributors seem to agree that sustainability will not do in addressing the serious challenges which it was conceived as an answer to.

In spite of their notable differences in academic backgrounds, methodologies and field of study, the four contributors point to the concepts’ political substance (or lack hereof). When Smythe asserts that “concerns for both people and planet calls for thinking more deeply and rigorously about the interconnectedness between people and the environment” (p. 926), such concerns are not strictly “academic” as noted by Kopnina in regards to her discussion of deep ecology. They are also political. Therefore, as Fuentes notes, it is vital to study cultural phenomena such as the green consumer, because “by determining whom the green consumer is/should be we are also to some extent determining how sustainability is to be approached” (p. 974).

It is this struggle over how sustainability is approached – or perhaps rather how sustainability multiplies into sustainabilities in a variety of contexts and practices, which needs to be continually addressed by scholars. As such, our wish in opening this call for papers was not to raise attention to the lack of clear definitions of what sustainability is, but rather to consider how we may come to terms and deal with its inability to perform as a coherent concept.

As editors to this volume we had asked contributors to reflect on sustainability in relation to the cultural economy. We received over twenty proposals and we chose four submissions for publication. But we still miss a very different perspective on what sustainability can imply, which none of the contributions directly addressed, although Smythe’s discussion of the human spirit (and human qualities such as truth, beauty and goodness) does approach. That is, as we reflect upon sustainability we are surprised, dare we say worried, by the degree to which this cultural economy focuses upon very public, and rather impersonal relationships to the subject. Why don’t we frame sustainability more in very personal and emotional terms? In a time in which stress, burn-out, divorce, and feelings of inadequacy are so prevalent, why aren’t these issues framed more often in terms of sustainability. How do we sustain love in a time so preoccupied with career success and economic return, because while very many people succeed in doing this, very many people do not. The triple helix which so many scholars interested in sustainability circle around is bound to the three “p’s” “people, planet and profit”. All too
often this is framed as the “social, the ecological and the economic”. But the mag-
ic of life is so often bound to the realm of the emotional. How can we better un-
derstand sustainability on a private plane between individuals? This is also a cul-
tural economy of affect in need of further attention. As editors for this volume we
wonder why discussions of sustainability remain so anchored in discussions of
rationality, choice, morality, and public engagement. In the literature there exists a
field of study focused upon the cultural economy of the emotional and private
plane, not least developed by scholars such as Hochschild (2003; 2012), but per-
haps it would be fruitful to more explicitly develop this field in relation to the
question of sustainability.

The contributions to this volume relate critically to the notion of sustainability,
pointing to the limits of the concept, but the case may be that sustainability as a
subject needs to be focused much more on a personal, emotional and thereby cul-
tural plane. If we can’t save the world (and the authors to this volume and so
many others are in agreement that discussions of sustainability seem to be ineffec-
tive at best in moving in this direction) maybe it’s time to sink the bar, and reflect
upon the cultural economy of sustainability and personal relations. That would
imply shifting the focus of discussions of sustainability from the political and
economic plane to the personal and social plane. To this end we would argue for a
need to follow Smythe’s line of argumentation, and even push it further, refram-
ing sustainability not in terms of the economic, environmental and social, but re-
moving the first two of these three legs upon which sustainability has been framed
over the past 50 years (or at least diminishing the focus upon them), and adding a
new one… the emotional/personal – and testing the premises upon which sustain-
ability might be framed, not as a project of political strategy or rational choice, but
as one of emotional orientation and cultural disposition.

An introduction is not the place to fully develop such a position, but perhaps
we can encourage readers and other scholars to take this as a point of departure for
further contemplation and debate. In closing, we would like to thank the contribu-
tors and the editorial team at Culture Unbound for joining us on the journey that
completing this special issue of Culture Unbound implied, and look forward to
following the debates on sustainability that will follow in the years to come. We
are keen to learn what may come next in the common endeavor to develop appro-
priate and useful concepts and tools to create a world – and worldly practices –
accommodating people, culture, nature, and the realm of affective engagement as
inclusively as possible.

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**References**


An Historian's Critique of Sustainability

By Kathleen R. Smythe

Abstract

The most common word-based image of sustainability is a balanced three-way relationship between the environment, society and the economy, sometimes portrayed as a triangle, sometimes as a Venn diagram. The idea is that if you consider all three equally you will have a sustainable outcome. After twenty years of use, however, it has yet to yield a radically different approach to policy, planning or business. The combination of abundant and cheap energy and an emphasis on production has resulted in the separation of economics from both social and biophysical worlds. The long-established practice of isolating the three elements makes re-associating them difficult. Even if it were possible, a more holistic approach to human welfare, both in relation to the natural and social worlds, is likely to bring societies closer to sustainability. The suggestion is that a framework that starts from the premise of providing meaningful work and meaningful lives will support the flourishing of other species as well as the human species.

Keywords: Sustainable development, Brundtland Commission, poverty, energy
Introduction

Sustainability is a broad term that suggests where those concerned with planetary welfare might fruitfully direct their attention (Jacob 1994: 241). The most common framework for sustainability is a three-pronged diagram that integrates economic, social and environmental factors for planning and decision-making. This diagram, sometimes a triangle, sometimes a Venn diagram, highlights the need to keep multiple priorities in mind in order to achieve sustainability in a variety of contexts, such as education, business, human rights law, and urban planning (Elkington 1994: 90-100; McGoldrick 1996: 796-818; Elkington 1997; Davidson 2009: 607-608). Such a framework has been in use for more than twenty years and has yet to yield a markedly different approach to constructing human societies to ensure the long-term welfare of the human and other species.

Fig. 1: The Sustainability Triangle

Most, even those critiquing our current systems and ways of operating, accept the triangle, including the isolation of economics from the social and environmental legs, as the best operational mechanism for achieving a more sustainable future. For example, authors of The Resilience Imperative, Michael Lewis and Pat Conaty, argue that a steady state economy is the solution to more resilient societies, emphasizing the primacy of the economic leg (Lewis & Conaty 2012: 2, 33). Ecological economists, too, want to include the resources and goods derived from our ecological systems to our economic reckoning but not necessarily change the fact that one leg is economics (Lewis & Conaty 2012: 332).

The Problem: Isolating Economics

Such widespread acceptance of the sustainability concept and lack of significant change after decades suggest a need to re-examine the origins of the sustainability framework for clues to explain its inutility. How the current framework (or the triangle) came to be and why it has been unsuccessful is the focus of this article. I will argue two things. The first is that one of the primary hindrances to achieving sustainability, or the associated idea of sustainable development, is that scholars and professionals are more bound by past formulations of society, economics and
the environment than they realize. For decades now, and before the three-part framework was developed in the early 1980s, these facets have been considered in isolation. It is particularly important that economics has been isolated from social and environmental considerations. Simply bringing them together in a polygon has not created and cannot create sustainability.

Unlike previous economists, such as the French Physiocrats, current economists dismiss societies’ relationship to the biophysical and social worlds as inconsequential, making integration impossible to achieve (Hall & Klitgaard 2012: 104). Economics is but one prism for understanding society, and prevailing neoliberal economics is a particularly narrow one. As economist Karl Polanyi and others have claimed, economics is a societal construct, too; it does not exist outside of human societies (Daly & Farley 2011: 7). Economist Kenneth Boulding wrote decades ago that, “there is no such thing as economics, only social science applied to economic problems” (Lewis & Conaty 2012: 332). And changes in economics render changes across society.

The weaknesses and faults of current economic thought are more obvious in the developing world than in the industrialized world from whence they came. As the late professor of development sociology Thomas Lyson wrote, “the ‘seams’ of the neoclassical [economic] viewpoint are most evident” in developing countries (Lyson 2004: 24). One reason for this is that the field of economics and the assumptions built into it stem from a Northern, “successful” perspective. Such views have been built, in part, on the South’s heavy economic work of providing cheap resources and cheap labor for the benefit of the North (Hall & Klitgaard 2012: 64).

Africans’ experiences with colonialism and development bring into sharp relief what happens when a society or country is examined primarily through the lens of economics, as extractive colonial governments did. The attendant consequences in religion, politics, and culture were not always anticipated and often complicated. For example, a focus on cash crops for export, such as coffee and tea, meant that men who had either cooperated with women in food production or played a secondary role now had government-sanctioned access to agricultural technology and the cash associated with export crops, while women and children were left as subsistence producers. A strong gender divide in terms of access to the cash economy has prevailed ever since in many African societies, as has a concomitant sense of gender identity shaped by access to the market economy (Gilbert and Reynolds 2012: 286-307; Mathabane 1987; M’Mbugu-Schelling 1987).2

Another more recent African example demonstrates how challenging it is to embrace all three aspects of sustainability equally. When the improved seeds, pesticides, and biotechnology associated with the Green Revolution increased yields in places like Mexico and India during the 1960s, such changes did not occur in Africa. In the twenty-first century, a number of development organizations, including the Gates Foundation, have decided that the Green Revolution is part of
the solution to Africa’s economic woes (Blaustein 2008: 8-14). Yet, one of the results of the Green Revolution decades ago was persistent social inequalities as well as environmental degradation. Without attention to this reality, the results will be the same in Africa. Thus, the Green Revolution will likely increase production, the economic side of the triangle, at the risk of little improvement on the other two sides of the triangle (Kerr 2012: 213-229). Moreover, as both these examples demonstrate, the disruption of subsistence agriculture has been a chief attribute of development, one that sustainability has done little to disrupt. Moving people away from subsistence production has been a long-standing desire.

Why, given our understanding of such global events over the past century, would we isolate economic ideas from other important social constructs, such as household, community, politics or religion in the pursuit of sustainability (Littig & Griesler 2005: 67; Davidson 2009: 616)? The pursuit of sustainable development (a derivative of the triangle most clearly articulated in the UN document *Our Common Future*) has not eradicated poverty or promoted a more sustainable use of global resources (Jacob 1994: 239). Part of the challenge that the sustainability movement has faced up to this point is that it has isolated economics as deserving special recognition and attention in sustainability decisions.

Because of the pervasiveness of the isolation of economics from the environment and society, the current framework is not the best representation of human welfare or prospects. This, then, is the second argument of the paper. As a species, there are fundamental needs and relationships integral to human thriving. Reframing sustainability on the basis of holistic human welfare, both in relation to the natural and social worlds, is likely to bring societies closer to sustainability. It also begins to integrate the anthropocentric and intrinsic value views of the natural world, arguing that optimal human welfare is consonant with rich, diverse ecosystems.

A History of the Triangle

Isolating Economics

The sustainability triangle captures a history of ideas—first that economics became isolated from the natural world and society and, then, that policymakers and politicians sought to restore the connections. There is one foundational reason for economics’ isolation from the environment and society, paving the way for the reign of neoliberal economics, when economists and politicians believed that if you got the economics right, particularly production, then other societal interests would follow. The foundational piece is the unprecedented economic growth associated with the last two centuries, and the twentieth century particularly, made possible largely from abundant and cheap supplies of fossil fuels. These trends brought renewed interest in markets, an idea that was reinforced with the fall of
European communist states in the late 1980s. Then at least two other developments, a concern for poverty and environmental degradation, brought scholars and policymakers to the point of trying to re-integrate economics, society and the environment.

The Industrial Revolution was possible due to the concentrated energy of coal that released people and animals from a variety of tasks, making work more efficient. Economic development leapfrogged again with the commercial use of petroleum. Liquid fossil fuels were discovered in large quantities in Pennsylvania in the middle of the nineteenth century. At the time of discovery, there seemed to be little use for the black gold, as historian Brian C. Black calls it (Black 2012: 20-30). Yet, a decline in whale oil production, abundant quantities of crude petroleum, and an entrepreneurial capitalist spirit created an industry by the end of the nineteenth century. “By the 1920s, the nearly useless product had become the lifeblood of national security to the United States and Great Britain,” Black writes (Black 2012: 59). Such dependence led to an alliance between the oil tycoons and the U.S. government, resulting in an oil economy that relied on transnational extraction and refining (Black 2012: 67-93). Historian John McNeill calculates that “we have probably deployed more energy since 1900 than in all of human history” (Black 2012: 10).

Such abundant, cheap energy is an historical anomaly and, according to systems ecologist Charles A.S. Hall and economist Kent A. Klitgaard, lured most economists and politicians away from the biophysical foundations of our economy. In Energy and The Wealth of Nations Hall and Klitgaard write, “The only effective and large-scale technology that so far has been ‘invented’ for capturing and storing that energy is photosynthesis.” We use products of photosynthesis for all of our needs. Fossil fuels, ancient plant material, are no exception. All the theories that dominate economic thought today were developed on the upslope of the Hubbert curve, during a time characterized by the enormously increasing availability, and declining cost of obtaining, energy,” Hall and Klitgaard proffer (Black 2012: 101-2). The Hubbert curve is Shell Oil executive M. King Hubbert’s depiction of the rate of global oil production with a peak occurring some time around 1970.

One result of the spread of the use of cheap hydrocarbon energy was that economists stopped worrying about the limits of solar flow and the limits of the biophysical world, essentially ignoring energy, and, instead, turned to social explanations for economic problems, focusing on production and wealth generation (Black 2012: 71, 97-8). In fact, even though abundant, oil and minerals remain the means by which modern societies add value through labor and capital to produce goods. To ignore it, as Herman Daly notes, is “nonsensical” (Daly 2008: 513).

After decades of access to cheap fuel, a belief in endless growth came to be government policy through Reaganomics or neoliberal economics in the United States, similar policies in Great Britain, and the imposition of such policies glob-
ally through institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (Ferguson 2009: 172-3). This was the second wave of unregulated markets in the twentieth century, the first occurring between the 1890s and 1920s (Lewis & Conaty 2012: 39). After the Great Depression, economics and economic decision-making earned high prestige in both the United States and Great Britain, as governments sought to control and revive their economies both in the 1930s and after World War II (Daly & Farley 2011: xix-xx). But the emphasis for decades (between the 1930s and 1970s) was on Keynesian economics with a concern for employment and a role for the state in economic planning. Several decades after World War II there was a return to unregulated markets as faith in government planning, both in capitalist and communist countries waned. While both communism (or state-planned economies) and capitalism placed value on extracting resources at faster and faster rates to fuel economic growth, capitalism favored free markets rather than planned economies. With the fall of communism in the late 1980s, greater faith was placed on the unregulated market as the arbiter for economic production, emphasizing economics’ disconnect from both environment and society.

Since the 1980s, in both the North and the South, the hegemonic idea was that if societies reduced government and encouraged free markets, more people would have more goods and better lives. This was neoliberalism, a belief in maximizing utility (Jacob 1994: 241). Neoliberal economics under Margaret Thatcher in Great Britain was marked by a twenty percent reduction in the civil service during her tenure (Kavanagh 1997: 123). By the time Thatcher left office in 1990, two-thirds of publicly owned assets had been sold. The Conservative government also cut the income tax rate from 33 to 25 percent (Kavanagh 1997: 127). The era was marked by declining labor union influence and middle class influence in the form of increasing control over public school and university teachers (Kavanagh 1997: 128-9). In the United States, the airline industry was deregulated, welfare reduced, and private investment encouraged. Deregulation of the airline industry, meant to promote competition, soon left the top five airlines controlling seventy-one percent of the market and able to charge exorbitant fees on some routes and for some seats (Kuttner 1989). In addition, during eight years in office, Reagan cut social welfare deeply and implemented policies that resulted in both unemployment and a more nimble workforce as well as the closure of a number of companies and a more modern industrial sector (Aho & Levinson 1988: 10-25). The various policies weakened labor union strength, workers’ wages and security.

Labor, people really, became secondary to narrowly conceived economic policy. Keynesian economics had foregrounded employment as an important element of economic policy. After the 1970s wages and corporate growth and success became disconnected, except at the upper ranks of leadership, as prevailing theorists argued that the best possible way to improve the overall global economy was by promoting policies that favored production, not full employment or fair wages.
A stronger focus on the market masked “non-economic and non-market forms of human relationships” (Keys 1998: 80).

The last five decades have been marked by divergent paths for many industrialized countries (many in the North) and less-industrialized, usually previously colonized countries in the South. Yet, citizens in both places have faced similar policies. In the South, the 1980s was marked by “structural adjustment,” including budget austerity and market liberalization (Rist 2008: 171). The results, in many cases, in both the North and the South, resulted in adjusting well being downwards to meet the “imperatives of the market economy” (Rist 2008: 173). In response, in the South non-governmental organizations and the United Nations sought to ameliorate the consequences of these economic policies through community-based and small-scale ventures (Rist 2008: 173). Across the globe, economics was no longer integrated into society as a source of employment or as a system that needed governmental checks or balances to ensure citizens’ welfare. If checks and balances did exist, they came from civil society.

A Concern for and Construction of Material Poverty (and Devaluing of Manual Labor)

By the 1980s, economists and policy-makers had largely dis-connected economics from both its environmental and social foundations. And the costs of efforts in these directions had been clear to some for decades as social movements and government policies responded to the inequality, injustice and degradation such beliefs were causing. Since the 1950s, a view of the world—not of rich and poor countries—came to dominate in the North. Dividing the world into “poor” and “rich” has its origins in the post-World War II era (Bertaux, Smythe, and Crable 2012: 34-45). President Truman’s inaugural address in 1948 is an oft-cited early public statement of such a belief system. In it he identifies the “ancient enemies” of “hunger, misery, and despair” as problems to be overcome. Hunger had been a long-standing concern, as Thomas Malthus’ oft-cited projections in 1798 indicate (Hall & Klitgaard 2012: 208). Through much of the nineteenth century, hunger was a specter for many (Hall & Klitgaard 2012: 212). Truman saw technology and international cooperation as means to eradicate global poverty. He invited other countries “to pool their technological resources” to benefit peoples elsewhere as “our commerce with other countries expands as they progress industrially and economically” (American Experience). Cheap fossil fuels were leading to spectacular agricultural production rates, a thousand times greater than those associated with slash and burn agriculture of the tropics, suggesting that hunger could be eradicated (Mazoyer & Roudart 2006). It seemed clear to many that economic and social welfare could be joined. Yet, this formulation of poverty, reliant upon increasing use of technology for its eradication, has done little to bridge the gap.

Misery and despair are likely a reference to difficult, labor-intensive work (often for subsistence rather than market production) and the rudimentary housing
and clothing conditions often associated with it, conditions that most in the United States were only a generation or two away from when Truman gave his call to action. He called upon the international community to aid and develop the less fortunate, decolonizing states to overcome such enemies (McMichael 2008: 274).

Yet, Truman’s and others’ promotion of development constructed poverty or “modernized poverty” by devaluing subsistence economies (McMichael 2008: 276-7). Walt Rostow’s “big push” of the 1960s and Jeffrey Sach’s ladder of development of the 2000s are two examples (Rostow 1960). Bill McKibben describes Sachs’ idea:

[It is a] progression of development that moves from subsistence agriculture toward light manufacturing and urbanization, and on to high tech services. You begin with peasants who “typically know to build their own houses, grow and cook food, tend to animals, and make their own clothing. They are therefore construction workers, veterinarians, and agronomists, and apparel manufacturers. They do it all, and their abilities are deeply impressive.” But they are also “deeply inefficient,” because “Adam Smith pointed out to us that specialization, where each of us learns just one of these skills, leads to a general improvement of everybody’s well-being” (McKibben 2010: 163).

In this view, specialization and reliance on the market economy are key to individual and societal success. The social leg of the triangle becomes primarily focused on the eradication of material poverty, feeding the notion that economics is more important than any other aspect of society.

But, as Sach’s view acknowledges, if only implicitly, development leads not only to a materially more complex lifestyle but also to one in which there is more vulnerability, both for individuals and societies, as they come to rely on the marketplace for most of their needs rather than satisfying some of them through their own labor and relationships. This is not a new realization. Historian William McNeill offers, “catastrophe is the underside of the human condition—a price we pay for being able to alter natural balances and to transform the face of the earth through collective effort and the use of tools.” The better humans become at controlling nature, the more vulnerable humans are to catastrophe (Foster 2011: 1). McNeill’s view that economic exploitation through technology leads to endemic catastrophe is different than that of the Brundtland Commission as will be seen; in their view poverty leads to endemic catastrophe.

As sociologist Phillip McMichael argues, the “have/have-not” division was not only created by Northern power but has been perpetuated by it as well. Thus, the WTO (World Trade Organization) promotes corporate agriculture, driving farmers off their land, while the World Bank seeks to eradicate poverty, a poverty that is most readily apparent in urban slums, where failing farmers flee. “Then its [the WTO’s] success (abundant commercial food) is simultaneously its failure (a billion slum dwellers),” he claims (McMichael 2008: 274). Thus, capitalist industry promotes dislocation and modernized poverty while social interests seek to ameliorate the conditions. Economic and societal interests work at cross-purposes.
Ending hunger, misery and despair are not strictly economic enterprises but because they have been promoted as such, a truncated version of human needs, featuring access to wages and goods in the marketplace, has been promoted.

The Construction of Social Poverty and Valuing Technology

Within neoliberal economics there is an almost unassailable belief in technology as intrinsically good. There are two relevant consequences of this belief. The first is an undue emphasis on ease of access to food, water and shelter that often gets translated into the ability to reduce hard labor and hard living and sometimes a rationale for destruction of subsistence economies. The assumption was (and is) that those in subsistence economies “could not live life fully,” as Gustavo Esteva has noted (Keys 1998: 83). While the industrialized West has realized access to water and health care and other benefits by pursuing technological and economic development, this does not mean ours is the only path to such achievements nor does it mean that such development has not had significant costs (Borgmann 1984: 103). Pursuit of technology has lead to disengagement from community and dissatisfaction with work, or diminution of the human spirit, due to reduction in connection to people and the Earth. Philosopher Albert Borgmann laments the contraction of expertise and expansion of unskilled labor, for example, as a result of promoting comfort, mobility, and access (Borgmann 1984: 52-120). A second consequence is the increased vulnerability discussed earlier. In both cases, a balance between individuals’ ability to meet some of their needs and elimination of backbreaking work is not part of general economic discussions. Sustainability has inherited a narrow concern for material welfare that has excluded of other means of promoting material welfare as well as consideration of social welfare.

A Concern for the Environment

The other movement since the 1960s, in addition to a concern for poverty, has been an environmental movement. Political scientist Glenn Ricketts seeks the roots of sustainability in both the environmental movement and other social movements of the 1960s and early 1970s. Both were a response to the fast-paced economic and social changes wrought by cheap fuels. While “conservationism began long before the 1960s, … its environmentalist incarnation arose with the publication of … Silent Spring in 1962,” he writes (Ricketts 2010: 20-21). One of the ways in which environmentalism is distinguishable from sustainability is that the former rarely saw or acted upon interconnections between environmental and social injustice, preferring to focus on the environment, while others worked on issues of race and gender, or systemic injustices due to lack of access to power. The environmental movement’s links to the feminist movement and environmental justice, among others, helped pave the way for sustainability (Ricketts 2010: 38-40). “When it did emerge, the sustainability doctrine offered a way to synthe-
size environmentalism with civil rights themes and anti-poverty programs,” Ricketts continues (Ricketts 2010: 35). With Ricketts’ analysis, it is clear how heretofore disparate facets, society and the environment, were considered together.

A Concern for Poverty and Environment – the Brundtland Commission

In the early 1980s, with a concern for social equity (particularly poverty), the environment and a commitment to endless growth, an international team wrote the seminal document for sustainability and its closely associated idea, sustainable development. In 1983 the General Assembly of the United Nations asked the Secretary-General to appoint a commission on the environment and development. The Prime Minister of Norway, Mrs. Gro Harlem Brundtland became Chair of the Commission. The members, politicians and environmental experts from various countries, published their report, *Our Common Future*, in 1988. They recognized that human activities, particularly ones associated with development, were destroying the environment but, at the same time, poorer peoples, certainly deserved more development. They sought to re-integrate what had become and still was becoming an isolated perspective on economics, human welfare and environmental sustainability. The triangle placed all three in relation and carved out a space in the center for sustainability. Sustainable development was reinvigorated. But the model was deeply flawed because the dominant economic system was not flexible enough to accommodate the holistic connected thinking necessary for complete re-integration.

In this intellectual and geopolitical environment, The Commission wrote:

> Humanity has the ability to make development sustainable—to ensure that it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The concept of sustainable development does imply limits—not absolute limits but limitations imposed by the present state of technology and social organization on environmental resources and by the ability of the biosphere to absorb the effects of human activities. But technology and social organization can both be managed and improved to make way for a new era of economic growth. The Commission believes that widespread poverty is no longer inevitable. Poverty is not only an evil in itself, but sustainable development requires meeting the basic needs of all and extending to all the opportunity to fulfill their aspirations for a better life. A world in which poverty is endemic will always be prone to ecological and other catastrophes (Rist 2008: 181).

In this passage, the emphasis is on more development (through better technology and social organization) in order to eradicate poverty. A gesture toward the environment and limits was all that was achieved likely due to a faith in the market economy and a primary concern for material poverty (Rist 2008: 194). Here and throughout the document, the focus is on realizing economic concerns, justified in part at least by social concerns (Rist 2008: 182). For example, in the Introduction, the Commission writes, “Our report…is not a prediction of ever increasing environmental decay, poverty and hardship…. We see instead the possibility for a new era of economic growth, one that must be based on policies that sustain and ex-
pand the environmental resource base” (Our Common Future). The message is that human technology will overcome environmental limits for the sake of development. Finally, Our Common Future concludes that ending material poverty is the only way to ensure societal sustainability, while others have long been concerned that societal vulnerability is due as much if not more to investment in endless growth without concern for limits.

The triangle, born of concern with current practices, sought a way to bridge economics long-standing isolation, but instead it reinforced the autonomy of the economy from the two systems of which it is an inherent part because the value system under which the authors and their host countries operated was not substantially different than what had come before (Jacob 1994: 241). Therefore, the resulting framework did not subsume economics back into the environment and society. It has, however, brought warranted attention to the challenges inherent in halting environmental degradation. A number of conferences followed in the next decade, including the “Earth Summit” in Rio de Janeiro and UN Framework Conventions on Climate Change and Biological Diversity all in 1992. As a result, most development projects seek to understand the environmental implications of their plans.

Yet, weaknesses of the formulation are clear to many who have sought to clarify sustainability and sustainable development in order to implement beneficent concrete actions. Development studies scholar Gilbert Rist has noted that “humanity has the ability to make development sustainable” is a circular argument, “assuming as true what has to be demonstrated,” which is particularly troubling because the concept is not accompanied by policy guidance (Rist 2008: 180). Ecological economist Herman Daly has called for a distinction between development and growth. He defines the former as “qualitative improvement” and the latter as “quantitative physical increase” (Daly 2008: 513). For Daly, sustainable development would mean “qualitative improvement in design, technology, efficiency, and ordering of priorities... without quantitative increase in the entropic throughput from environmental sources to sinks” (Daly 2008: 513-14). This distinction is useful because it moves closer to a means by which human societies could seek both reduction of poverty and ease pressure on environmental resources. It is a move that Professor Merle Jacob of the Lund University School of Economics and Management also supports but she warns that such a re-definition of economic policy for sustainability would require a new framework for sustainable development as it is a radical departure from previous assumptions (1994).

Both Daly’s and Jacob’s critiques recognize that since the 1988 document growth replaced concern for human rights. The United Nations’ annual country reports for its Human Development Index (begun in 1990) recognizes other ways of improving human welfare and development beyond growth. The index includes school enrollment/literacy and life expectancy, among other factors. Economist and Nobel laureate Amartya Sen’s definition of development is a measure of a
people’s ability to make choices about their own futures (Sen 1999). In these conceptualizations, human welfare is broader than material welfare.

Such notions get closer to a more holistic vision of what humanity might be but they don’t sufficiently tackle the underlying premise of development as proportional to material comfort and ease of labor or, to put it more strongly, that “poverty is an evil in itself” (Rist 2008: 182). A more successful sustainability model might start with who humans are and what they need to thrive. Then with a more realistic view of the limited utility of technology and economics’ ability to meet human needs, the work of crafting a new model can begin.

**Toward a New Framework: Meaningful Work and Meaningful Lives**

The first step is to be explicit about holistic human needs rather than simply material ones. Hall and Klitgaard offer a place to begin. “To be sustainable, an economy must live indefinitely within nature’s limits…. A sustainable economy must be able to provide not only jobs but, ideally, also meaningful work and meaningful lives for those human beings who make up ‘the economy (Hall & Klitgaard 2012: 35).’” In this definition the economy must answer to the welfare of the environment and people first.

In similar language, The United Kingdom’s Sustainable Development Commission calls for prosperity rather than economic growth. The former is achieved by the strength of relationships, social trust, satisfaction at work, civic engagement, and a sense of shared meaning and purpose as essential to prosperity (Lewis & Conaty 2012: 15). To achieve this, governments must “provide creative opportunities for people to flourish” and “establish clear resource and environmental limits on economic activity” (Lewis & Conaty 2012: 15). Resource and environmental limits would likely reduce reliance on the market for some human needs. Meaningful jobs and meaningful lives (involving a reasonable measure of subsistence work and access to technology), full of meaning and purpose, provide a starting point for a critique of the triangle.

A third way of thinking about non-material needs is in terms of the human spirit, something that makes us distinct from all other species, and thus is part of human nature. According to psychologist Michael Penn and political scientist Aditi Malik there are two elements to the human spirit: “to consciously strive to attain that which is perceived to be true, beautiful and good” and our psychological sense of self with hopes and aspirations “that transcend the struggle for mere existence and continuity as a biological organism” (Penn & Malik 2010: 665-688). The first might roughly be central to a meaningful life and the second to meaningful work. So far we have established some conditions for promoting the human spirit. But what is the relationship between meaningful lives and work and the environment?
Establishing what the relationship between meaningful lives and the environment requires re-evaluating the role of technology. Herman Daly seeks to remind that pursuit of technology should be a means to an end, human well being, not an end in itself. And his ultimate (natural capital) and intermediate means (labor and processed raw materials) are means by which humans express their nature and needs, their “ends.” Daly is missing one important intermediate end, our holistic relationship to the environment, and one ultimate end, the capability for self-sufficiency. In Daly’s scheme humans rely on natural resources for material needs alone. In actuality, we rely on natural resources for a variety of human needs. But experiences of harmony, fulfillment and transcendence (or truth, beauty, and goodness) are grounded in both the social and natural worlds.

Ecologist Daniel Botkin argues that the material world does not simply provide capital. Using Thoreau’s writings, he illuminates Thoreau’s direct observation, scientific study, and openness to new ideas as a formula for outlining what might be humans’ relationship with nature. In Botkin’s view we relate to nature for material, intellectual, and spiritual reasons (Botkin 2001). Geographer Nigel Clark’s insight that we relate to nature as vulnerable beings is important as well. We seek solace in nature, its biodiversity, beauty and grandeur and we, despite our technological prowess, remain subject to it in the form of heavy rains, tornados, lightning, and tectonic activity (Clark 2011). Thus, we relate to nature as a material, intellectual and spiritual resource.

The latter two concerns are minimized in most current formulations of sustainability. Human lives create meaning beyond labor and beyond control of resources. In fact, part of being human is being vulnerable (spirituality), working directly with natural resources and understanding or seeking to understand them (intellectual). Both inculcate a connection to the natural world (spiritual and intellectual). If prosperity of the human spirit is the goal, labor in a variety of ways, not just for wages but also for aesthetics, health and community welfare, becomes important. Such thinking shifts from policy for productivity alone to policy for meaningful work and meaningful engagement within a larger framework of human society and the environment. It likely entails some form of control or limits on technology as well to create space for human labor, community formation, a sense of vulnerability and transcendence and opportunities for direct observation and study.

Conclusion

Due to a confluence of events in the 20th century, Westerners (and many others) finished the century steeped in a deep faith in development, one that did little to promote sustainability. With some distance from our global efforts at eradicating poverty, and promoting development, sustainable or otherwise, we are in a better position than in the past to recognize that little has changed for the better in the global community as a result of 1980s sustainability. To achieve sustainability within the biophysical limits of the planet while maintaining respect for the human spirit and the human need for meaningful work, a more holistic and inclusive understanding of what it means, first, to be human and, then, members of larger societies is in order. Production and consumption are means to an end but not the only mechanism by which society should be measured. In the twenty-first century, concern for both people and planet calls for thinking more deeply and rigorously about the interconnectedness between people and the environment. In so doing, humans and human societies are seen as primarily makers of meaning (goodness, beauty, and truth) in both natural and social realms through a variety of activities, including labor, rather than makers of goods.
A new sustainability paradigm will illustrate consideration of the human spirit and broader human needs by emphasizing human nature. In this view, human nature has a multi-faceted relationship to the environment, both its tangible and intangible resources. Human societies are utterly dependent on the natural world not only for material but also intellectual and spiritual sustenance. Only a holistic view of these relationships will support the flourishing of other species as well as the human species. Such pan-species flourishing is what sustainability seeks.

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Notes

1 Elkington first introduced the triple bottom line of which people, planet and profit are an outgrowth.

2 The film *Kumekucha* illuminates women’s lives in Tanzania during the 1970s during difficult economic times. The subsistence work that women were doing and their relatively new entrance into wage labor alongside men’s disenfranchisement from the market economy are clearly visible as legacies of the colonial period.

3 Geographer Mark Davison offers one possible definition of a sustainable society as “one where social movements, forms of democracy and the foundations of political action are constantly reworked.” This definition promotes social relations organized around politics rather than the market. Beate Littig and Erich Griesler note the possibility of adding “a cultural-aesthetic, a religious-spiritual, or a political-institutional pillar.”

4 A similar approach to sustainable development can be seen in the Kyoto Protocol and Copenhagen Commitment. In both cases, it was recognized that less industrialized countries had a right to develop along lines similar to the more industrialized, carbon-emitting nations, Clark 2011: 112.

5 The term “sustainable development” was already in use but the UN document popularized it. The 1980 World Conservation Strategy authored by the World Conservation Union (IUCN), the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP), and the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) used the term. Robinson 1993: 20.

6 See also p. 46 for the first strategy for achieving sustainable development, “reviving growth.”

7 Anthropologist Jeremy Keenan provides a great example of how one institution, deeply involved in promoting the idea of sustainable development was not able to bring the legs of the triangle together in its own work. He notes that following the UN Rio Conference on Environment and Development, “the World Bank set up a special fund, the Global Environmental Facility to allocate financial assistance to countries that showed their willingness to comply with the new international charter in matters of biodiversity conservation and environmental policies…. As a parallel process, the 1990s saw the World Bank pursuing its own socioeconomic agenda of putting ‘poverty alleviation’ at the top of its priorities.” Keenan 2013: 45.
See a variety of documents at [www.worldbank.org](http://www.worldbank.org) as well as Rist 2008:190 for NGO approaches to environmental aspects of development. The Conventions on Climate Change and Biodiversity remain active.

Erick Keys notes that Donald Worster is concerned about the anthropocentric nature of sustainable development. He is more comfortable with the opposite approach that nature has intrinsic value, apart from what humans have normally associated with it. Thus, Worster “calls for an ethical and aesthetic relationship with nature.” While the interpretation here is anthropocentric it also recognizes an aesthetic and spiritual relationship to nature that is beyond our control. The proposal here seeks to move beyond the anthropocentric/intrinsic dichotomy to a view of nature and humans’ relationship to it that is grounded in evolutionary biology and long-term history. Keys 1998: 82. Such an approach also assumes some level of biodiversity preservation for maximum human benefit. See Robinson 1993: 21.

Erick Keys is quoting Michael Redclift noting that “Societies moving toward sustainability control technology and consumption in order to satisfy basic needs, not to gather maximum profits.” Keys 1998: 81.

References


Contesting ‘Environment’ Through the Lens of Sustainability: Examining Implications for Environmental Education (EE) and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)

By Helen Kopnina

Abstract

This article reflects on implications of presenting nature as a social construction, and of commodification of nature. The social construction of nature tends to limit significance of nature to human perception of it. Commodification presents nature in strict instrumental terms as ‘natural resources’, ‘natural capital’ or ‘ecosystem services’. Both construction and commodification exhibit anthropocentric bias in denying intrinsic value of non-human species. This article will highlight the importance of a deep ecology perspective, by elaborating upon the ethical context in which construction and commodification of nature occur. Finally, this article will discuss the implications of this ethical context in relation to environmental education (EE) and education for sustainable development (ESD).

Keywords: Anthropocentrism, biodiversity, conservation, deep ecology, education for sustainable development (ESD), environmental education (EE), ethics, pluralism, sustainability, sustainable development
Introduction

This Culture Unbound special issue seeks to address the question: How does sustainability manifest itself when examined from within the broad field of cultural economy? But what is meant by sustainability? There are different terms that describe sustainability: ‘industrial ecology’, ‘business ecology’, ‘Cradle to Cradle’, ‘green capitalism’, ‘eco-efficiency’, ‘social and environmental responsibility’, and the triple bottom line (People, Planet, Profit). The word ‘sustainability’ is an adjective that means the capacity to support, maintain or endure; it can indicate both a goal and a process. In ecology sustainability describes how biological systems remain diverse, robust, and productive over time, a necessary precondition for the well-being of humans and other species. Distinction is drawn between different types of sustainability, for example between social (in terms of sustaining people’s welfare) and environmental (in terms of sustaining nature or natural resources) sustainability as well as combination of them.

Since the 1980s, the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) defines sustainability as integration of environmental, economic, and social dimensions towards responsible management of natural resources. In Our Common Future report, The Brundtland Commission (1987) characterized sustainable development as ‘development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’.

The word ‘sustainability’ became so ubiquitous; it can mean almost anything and apply to almost anything. Sustaining plant and animal life or sustaining human lifestyles can be as different (and potentially opposing) as preserving rainforest AND expanding agricultural activities in the same area. The breadth of sustainability as a subject of educational practice is reflected in environmental education (EE) and education for sustainable development (ESD) publications in journals such as Environmental Education Research, Journal of Environmental Education, International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education, and Journal of Education for Sustainable Development.

ESD can be regarded as an ‘ethical education’ that embraces universal aspects and concepts as well as variety of ethical positions (Sund & Öhman 2011; Van Poeck & Vandenabeele 2012). As Arjen Wals and Bob Jickling (2002: 223) have reflected, sustainability issues involve addressing ethical questions and issues about cultural identities, social and environmental equity, respect, society-nature relationships and tensions between intrinsic and instrumental values. Environmental ethics are seen as particularly pertinent to clarifying some of the important pedagogical grounds of environmental education (Jickling 2005; Kronlid & Öhman 2013).
While typically attempting to combine both social and environmental objectives, literature on the relationship between education, ethics and sustainable development also reflects upon potential contradictions and paradoxes embedded in sustainability discourse. ‘When comparing the sustaining of ecological processes with the sustaining of consumerism we immediately see inconsistencies and incompatibilities of values, yet many people, conditioned to think that sustainability is inherently good, will promote both at the same time’ (Wals & Jickling 2002: 223). It is questioned whether the objective of balancing social, economic and environmental triad is achievable, since the expansion of the ‘economic pie’ to the ‘bottom billion’ (Collier 2007) of the poor would lead to a greater crisis of natural resources (Bartlett 2012; Rolston 2015). Washington (2013) argues that mainstream sustainability solutions that do not take environmental integrity as a starting point do not address long term solutions and the issues connected with population and consumption.

In line with the objective of this special issue, this article aims to interrogate manifold and disputed features, uses and manifestations of the term sustainability through critical reflection on paradoxes of sustainable development. However, rather than attempting to come to terms sustainable development and deal with its inability to perform as a coherent concept, this article will argue that the mainstream concept of sustainability is largely influenced by the two trends within sustainability discourse in relation to nature.

The first trend is the social construction of nature, in which nature is seen primarily as a culturally and socially mediated concept. The second trend is commodification in which non-human species are presented as ‘natural resources’ or ‘ecosystem services’. While there are other possible or contrastive trends in this discursive field, the author has selected constructivism and commodification because they represent dominant conceptions in sustainability discourse. The following sections will reflect upon the implications of these trends and will highlight the importance of a perspective oriented towards the intrinsic values of nature, and the relevance of such a perspective to EE and ESD.

**Constructing ‘Nature’**

On the one hand, construction can refer to actual man-made ‘construction’ (creation or building) of environment by humans, as in the case of urban environments or gardens; and to social construction, that is culturally mediated way of perceiving environment. Historically, humans had a significant influence on their environment, thus parts of nature was literally ‘constructed’ into objects and artifacts by humans.

With the emergence of post-modern philosophy, yet another dimension of construction was added. That dimension can be characterized by fusing nature with human perception of it, which blends not only wild places with cultivated gardens,
but even the thought about wild places or domesticated species with their originals. This constructivism reflects the diversity of use of the term 'environment' and examines how the very definition of ‘sustainability’ fits within the broader history, issues and purposes of what sustainability is supposed to do in relation to nature (Crist 2008). Following a long tradition of epistemological doubt in philosophical thought, the very physicality of nature is fused – and in some cases made subordinate to – human perception of it (Rolston 1997).

Postmodern literary tradition has often blurred the lines between what is natural and artificial. This blending implies that ‘nature’ is connected to and does not exist outside the human perception of it (Escobar 1996). As William Cronon (1996:70) has asserted: ‘Wilderness hides its unnaturalness behind a mask that is all the more beguiling because it seems so natural. As we gaze into the mirror it holds up for us, we too easily imagine that what we behold is Nature when in fact we see the reflection of our Own unexamined longings and desires’. Continuing in this tradition, in ‘Trouble with Nature: Ecology as the New Opium of the Masses’ (2010), Erik Swyngedouw argues that ‘nature’ is the empty signifier as

the biological world is inherently relationally constituted through contingent, historically produced, infinitely variable forms in which each part, human or non-human, organic or non-organic is intrinsically bound up with the wider relation that make up the whole...a singular Nature does not exist...there is no trans-historical and/or trans-geographical transcendental natural state of things or conditions or of relations, but rather that there are a range of different historical natures, relations and environments that are subject to continuous, occasionally dramatic or catastrophic, and rarely, if ever, fully predictable changes and transformations (303).

Swyngedouw lays out an argument that: 1. ‘Nature’ and its more recent derivatives, like ‘environment’ or ‘sustainability’ are ‘empty’ signifiers. 2. There is no such thing as a singular Nature around which an environmental policy or an environmentally sensitive planning can be constructed and performed. 3. The obsession with a singular Nature that requires ‘sustaining’ or, at least ‘managing’, is sustained by a particular ‘quilting’ of Nature that forecloses asking political questions about immediately and really possible alternative socio-natural arrangements.

From this perspective, nature is not only represented by language but created by it, and ultimately becomes little more than an offshoot of social reality. What is worst, concern about environment came to be seen by some as an “elite” preoccupation (Rudy and Konefal 2007; West 2008). While dismissive of overwhelming evidence of grass-roots environmental activism and non-Western (thus ‘none-elite’) ecocentric perceptions (e.g. Black 2010), as well as anthropocentrism inherent in neoliberal view of environment in much of social science (Dunalp and Van Lier 1978; Kopnina 2012d), this view has found its way into literature on conservation, environmental ethics, and educational research.
Construction of Nature in Educational Practice

Construction of nature within EE and ESD is supported by the calls for encouraging plural and open perspectives based on the belief that there are many conceptions of nature and sustainability, and none of them are fixed or objective (e.g. Gough & Scott 2007). This implies that ‘it is a myth to think that there is a single right vision or a best way to sustain the earth’ (Wals & Jickling 2002: 224) and that ‘there are too many realities out and there, and, to make things worse, these realities shift and transform constantly’ (Wals 2010: 144). Sustainability claims are seen as socially constructed, contextual and subject to social and political struggle (Van Poeck & Vandenabeele 2012: 549). As Van Poeck and Vandenabeele emphasize, ‘researchers point at the widely accepted observation that we do not and cannot know what the most sustainable way of living is’ (2012: 547). This raises the question: ‘if values are culturally contextual and variable – are educators and education policy-makers then left with relativist positions and arguments?’ (Sund & Öhman 2014). The implications of answering this question for educational practice are profound.

Constructivist view implies that students will be (and are) taught that environmental problems are related to public debates. Instrumental aim of educating for the environment can be easily dismissed in favor of pluralistic discussions about what environment and sustainability mean to different people. The perceived danger of having an instrumental education for sustainability or for nature concerns the ‘difficulty of warranting a set of educational values and norms’ (Sund & Öhman 2014) that is inconsistent with democratic tradition of our (Western, ‘enlightened’) society. Without allowing plural perspectives, we are warned, we may even slip into what Wals and Jickling (2002: 225) called ‘eco-totalitarianism’, a ‘regime that through law and order, rewards and punishment, and conditioning of behavior can create a society that is quite sustainable according to some more ecological criteria’. Wals and Jickling continue, ‘we can wonder whether the people living within such an ‘eco-totalitarian’ regime are happy or whether their regime is just, but they do live ‘sustainably’ and so will their children’ (Ibid). Reflecting on the perceived need to support the democratic responsibilities of public education, researchers find an easy ally in constructivist tradition which tends to dismiss the urgency of education for anything in favor of caution against instrumentalism.

Criticism of Construction

The fear of the normative dangers of education and a conviction that it is ‘wrong to persuade, influence or even educate people towards pre- and expert-determined ways of thinking and acting’ (Wals 2010: 150) is mediated by using construction of nature and sustainability. Yet, as Holmes Rolston III has reflected:
Too much lingering in the Kantian conviction that we humans cannot escape our subjectivity makes us liable to commit a fallacy of misplaced values. We must release some realms of value from our subject-minds and locate these instead out there in the world, at the same time that we are involved enough to feel the bite that registers values, getting past mere science to residence in a biotic community. If we cannot have that much truth, we have not only lost a world, we have become lost ourselves (1997: 62-63).

Constructivist view of nature makes it impossible to judge one attitude toward nature as better or worse, more beneficial or more harmful than any other for, according to this logic, there is no nature outside the human perception of it (Crist 2008; Kopnina 2012c). Therefore the discussion of environmental problems or conservation is only relevant in as far as human perception of what needs to be sustained, implicitly relying on a humanist perspective about knowledge creation that privileges the cognitive sovereignty of human subject over nature (Crist 2008). In this framework, animal victimhood can be perceived as nothing more than a collateral damage (Desmond 2013).

Another issue with environment’s representation as a social construction is that the warning voices about environmental calamities can be dismissed as alarmist ‘environmental apocalypticism’ (Veldman 2012). Constructivism can thus also apply to construction of environmental problems, and to rendering of issues associated with biodiversity threats, climate change, and many others as an interesting case of discussion among environmental ethicists rather than ‘real’ issues to be addressed. Indeed, one may argue that projecting doom and gloom may spur some otherwise unmotivated consumers into more sustainable behaviors. Yet, it is not just apocalyptic projections that need to be critically examined when addressing social construction of nature. As Crist (2012: 153) reflects in her projection of the future:

In contrast with many of my colleagues, I do not necessarily foresee a world that collapses by undermining its own life-support systems. It may instead turn into a world that is molded and propped by the strengths advanced industrial civilization has at its disposal: the rational-instrumental means of technical management, heightened efficiency, and technological breakthrough. It is possible that by such means a viable ‘civilization’ might be established upon a thoroughly denatured planet. What is deeply repugnant about such a civilization is not its potential for self-annihilation, but its totalitarian conversion of the natural world into a domain of resources to serve a human supremacist way of life, and the consequent destruction of all the intrinsic wealth of its natural places, beings, and elements.

It is the question of this intrinsic wealth that is being seriously undermined by constructivist thinkers. The danger of constructivism is in forgetting that nature can exist outside of human politics, assumptions and desires, and to channel the questions of stewardship, responsibility, and guilt into an amorphous realm of academic discussions.
Commodifying Nature

Related to constructionism, nature is often framed as a ‘common good’ and putting a price on ‘ecosystem services’ or ‘natural capital’ became increasingly prominent in international political debates since the nineteen eighties. The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB), is an example of a global initiative focused on drawing attention to the economic benefits of biodiversity including the growing cost of biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation. Commodification of nature refers to an area of research within critical environmental studies concerned with the ways in which natural entities and processes are made exchangeable through economic valuation. Commodification view of biodiversity is summarized in the World Bank’s mission statement on environment and sustainable development: ‘The World Bank’s mission is to alleviate poverty and support sustainable development. Biological resources provide the raw materials for livelihoods, sustenance, medicines, trade, tourism, and industry…’ (http://go.worldbank.org/08H25N3QY0).

In an interview with The Ecologist (Lee 2010), Paul Collier has explicitly linked the moral objective of lifting poverty with the idea of nature as a commodity, pointing out that its preservation is only important is so far as it serves economic interests of the poor. In discussing ethical implications of preserving or destroying nature, Collier argues that the only ethical responsibility and only rights lie between present human communities and future generations of humans:

If you take a rights-based view, we don't have the right to plunder our natural assets and not leave anything to the future or plunder our natural liabilities and leave a huge load for the future. The question is: what is the nature of these rights? This depends upon how much value is created when we burn down nature.

Sometimes, in poor societies, it is very important to burn down nature and convert it into more productive assets and hand these on. This is the ethical imperative – that's what stewardship is. Using natural assets productively, creating more value and passing them on is how we will reduce poverty.

But in other cases, the same thought experiment will come up with a different answer – the future may say you are proposing to leave us a nasty climate and we will be awash in man-made assets...Once you come from a doctrinal, ideological position that ‘nature has to be preserved’, it will condemn poor societies to poverty (Collier in Lee 2010).

Collier criticizes ‘romantic environmentalists’ who argue that nature should also have rights – instead he argues that ‘simple ethics of nature – different from the conventional economic ethics of the future and also different from the romantic environmentalist position’ relates to human rights to exploit nature.

Commodification of Nature in Educational Practice

Referring to the objectification of non-human species into ‘resources’ Crist (2012: 150) notes that the ‘genocide of nonhumans is something about which the main-
stream culture, observes silence’. Academics, including educational practitioners, seem to follow suit, perhaps because they view raising an issue about which silence is observed as a non sequitur. Relating this back to EE and ESD, combating social problems are acknowledged in all ESD objectives, speciesism is considered to be a non-issue as overview of ESD indicators suggest (Reid et al. 2006; UNESCO 2013a). The recent review of articles in leading EE and ESD journals have revealed that there is little mention of ecological justice, or discussion of the rights of non-human species (Kopnina 2012a, 2013a). In the widely accepted anthropocentric curriculum, conceiving controlling the growth of human population and limiting consumption becomes inconceivable, while distribution of natural resources – aka species of plants and animals either directly used for consumption or swiped away during clearing of ‘productive lands’ become normalized. EE explicitly addressing consumption in Western countries or global population growth are rare (e.g. Kopnina 2013b).

The key areas outlined in the documents of the Decade for Education for sustainable Development (2005-2014) are mostly social or economic, such as cultural diversity, poverty reduction, gender equality, health promotion, peace and human security (UNESCO 2013a). The ‘environmental’ areas such as water, climate change or biodiversity are explicitly linked to human concerns. Limits to growth, and population growth seem to be subordinate to the aim of reconciling protection of biodiversity with ‘growth of human activities’ (UNESCO 2013b).

In relation to education, this suspicion has crossed over into doubt whether the shifting focus towards social equity issues in EE and ESD may represent abandoning of concerns with preservation of nature in favor of more conventional ‘sustainability’ solutions geared toward further commodification and construction of nature. Critical authors have emphasized that the current contradictory discourses on sustainability have implications for how the education is carried out, particularly pointing out robust anthropocentric bias in teaching students both to perceive (construct) and use (commodify) nature as subordinate to human interests (e.g. Jickling 2005; Kopnina 2012a).

**Criticism of Commodication**

Collier’s insistence that the only moral obligation in regard to nature is the equitable distribution of its assets to the poor is a prevalent position in mainstream sustainable development discourse, and indeed in many neo-liberal societies. This position however can be criticized from a number of perspectives.

The first objection has to do with ethics. Arne Naess (1973, 1989) is credited with coining the term ‘deep ecology’ and distinguishing it from ‘shallow ecology’. Shallow ecology can be exemplified by environmental concerns motivated by anthropocentric interests, such as the fight against pollution and resource depletion, which is typically associated with sustainable development. Shallow ecology...
adheres to the Dominant Social Paradigm (DSP), positing endless progress, growth, and abundance as pre-conditions of human development (Dunlap & Van Liere 1978). Those committed to shallow ecology solutions are treating only the symptoms, and not the source of the symptoms, such as overpopulation and growth in consumption. DSP is opposed to the New Ecological Paradigm (NEP), which highlights the disruption of ecosystems caused by modern industrial societies exceeding environmental limits.

Deep ecology can be summarized in a number of tenants (although many consequent philosophers and ethicists have interpreted them differently). First, the well-being and flourishing of human and non-human life on Earth have value in themselves, and thus possess intrinsic value, independent of the usefulness to humans (Miller et al 2014). Pricing of nature is a problem as many species, landscapes and services are unique or otherwise irreplaceable. Secondly, richness and diversity of life forms contribute to the realization of these values. The ideological change proposed is appreciating life quality dwelling in situations of inherent value, rather than adhering to an increasingly higher standard of living (Naess 1989: 29). Deep ecology perspective suggests that humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital needs (Naess 1973). In the very act of commodifying nature, moral consideration is exclusively reserved to human beings, judging our acts towards nature on the basis of how they affect our social or economic interests (Eckersley 2004).

Comparing deep ecology perspective to that of social liberation movement of the past, prominent anthropologist Veronica Strang (2013) notes that in the last few centuries, large patriarchal societies have embarked upon hegemonic colonial enterprises creating wildly unequal power relations between human societies and that concern with social justice has therefore tended to be concerned with the rights of disadvantaged human groups. However, it is often entangled with notions of ‘development’ and achieving more equitable access to resources. What sometimes gets lost in the shuffle is that this process of expansion has also exported to all corners of the globe unsustainable economic practices. While these may support human groups, they have had massive impacts on non-human species and ecosystems….However; there remains a thorny question as to whether anyone, advantaged or disadvantaged, has the right to prioritise their own interests to the extent that those of the non-human are deemed expendable (Strang 2013: 2).

Another objection to commodification is the practical (anthropocentric) concern whether – even from an anthropocentric perspective of practical utility – humans (both rich and poor) will profit from depletion of natural resources, and whether human equity questions will be solved by short-term increase and distribution of wealth. Blowfield (2013) suggests that it does not appear logical to include poverty in sustainability challenges, as population growth and heightened
consumption actually deepen sustainability challenges such as water, food and energy.

Strang (2013) argues that discourses on justice for people often imply that the most disadvantaged groups should have special rights to redress long-term imbalances. However, if the result is only a short-term gain at the long-term expense of the non-human, this is in itself not a sustainable process for maintaining either social or environmental equity. Crist (2012) argues that destruction of natural resources presents a greater loss for humanity itself that is not resources but the very essence of what makes humans native to the Earth, the magical potency of true inter-connectiveness with other species.

Another question that arises from economic valuation of nature is whether commodification is sufficient to support only those elements of nature most useful to human endeavor, while potentially ignoring anything that might not have manifest value to humans. Some authors have suggested that preservation of ‘some’ biodiversity would be sufficient and that we should not be so concerned about species that are functionally useless to humanity. Haring (2011) argues that only some select species such as agricultural monocultures are needed for human welfare, one should accept the ‘uncomfortable truth about biodiversity’, the fact that not all species are needed (and should be protected) by humanity (Thompson 2010).

Aside from those who espouse deep ecology perspective or represent animal rights, the mainstream sustainability supporters do not seem to consider ecological justice or justice between species, to be part of sustainable development (Baxter 2005). The ethical burden of sacrificing billions of non-human species to feed an (growing) segment of human population reveals one of the most striking ethical paradoxes of sustainability.

Cultural economy suggests that markets are sites where actors grapple with questions of valuation and the consummation of an economic exchange involving efforts to qualify the object that is exchanged and hence assessing its value in certain dimensions (Helgesson & Kjellberg 2013: 361). Ecological justice concerns go beyond mere questions of cultural economy.

**Reflection**

EE/ESD scholars are right to point out the danger of accepting pre-determined, official, mainstream views of sustainability, as most of them are geared toward oxymoronic aims of combining ‘the triple P’ objectives, the empty slogans and hidden agendas of financial institutions and development agencies (e.g. Jickling 2005; Stevenson 2006; Jickling & Wals 2008). Yet, there are a few issues that need to be emphasized in relation to the fear of ‘environmental indoctrination’.
We shall recall the fear of eco-totalitarian society (Wals & Jickling 2002). On the emancipatory end of the continuum Jickling and Wals support a ‘very transparent society’, with ‘action competent citizens’, who actively and critically participate in problem solving and decision making, and value and respect alternative ways of thinking, valuing and doing. This society may not be so sustainable from the strictly ecological point of view as represented by the eco-totalitarian society, but the people might be happier, and ultimately capable of better responding to emerging environmental issues (2002: 225).

One issue with the horror scenario of ‘eco-totalitarian’ education is empirical – whether EE/ESD scholars really believe that education that teaches students to care about nature can lead to such a frightening unhappy society? There is no literature, to my knowledge, correlating ‘happiness’ (or ‘unhappiness’, for that matter) to better responses to environmental issues. Empirical evidence shows that despite any efforts in education or society, environmental problems such as extinction of species continue unabated and there is not a thread of evidence that any radical environmentalist groups are anywhere close to overtaking educational institutions, let along the public minds (Kopnina 2012b).

Another issue with the ‘eco-totalitarian’ scenario is ethical – is preaching for democratic values, equality of genders, races, etc. and against ecologically benign governance not a form of indoctrination itself? Following the relativist position, we imagine that it can very well be, and this indoctrination might be much worse than some imaginary ‘eco-totalitarianism’ as it is tacit, hidden, and universally accepted (at least in politically correct, enlightened, Western educational institutions). And is the rhetoric of pluralism, diversity, democracy, etc. not too comfortably close to the discursive preferences of the leading international organizations that ‘inspire’ and most significantly fund the EE/ESD enterprise? Indeed, ‘learning from sustainable development’ seems to gear our educational practice towards articulation rather than resolution of conflicts, avoiding moral (good vs. bad) or rational (right vs. wrong) terms at all costs (Van Poeck & Vandenabeele 2012: 548). What happens then to our ‘deep concern about the state of the planet and a sense of urgency that demands a break with existing un-sustainable systems’ (Wals 2010: 150)? Are we back to Collier’s ‘simple ethics of nature’?

Rather than delving into the intricate depths of environmental ethics debates within EE/ESD, we can simply demand to know how ‘happy’, to use Wals and Jickling’s (2002) expression, can non-human species be when the very act of their ‘distribution’ becomes part of the economic ethics perspective, and their (majority, in a planetary sense) ‘voice’ is completely excluded from the ‘pluralistic’ perspectives? Of course the academics can retreat back into the relativist distance saying that we cannot know whether non-humans are happy or interpret their ‘voice’. But was this not once the argument used for silencing the slaves or underprivileged human groups or denigrating the ‘savages’? How ‘happy’ can we be
ourselves, living in a polluted world stripped of its bicultural diversity, of variety of life that we ourselves are a part?

Certainly, any totalitarian society sounds frightening. Certainly it is good to have alternative visions, especially when the experts lack insight into the complex web of causes and effects and it is ‘not clear who will suffer from the consequences’ (Van Poeck & Vandenabeele 2012: 547). Unfortunately in this situation it is actually quite clear who suffers the consequences. Only perhaps our own politically correct EE/ESD community may not want to acknowledge the danger of having a democratic society which conveniently condones extermination of other species as one of many (socially constructed) challenges of sustainability. As not-so-politically correct Crist (2013: 137-138) has retorted in her challenge to the Anthropocene, describing human-driven extinction with detachment (and often in passing) sidesteps a matter of unparalleled, even cosmological significance, while also marshalling those facts as favoring the championed geological designator:

Detached reporting on the sixth extinction amounts to absence of clarity about its earth-shattering meaning and avoidance of voicing the imperative of its preemption. This begs some questions. Will the human enterprise’s legacy to the planet, and all generations to come, be to obliterate a large fraction of our nonhuman cohort, while at the same time constricting and enslaving another sizable portion of what is left? … And in a world where the idea of freedom enjoys superlative status, why are we not pursuing larger possibilities of freedom for people and nonhumans alike, beyond those of liberal politics, trade agreements, technological innovations, and consumer choices? (Ibid)

Is it not in itself indoctrination to claim that we need to favor democracy and economic equality at all costs and that teaching the love of nature is similar to Orwell’s Big Brother’s totalitarianism? Can education for deep ecology which fosters ‘ever deepening understanding of the patterns of the place which produce the life there, an ever deepening gratitude to the mountains, trees, rivers and thus a deeper love’ (LaChapelle 1991) really be seen as a threat? And if it can, perhaps we should recall the fear of disturbing our established power hegemonies that used to deny rights of disadvantaged groups less than a hundred years ago. In other words, criticizing instrumentalism in education for nature, and promoting a slogan-like idea of diversity and pluralism, are we not ourselves guilty of supporting the impotent cacophony of increasingly anthropocentric voices and academic ‘doublethink’ (Wals & Jickling 2002)? Are the scholars criticizing ‘elite’ preoccupation with environmental protection not themselves affected by ‘elite’ (in this case, anthropocentric, neoliberal) thinking that allows them to abandon nature as a marginal concern? As Zaleha (2014) has reflected, many scholars supporting construction of nature perspective or explicitly favor social and economic concerns at the expense of non-humans genuinely lack the biophilia. If that is their affective orientation, anthropocentric scholars can indeed imagine they are maintaining a challenge against elites, and in favor of their intended marginal communities. Yet, love of the non-human biophysical world is not the exclusive domain
of neoliberal elites that are the traditional target of postmodernist critique. In fact, without realizing our connection with nature, can we truly teach students to care about ‘our common future’? Can we presume to teach sustainability when we continue to assume the primacy of economic agendas?

We shall recall the question of whether values can be seen as normative or are culturally contextual and variable and what kind of implications this has for educators and education policy-makers (Sund & Öhman 2014)? We can reason in two principle ways. One, we may assume that assessment of value of nature is neither objective nor ethics-free, and in fact highly contextual and ‘morally loaded’ in association with predominant ideology and issues of political correctness. For example, the value of productive labour of slaves, and indeed of slavery itself can hardly be judged – from the point of view of present-day morality – as something that is simply economically rational or part of cultural economy. Yet it has been seen just as such less than a hundred years ago. In this relativistic case, we can assume that our contemporary (Western, enlightened) ideology of embracing democracy, equality, respect for all persons, sacredness of all human life, etc. is a mere product of our time and geographical positioning. In this case, there is hope that sacredness of all life on earth will one day be recognized, and current way of using nature will be seen as morally inconceivable. We might as well attempt teaching this new morality, acknowledging that what we currently teach (respect for other human beings, importance of ‘global citizenship’, ethical imperative of lifting people out of poverty and curing diseases or whatever) is just as transient.

If, on the other hand, and following Kantian non-consequentialism, moral values such as sacredness of human life, are to be seen as absolute good (and indeed, something that we humans, have morally ‘developed’ toward), than recognition of sacredness of all life can be seen as the next step of moral development. EE and ESD educators then need to gather courage to teach ecological justice and deep ecology against the grain of dominant anthropocentric hegemonies, insisting that non-human voices, represented through eco-advocates, have to be included into ‘pluralistic’ discourse and supported by continuous affirmative action as they will never be able to speak for themselves. This is no mundane task and certainly requires going beyond the current EE/ESD debates. The scope of this article does not allow us to investigate the ethical background of these claims in any detail. Yet the main thrust of the argument is that we need to critically evaluate our relationship with nature in ethical terms and urgently address its implications in educational practice.

Michael Bonnett’s call to use ESD not for conventional purpose of indoctrination of students into economically significant ‘values’ but for developing a sense of intrinsic value of nature embodies both the critique of commodification and construction of nature:

In its essential otherness nature participates with us in the production (rather than ‘construction’, which is too deliberative) of places that constitute our life-worlds.
Such places are the source of meaning, intrinsic value and identity, and where nature’s voice is absent or silenced, that otherness and mystery that can take us beyond ourselves and gift inspiration is removed, leaving the field clear for the unrestrained play of anthropocentrism and the metaphysics of mastery (Bonnett 2013: 19).

This formulation offers us a hopeful direction as to how nature could be alternatively perceived – and taught – in EE and ESD. As Kronlid and Öhman (2013:31) support the view that environmental ethics has an important role to play in sustainability and EE research and that there is great potential in widening this research in terms of methodology and empirical material. ‘Schooling the world’ that reproduces mainstream power hegemonies may indeed indoctrinate students into the consumerist system of values (Shiva 1993; Black 2010), yet ‘learning in nature’ and ‘learning from nature’ can give the students- and future generations of humans and non-humans alike their world back.

Conclusions

In this article we have emphasized two trends within sustainability discourse in relation to nature. This article has contributed to the emergent theme within the field of environmental education (EE) and education for sustainable development (ESD), namely the ethical implications of a trend to treat nature either as social construction or a commodity. The first trend presents nature as primarily as a culturally and socially mediated concept. The second trend, presents non-human species as ‘natural resources’. We have emphasized that while the social construction tends to limit significance of nature to human perception of it, commodification tends to present nature in strict instrumental terms. Both trends exhibit anthropocentric bias that is reflected in pluralistic approaches to EE and ESD. It was suggested that while debates on the aims of sustainable development are not new, earnest recognition of the value of conservation or deep ecology education with its emphasis on ecological values, and ethical responsibility of humans towards other planetary citizens, may lead to true integration of human interests with those of the entire ecosphere.

Rather than attempting to come to terms with the multiplicity of conceptions of sustainability and its inability to perform as a coherent concept, the author has argued that the current calls for emancipatory, plural, and democratic education fail to address the deep ecology perspective. As long as pluralistic interpretations of sustainability and environment remain essentially anthropocentric, they cannot address severe and urgent challenges such as rapid extinction of non-human species. Unless education for nature is re-instated, no progress in sustaining Nature (either for humans or independently of humans) can be expected.

Of course, responding to this call brings us to quite uncomfortable ethical questions that effect more than just cultural economy and contested uses of the term sustainability. As was the case in the past with abolition of slavery, and the rise in
women’s and other minority rights’ movements – the claim made in this article that sustainability needs to include ecological justice is not ‘academic’. Yet, the author hopes that this claim will open up a broader discussion about what our children are missing from their current curriculum in order to make them responsible and happy citizens of this planet.

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Notes
1 There is a huge literature however on the criticism of ecological modernization theory, Environmental Kuznets Curve, and post-material values theories that bring into question the linear relationship between wealthy neo-liberal societies and environmentally benign actions that is regrettably beyond the scope of this article.

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Work at the Periphery:
Issues of Tourism Sustainability in Jamaica

By Lauren C. Johnson

Abstract

The tourism industry in Jamaica, as elsewhere in the Caribbean, has provided government interests and tourism stakeholders with increasingly profitable economic benefits. The development and prosperity of the ‘all-inclusive’ vacation model has become a significant aspect of these benefits. Vacationers from North America and Europe are particularly attracted to tourism destinations providing resort accommodations that cater to foreign visitors, offering ‘safe spaces’ for the enjoyment of sun, sand, and sea that so many leisure-seekers desire. Safety and security are progressively becoming more relevant within the contexts of poverty, crime, and tourist harassment that are now commonplace in many of these island destinations. This model of tourism development, however, represents a problematic relationship between these types of hotels and the environmental, political, and economic interests of the communities in which they are located. The lack of linkage between tourist entities and other sectors, such as agriculture and transportation, leaves members of local communities out of the immense profits that are generated. Based on a review of relevant literature and ethnographic research conducted in one of Jamaica’s most popular resort towns, this paper considers the ways in which the sociocultural landscape of a specific place is affected by and responds to the demands of an overtly demanding industry. Utilizing an anthropological approach, I explore local responses to tourism shifts, and analyse recent trends in the tourism industry as they relate to the concept of sustainability.

Keywords: Tourism, culture, ethnography, sustainability, Jamaica
Introduction

While walking along the beach in Negril from where I resided, I cut through a number of all-inclusive hotel properties, the beaches of which were filled with both tourists and security guards. I began to wonder about the significant number of guards and their intended aims on the property. Were they there solely to keep out intruders? As I left one popular resort on a walk, I was immediately approached by several local residents. One man asked if I needed company on my walk, another offered to sell me marijuana, and two women invited me to peruse the crafts they were selling out of a small shed. After turning down their offers, I sat nearby for a while to observe their interactions with tourist passersby. Although these vendors waited for each individual or couple to offer their goods, none of the tourists responded favourably. After that experience, I wrote in my field notes: These people occupy a space at the periphery of the all-inclusives. The space between resorts, on the beach, where they spend their days waiting for brief opportunities to get in on the immense profitability of tourism here in Negril. They don’t have jobs as guards, entertainment staff, housekeepers, bartenders or servers that would allow them to legally occupy spaces within the lines. So they wait outside the lines. They’re not young or fit or particularly clever or charismatic. They simply work hard and want to get their piece of the pie.

This field note excerpt from my first month of research in Jamaica indicates a theme that would become a common aspect of my observations in the place: that of local residents living and working in the periphery of spaces designated for tourists. In order to carry out ethnographic dissertation research on sex tourism in 2010-2011, I conducted observations and interviews with local and foreign-born residents, tourism workers, and health officials on the impact of this particular type of tourism. One noteworthy finding early on during this fieldwork was that a key concern in the resort town is the perceived ‘takeover’ of the industry by all-inclusive resorts. Shifts in the tourism industry have meant growing profits from tourist visitors to Jamaica, yet have not led to substantial growth for many residents within the country’s tourism sectors. Not just a preoccupation of taxi drivers and vendors, this proved to be a concern for hotel owners and managers, restaurateurs, shop owners, and other indirect tourism employees. Feeling the impact of national debt, declining local industry, unemployment, crime, and political strife, Jamaica’s people rely on the tourism industry to provide jobs and foreign revenue (de Albuquerque 1999; Alleyne & Boxill 2003; Crick 2003; Boxill 2004; Pattullo 2005). However, the resulting leakage of tourist dollars, environmental pollution, sex tourism, and additional social ills make it clear that tourism cannot be viewed as a fix-all for the nation’s problems. The locals residing in resort areas are particularly vulnerable to shifts in the tourism industry and impacted significantly by the issues of tourism-related crime, drug use, and sex work (Dunn & Dunn 2002; Kempadoo 2004; Pattullo 2005). For residents here, as in other tourism destina-
tions, the problem of sustainability is one that must be contended with every day; the delicate balance of appealing to tourists and maintaining the illusion of ‘paradise’ conflicts directly with the struggle to survive (Turner & Ash 1976; Jayawardena 2003; Gmelch 2003; McDavid & Ramajeesingh 2003; Cabezas 2008). Utilizing ethnographic data from the aforementioned research and published research relating to the Caribbean tourism industry, this discussion focuses on the lived experiences of local residents as they pertain to tourism trends and the sustainability of the industry in the region. Here, I seek to contribute to the ongoing discussion of sustainable tourism by emphasizing the significance of the sociocultural impact of tourism on residents, and the need to prioritize local communities in tourism development.

**Tourism and the Jamaican Economy**

Tourism receipts worldwide totalled approximately $1,159 billion in 2013; of this amount, $24.8 billion was generated in the Caribbean region (Word Tourism Organization 2014). Last year, Jamaica received the third highest number of stopover tourists in the Caribbean, following Cuba and the Dominican Republic, with 2,008,409 total visitors (Caribbean Tourism Organization 2014). Tourism receipts overall in Jamaica have increased over the last decade, with tourism contributing $1.1 billion, or 25.6% in direct and indirect contributions, to the Gross Domestic Product. Travel and tourism directly supported 82,000 jobs in 2013, or 7.0% of total employment, and indirectly supported 274,500 jobs, or 23.4% of total employment (World Travel & Tourism Council 2012). The increasing importance of all-inclusive resorts, however, has left smaller hotel units vulnerable to declining occupancy rates. All-inclusive hotel stays have remained on the rise for the last several years, with the number of room nights sold increasing by nearly one million between 2006 and 2010. For those same years, there was a steady decline for non all-inclusive hotels (Jamaica Tourist Board 2011). Recently, there has been significant hotel expansion in the most popular resort destinations of Ocho Rios, Montego Bay, and Negril, resulting from the foreign direct investment of large Spanish hotel chains (Poverty Reduction and Economic Management Unit 2011).

The Jamaican economy has become progressively more reliant on both tourism and remittances for its gross domestic product (GDP), yet remains blighted with consistently high unemployment rates and considerable national debt. The unemployment rate is approximately 14%, with the highest numbers of unemployed citizens falling within the 25-34 age group for both men and women (Statistical Institute of Jamaica 2012). The debt-to-GDP ratio is a crucial concern when considering the economic climate in Jamaica, as it is one of the most indebted countries in the world. The country has maintained a debt-to-GDP ratio of approximately 120%, and its interest burden has averaged 13% since 2006 (Weisbrot 2011). This debt and the interest payments it has incurred have led to reductions
in government spending on infrastructure, health care, and education in the country over the last decade (Johnston & Montecino 2011; Weisbrot 2011). Crime has had a negative impact on the Jamaican economy, including detrimental effects on tourism to the country and the amount of spending to control violent crimes. Jamaica currently has a murder rate of 39.3 per 100,000 inhabitants, the majority of which involve firearms. This is the highest rate in the Caribbean and ranks among the highest six murder rates in the world (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 2014). Violent crime in Jamaica has been found to be a deterrent to tourists, particularly those from Europe, although the development of all-inclusive resorts as tourist ‘enclaves’ has mitigated this impact to an extent (de Albuquerque 1999; Alleyne & Boxill 2003; Issa & Jayawardena 2003).

The topic of sustainability in tourism and its relationship to development is one that frequently explores the environmental impact of the industry (Hunter 1997; McKercher 1993; Cohen 2002). The aspects of sustainability that are of relevance to this discussion, however, are those that seek to determine the ways in which tourism development can benefit and protect residents. On the topic of tourism in developing nations, and specifically in the Caribbean, researchers have been concerned with the problems of inequity and exclusion for local populations (Cohen 2002; McDavid & Ramajeesingh 2003; Crick 2003; Boxill 2004; Pattullo 2005). Tourism research has indicated that revenues from tourism in Caribbean countries generally benefit foreign business owners more than local citizens (Turner & Ash 1976; Pattullo 2005). The overdependence of the Caribbean on the tourism industry calls into question the extent to which tourism equates with growth for island nations (Jayawardena & Ramajeesingh 2003). The all-inclusive industry itself has been questioned for its ability to provide opportunities for local industries and workers. Despite its attraction for tourists seeking to escape to island destinations, enclave tourism has proven to be problematic for communities left outside of its protective boundaries (Freitag 1994; Crick 2003; Boxill 2004). Sustainable tourism development in the region requires consideration of the aspects of the industry that continue to be detrimental for residents of these locales.

As demonstrated in the above figures, tourism in Jamaica has clearly generated a great deal of revenue. However, the utilisation of tourism as a way to provide sustainable support to the economy has had a problematic impact on the island. According to a 2008 IMF report, economic growth in Jamaica has not correlated with increases in the tourism sector (International Monetary Fund 2008). Tourism research has indicated that revenues from tourism in Caribbean countries generally benefit foreign business owners more than local citizens (Turner & Ash 1976; Pattullo 2005). Leakage of tourist revenue, which occurs when foreign investments fail to stay inside the country, averages approximately 80% for the region. For Jamaica specifically, there is high foreign exchange outflow (nearly 40%) of revenue to foreign hotel owners’ countries and few linkages with the local economy indicate that much of the tourism earnings do not stay in the country.
The mining industry has declined, now employing just one percent of the labour force, due to the lack of linkages with other economic sectors and the importation of most goods and services (World Bank 2011). Although efforts have been made to create better linkages between tourist resorts and local farmers, research suggests that this has not yet had a significant benefit for agricultural producers (Thomas-Hope & Jardine-Comrie 2007). Furthermore, the promotion of tourism in the country has corresponded with the neglect of local residents regarding environmental and health concerns that directly impact the population. The environmental burdens of tourism in Jamaica include the removal of coral reefs and wetlands, along with increased water usage and solid waste, and water pollution in resort areas (Thomas-Hope & Jardine-Comrie 2007; Dodman 2009; National Environment and Planning Agency 2011). The National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA) has indicated that tourism is one of the major strains put on natural resources in Jamaica, including energy, water, raw materials, beaches, and waste disposal facilities. According to Dodman (2009: 213), ‘Provisioning for the demands of international tourists, given the importance placed on this economic sector, has meant that providing proper environmental and sanitation services for hotels has often taken precedence over similar programmes for Jamaican citizens.’

Similarly, evidence from the health sector in Jamaica indicates that efforts to create workplace policies for HIV/AIDS education programming and testing, as well as attempts toward the provision of condoms in hotels, have not been successful (Figueroa 2008; Johnson 2012). Transactional sex with tourists has become a way for many men and women in the Caribbean to benefit from the industry despite their low socioeconomic status, low educational attainment, and lack of employability in the formal tourism sector. Studies applying anthropological methods for sex tourism research have demonstrated the significance of this type of tourism in communities that rely on the industry. The work of Cabezas (2002; 2009), Kempadoo (2001; 2004), Mullings (1999), O’Connell-Davidson and Sánchez-Taylor (1999), Pruitt and LaFont (1995), and Sánchez-Taylor (2001) among others, describes the motivations of Caribbean women and men who utilize sex work as a means for gaining opportunities to improve their lives. Similar work, by such researchers as Aggleton (1999) and Padilla (2007, 2008), illustrate the practice of sex tourism among men who have sex with men (MSM) in the region. The implications of sex and tourism for the study of STI and HIV infection in the Caribbean are vast. As the region with the second highest overall prevalence rates of HIV/AIDS to Sub-Saharan Africa, understanding the link between sex and the tourism industry is vital for HIV prevention programming. The research of Boxill et al. (2005), Figueroa (2006, 2008; Figueroa et al. 2005), Kempadoo and Taitt (2006), and Padilla (2007; 2010; Padilla et al. 2008) has made significant progress towards demonstrating the negative effects of tourism on the
sexual health of Caribbean residents in tourist destinations. This is particularly problematic considering the incidence of sex tourism in Caribbean resort destinations; in Jamaica, the parishes with tourism-based economies have the highest HIV prevalence rates after its most urbanized area of St. Andrew (National HIV/STI Programme 2013). Despite work conducted by the Ministry of Health and Tourism Product Development Company (TPDCo), some tourism entities have expressed perceptions that the promotion of workplace policies on discrimination and HIV/AIDS education in resort areas will deter tourists from visiting (Figueroa 2008; Health Economics Unit 2009).

Local Perceptions of Tourism Shifts

While the effects of tourism on Caribbean populations are not universal, there are evidently negative sociocultural impacts for those who do not reap economic benefits from the growing tourism sector (de Albuquerque 1999; Mullings 1999; Taylor 1993; Cunningham 2006; Cabezas 2008). Many of the local women and men who have access to employment opportunities in the industry hold unskilled positions with relatively low social and income statuses, yet high turnover rates (Dunn & Dunn 2002; Pattullo 2005). Because of the structures that maintain exclusivity in the demand for tourism workers, as well as marginalize a large segment of the work force, opportunities for many Caribbean people to work legally in this sector are limited (Cabezas 2008). Increased tourism promotion leads to greater risk of criminalization for local people, as shown in current harassment laws that leave local vendors, taxi operators, and sex workers at risk of being arrested for interacting inappropriately with tourists (de Albuquerque 1999; Gmelch 2003; Mullings 1999; Ajagunna 2006). Local perspectives of tourism have been found to include perceived increases in crime, prostitution, and drug use in communities reliant upon tourism (Taylor 1993; Dunn & Dunn 2002; Pattullo 2005). Caribbean governments, including that of Jamaica, seem to avoid addressing illicit tourism-related practices in order to emphasize the overall benefit that tourist dollars bring to the region (Mullings 1999; Grenade 2007). The agendas of this and other Caribbean governments and private stakeholders promoting tourism include the elicitation of a natural, authentic sense of place and people for the consumption of tourists (Bolles 1992; Mullings 1999; Black 2001). Cultural forms, including music, language, food, and dance, are offered to foreign visitors along with accommodations and services as part of the tourism agenda. Tourists are provided relaxing settings in which they can consume the music of Bob Marley, cold Red Stripe beers, and select phrases of the local patois. Local people are expected to support this agenda for the ‘greater good,’ despite the lack of benefits that they may receive from participation in this, in effect, selling of place. The government here, as elsewhere, has encouraged appropriate behaviour and general friendliness towards tourists with ‘Be Nice’ campaigns in the past, and currently through the
‘Team Jamaica’ training for tourism-related workers (Turner & Ash 1976; Crick 2003). The Jamaican government is not a monolithic power that promotes tourism to the detriment of its citizens; there are, instead, multiple political and economic forces at work, with the tourism industry revealing alternate beneficial and detrimental roles.

The purpose of the research on which this paper is based was to explore the sociocultural, economic, and health impact of sex tourism in Negril, Jamaica. Unlike much of the previous work conducted on the topic, this ethnographic study aimed to reveal the ways in which the local population is affected by the practice, and to propose plausible solutions for reducing its negative ramifications for the sexual health of local male sex workers. Over the course of nine months spent in Negril, I conducted observations in places where interactions between locals and tourists were common, including beaches, restaurants, bars, and clubs. In addition, 53 total interviews were conducted on the topic of sex tourism with local residents, foreign tourists, health officials, and heads of multiple health-related NGOs in Jamaica. Of particular relevance here are the resident interviews in Negril, which included a variety of participants who work in the tourism industry. Shared perceptions of the tourism industry, along with its positive and negative associations for local men and women, illustrate relevant factors of tourism sustainability in Negril and demonstrate the varying degrees of marginalization within this particular population. The question with which interviews began asked how tourism has impacted Negril. For the most part, interview participants were able to state both positive and negative effects of tourism in the resort town, and the majority found the positive impact to be more significant. Among the benefits of tourism, both economic and social aspects were cited, such as financial and employment opportunities, cultural exchanges between Jamaicans and foreign tourists, and improved exposure to technology for locals. Tourism workers who have never left the island find opportunities to learn about the world through interactions with tourists; work in the industry provides access to spaces that are generally designated for tourists only.

Residents interviewed for the study found the negative aspects of tourism to include increased crime, drug use, harassment, sex work, and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), as well as a decline in moral standards. One interviewee, a 33 year-old self-identified ‘hustler’ born in Negril stated:

What tourism do to this place? Tourism uplift this place. We live off tourism. Without tourism here, lot of people don’t have a job. ‘Caw when is a low season for tourism, most hotel lay off people, so when they lay off people now that’s when you get more people out of work, so that’s where you get more crime or more people lay back, and then they will go violent and then they gotta turn to something different.

Similarly, taxi drivers and employees in bars and restaurants frequently shared complaints about the lack of tourists during the slow season. One informant who sells CDs for a living said during an interview that he planned to leave Negril: ‘I
can’t take it anymore here. If the tourists is not here, there’s no money here.’ Due to the decrease in popularity of Spring Break, there seem to be fewer periods of heavy tourist influx outside of the large resorts than in the past, which has clearly taken a toll on vendors, transportation workers, and small business owners. Several other participants, both Jamaican and foreign-born, stated that there would be no Negril without tourism. As a fishing village turned vacation spot for hippie tourists in the 1960s, the resort town has seen incredible economic and demographic shifts during the course of its growth. The head of the Negril’s Chamber of Commerce, an organization involved in local tourism promotion and the closest entity to a governing body in the town, mentioned in an interview that he believes up to 90% of the current population of Negril originates outside of the town.

A significant component of the changes that have occurred in Negril over the last twenty years involves the springing up of all-inclusive resorts along its Seven-mile beach and adjacent cliffs. As a town with little development until the 1990s, accommodations in Negril once included mainly guesthouses and small hotels (of under 50 rooms) that were owned by Jamaican nationals. In order to restrict the development of large structures, the Negril Land Authority only allowed buildings that did not exceed the height of the tallest tree in the area. However, government efforts to promote the development of tourist accommodations have since provided tax incentives to foreign hoteliers and allowed the importation of construction material. These incentives have encouraged the building of large, all-inclusive properties by international chains. This change is particularly perceptible to native Negrilians and long-term tourism workers who have been in the town for the last decade or more. One informant, a 45 year-old taxi driver, has been living just outside of Negril and working in the town for over fifteen years. When asked about the impact of tourism in Negril, he suggested that all-inclusives have a significant impact on the local industry. He expressed that tourism in general has been ‘going down since ’97,’ and that it is now harder to find tourists to take on tour, since the majority have all-inclusive packages for that purpose. In the aforementioned interview with Negril’s Chamber of Commerce, the president of the organization spoke about the political challenges of directing tourism in Negril towards creating benefits for the local population. Because the Ministry of Tourism is influenced by ‘industry players,’ he finds that the interests of the larger hotel chains are protected more than those of smaller, locally owned businesses. The theme of all-inclusives was a common one during interviews with hoteliers and tourism employees alike. The proprietor of a beach hotel who has owned the establishment for over twenty years shared that while his guests spend money at restaurants, bars, tourist sites, and use local transportation, large hotel chain guests pre-pay and tend to buy things only within their chosen resort. Andrew, a 33 year-old ‘hustler,’ also spoke about tourists who fail to leave the confines of the all-inclusives: ‘Dem fantasize Jamaica, save dey money for days, weeks, years, come here, but nevah reach. ‘Dem nah really wanna socialize wit’ de people like dat,
‘dem nah mind go in a all-inclusive hotel, eat di food, drink de beer, an go back ah dem yard. [They fantasize about Jamaica, they save money to come here, but they never really arrive. They don’t really want to socialize with people, they don’t mind staying in the all-inclusive eating, drinking, and then going back home.]’ This quote is indicative of a feeling among some local people that tourists, by confining themselves to all-inclusive resorts, fail to interact with Jamaican people and experience their culture.

This particular informant also spoke of tourists’ fears regarding locals in the resort town. Andrew finds that tourists are afraid of vendors due to the warnings of travel agents and hotel employees who insist that they avoid people on the beach. Several other interviewees suggested similar perceptions about tourists’ fears, and their inclinations to stay inside resort compounds as a result. This is an aspect of a broader topic, that of tourist harassment, which came up in nearly every interview conducted for this study. Negril residents find that tourists are frequently harassed by vendors who will not take ‘no’ for an answer while they are attempting to sell their wares, be they crafts or illegal drugs. Tourist harassment is enough of a concern to business owners that it is a frequent topic of discussion for the members of Negril’s Chamber of Commerce. During an interview at the local branch of the Tourism Product Development Company, which handles mandatory training and licensing for tourism employees throughout the country, the representative stated that training includes steps on approaching and dealing with tourists. However, she finds that vendors who pass the training still incite complaints from tourists about their aggressive approaches to selling, and blames it on lack of education and the ‘mentality’ of the people. Vendors, from her perspective, can be excessively persistent and take the attitude that they are owed something by foreign tourists they view as being wealthy. Local men and women can be charged with harassment by the police as well as the Courtesy Corps, which protects tourist areas and has recently granted its officers the ability to arrest. In addition to complaints about tourist harassment, many local persons shared their experiences regarding the unfair manner in which some residents are accused of the behaviour. Several interview participants stated that vendors are unduly hassled by police for selling merchandise without licenses or for bothering potential tourist clients. This criminalization of local people is an extreme example of the unsustainable nature of the current tourism model, whereby foreign visitors are isolated and protected while residents are restricted and punished due to this ‘need’ for protection.

**Discussion**

The significance of the tourism industry in the Caribbean is undeniable in terms of its economic impact. For Jamaica, it has provided stable revenue at a time of decline for other long-standing industries. Due to the nation’s situation of extreme indebtedness, participation in the global economy through tourism is required to
boost the foreign currency generated by remittances and mining. This reliance on
tourism, however, presents multiple challenges when considered from the per-
spective of sustainability. The lack of linkages between tourism and other sectors,
particularly agriculture, relates to the problem of leakage in Jamaica: the importa-
tion of food, construction materials, and various supplies for hotels means that
tourism revenue frequently leaves the country while local industries continue to
suffer. Additionally, the sociocultural ramifications of tourism have left an indeli-
ble mark on residents of resort areas. The number of jobs created by the industry,
while noteworthy, does not solve the significant unemployment and underem-
ployment problems for local populations. Residents working both formally and
informally in the tourism sector are subject to shifts that involve increasing all-
inclusive accommodations and the decline of locally owned businesses. Some
educated, skilled workers can attain formal employment in the tourism sector,
while many struggle to find spaces within the informal tourism industry in which
to earn a living.

Negril is a magnet for entrepreneurial men and women from various parts of
the island seeking to earn from the exceedingly profitable tourism industry. Men
in Negril are apt to self-identify as ‘hustlers’ when their incomes are generated
through jobs selling CDs, jewellery, souvenirs, and drugs, among other items, to
foreign tourists. In addition, many local men take on the roles of informal tour
guides and drivers for visitors in the town. Men who engage in hustling are often
of low socioeconomic status and lack formal educations. Even successful hustlers
who are able to significantly boost their incomes can be stigmatized within the
local community for their participation in illegal activities, including sex tourism.
There are local women who participate in these activities, yet they are more likely
to identify as vendors or as sex workers, respectively. While many men are also
employed as chefs, water sports operators, and construction workers, conversa-
tions and interviews with informants indicated that self- proclaimed hustlers tend
to work solely in the informal sector. These men are cultural brokers who provide
for visitors’ needs in the tourist areas. During interviews with men who hustle
tourists, some informants shared that in exchange for providing services to tour-
ists, they can get money, gifts, invitations to parties and bars, paid drinks and
meals, and trips around the island, among other compensation. Men who hustle a
living tend to have increased social interactions with foreign tourists, putting them
in positions to sell sex to these guests as well. These men, known locally as ‘gigo-
los,’ act as companions, tour guides, and protectors of women spending their vaca-
tions on the island. In return for sex and companionship, the men receive gifts,
cash, local tours, and opportunities to travel abroad. In Negril, as in other tourism
destinations, men who work as taxi drivers and hotel entertainers are perceived as
regular participants in sex tourism. Hustling can be viewed as a last resort option
for local individuals seeking ways to participate in the growing profits from tour-
ism, yet lack the skills to find gainful employment in the hotel chains that consist-
ently spring up in resort areas. Despite the threat raised by the significant police presence for these individuals, they make a living by offering services, either wanted or unwanted, to tourists from the periphery of tourist enclaves. By hustling a living, illicitly selling unlicensed tourism services, drugs, and/or sex, some individuals make opportunities to earn from the sector where there otherwise would be none. Many are caught between the tourist demand for illegal activities and the ever-increasing presence of law enforcement to shelter foreign visitors.

As in other tourist resort areas in Jamaica and throughout the Caribbean, Negril provides an escape for vacationers from abroad seeking the sun, sand, sex, and sea that these islands offer. It is a place that was created and has been maintained as a touristic space where foreign visitors are catered to by Jamaican men and women. The question remains as to whether or not the development of tourism can be relied upon as a sustainable source of revenue and employment. The increasing numbers of cruise ship passengers and stopover visitors are not likely to decline significantly in the very near future. However, the issues of indebtedness, underemployment, and crime are inextricably linked with the crime and harassment that tourists experience on vacation in Jamaica. This, in turn, leads more visitors to choose to remain inside all-inclusive resorts, leaving local residents modest gains from the tremendous profitability of the industry. Finally, the increased STI/HIV prevalence in popular tourist centres adds to the vulnerability of already marginalized local populations. Because condom use and HIV prevention efforts are perceived as threats to the tourism product, the sexual health of residents seems to come second to the state tourism agenda. In order for tourism to be a sustainable enterprise for the future, alternative models of tourism that are more inclusive of local populations must be considered. This would include the development of better linkages with other industries and improvements to the local infrastructure, allowing for increased and consistent employment opportunities for residents.

Conclusion
The published literature and results of the ethnographic research cited here indicate that, for many Caribbean people, residents’ needs have been subsumed to perceived profits from the tourism industry. Recent tourism shifts have left a significant portion of the population without the resources required to benefit fully from the industry; the enclaves constructed to attract tourists have effectively kept residents from reaping its benefits. While these issues are certainly concerns for many researchers and government officials in Jamaica, a dire need exists for further consideration of local communities in the creation and maintenance of tourism policy. The issues of profitability should be weighed in relation to the long-term sustainability of tourism development in Jamaica and other islands with tourism-based economies throughout the region. The tourism-based agenda of the
state cannot be entirely effective as long as the industry is developed without regards to the issue of equity and sustainability for local communities.

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Notes
1 The term ‘hustler’ in Negril is generally used to describe men who work in the informal, and often illicit, tourism industry. These men work various jobs as unlicensed taxi and tour services, street vendors, drug dealers, and other forms of employment through which they ‘hustle’ tourists for money.

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Enacting Green Consumers: The Case of the Scandinavian Preppies

By Christian Fuentes

Abstract
The aim of this paper is to develop and illustrate an analytic approach that brings the active making and makings of green consumer images to the fore. Efforts to “know” the green consumers have generated multiple representations. Enactments of the green consumer are not innocent but also play a role in shaping how we understand and approach sustainable consumption. Because of this it is important to examine and critically discuss how green consumers are enacted today.

This paper develops an approach that allows us to examine how green consumers are enacted and discuss the consequences these constructions might have for sustainability. Theoretically, a performativity approach drawing on theories from Science and Technology Studies (STS) and economic sociology is used to discuss the enactment of green consumers. Empirically, focus is on Boomerang – a Swedish fashion retailer, brand, and producer – and its marketing practices.

The analysis shows how the marketing work of the Boomerang Company leads to the enactment of the Green Scandinavian Preppy. This specific version of the green consumer is a combination of the knowledgeable green connoisseur – a consumer that knows quality when he/she sees it – and the green hedonist in search of the good life. The Green Scandinavian Preppy wants to enjoy nature, go sailing, and do so wearing fashionable quality clothes. This is a consumer that knows quality, appreciates design, and has the means to pay for both. While this is a version of the green consumer that might be appealing and thus have the potential to promote a version of green consumption, it is also a green consumer image that has lost much of its political power as green consumption is framed as simply another source of pleasure and identity-making.

Keywords: Green marketing, consumer images, performativity, fashion, sustainability
Introduction

The nature of the green consumer has been a topic of discussion within and outside academia. Efforts to “know” the green consumers have generated multiple representations. Green consumers have been described as alternative identity seekers (Thompson & Coskuner-Balli 2007a, 2007b; Connolly & Prothero 2003, 2008) and critical and reflexive consumers that challenge and question the capitalist society (Harrison et al. 2005; Cherrier & Murray 2007). But green consumers have also been described as rational individuals, information-processing and calculating entities that make informed choices regarding quality and price issues while considering “ethical” values as well (Shaw et al. 2000; Schröder and McEachern 2004; Harrison et al. 2005; Leonidou et al. 2010). As numerous studies have stated in the past, there are multiple and conflicting descriptions of the green consumer.

These descriptions of the green consumer are not innocent. They not only describe the green consumer, they also work to perform specific versions of the green consumer, to configure green consumers (regarding performativity see Law & Urry 2004; Licoppe 2010; Cova & Cova 2012). Enactments of the green consumer also have power in that they play a role in shaping how we understand and approach sustainable consumption. Determining who the green consumer is – as an ideal type – also involves determining how sustainability should be approached.

Because of this it is important to examine and critically discuss how green consumers are enacted today. How is the green consumer made in contemporary consumer culture? What do specific versions of the green consumer mean for the ways in which we approach sustainability?

While previous research on green consumption and sustainability often points out that there are different ways of viewing green consumers, there are few studies that explore how these images are made and what they may mean for sustainability.

Against this background, the aim of this paper is to develop and illustrate an analytic approach that brings the active making and makings of green consumer images to the fore. What I want to do is to develop an approach that allows us first to examine more closely how green consumers are enacted and second discuss the consequences these constructions might have for sustainability. By doing this I hope to contribute to the development of a more critical and reflexive approach to sustainability.

Theoretically, I take a performativity approach to the study of marketing and the enactment of consumers. The starting point for the argument made in this paper is that consumers do not simply exist out there but are made. More specifically, I use the concept of performativity as it has been used within Science and Technology Studies (STS) and, more recently, economic sociology (e.g. Barry &
Slater 2002; Law & Urry 2004; Callon et al. 2007,). Somewhat simplified, one can say that this strand of performativity studies has set out to investigate how the market (or the economy) is socio-materially performed by economics (Callon 1998; Barry & Slater 2002). Drawing on Actor-Network Theory (Callon 1991; Law 1991; Latour 2000, 2005,), the work of Callon shows that economic processes can be “treated as just another kind of socio-technical-discursive arrangement” in which economics is just one of the elements of the arrangement, shaping and being shaped in the network (Barry & Slater 2002: 180).

In the field of marketing, the ideas of Callon and colleagues have been used to analyse and discuss how marketing practices, theories, and devices work to construct markets (e.g., Araujo 2007; Kjellberg & Helgesson 2007; Cochoy 2009). These studies have argued that marketing practices are to be understood as market-shaping practices (Araujo 2007). Marketing (potentially) contributes to the constitution of markets (Kjellberg & Helgesson 2006).

Marketing is then not only about promoting products, it socio-materially constructs them (Fuentes 2011; Fuentes 2014). Marketing not only tries to find consumers “out there”, it often plays an important role in bringing these consumers to life (Cova & Cova 2012). And marketing not only dictates how employees should conduct themselves, it shapes their subjectivities (Skålén et al. 2008; Skålén 2009). From this perspective, the mission of critically oriented marketing scholars and other social scientists is to empirically examine, to paraphrase Callon, how marketing technologies perform markets and market entities (see also Araujo et al. 2008; Cova & Cova 2012). This is precisely what I intend to do here, critically examine the construction of one type of market entity: the green consumer.

Empirically, I focus on a specific case of green consumer enactment. In what follows, I examine how the Swedish retailer, brand, and producer Boomerang, through its marketing work, constructs a specific version of the green consumer.

There are at least three reasons why the Boomerang Company and its marketing work is a suitable case for the discussion of green consumer enactment. First, private corporations and their marketing work play a crucial role in the enactment of green consumers. Although far from the only actors involved in the production of green consumers their vast financial resources and marketing knowledge and skill make them powerful players. Second, the Boomerang Company has clearly profiled products as well-defined brands, which makes the enactment of consumers easier to study. Third, Boomerang is also a good example because the company’s work to green itself is fairly recent, on-going, and has not yet “settled”.

The analysis below builds on material collected as part of a larger on-going ethnographic study of Swedish fashion retailers and their sustainability strategies. This larger study, in which also two additional retailers are studied (Âhléns and Myrorna), aims to examine what sustainability issues are marketed, how these are marketed, and how sustainability is reframed through this marketing work. More
specifically, the analysis presented below draws on four types of materials generated by four types of research practices carried out by the author and a research assistant working on the project.

First, we collected media material using the “Retriever” database. The search focused on the retailer’s name and keywords connected to sustainability such as “ecological”, “green”, “environment”, and “fair trade”. Second, we carried out interviews. Six in-depth interviews with sustainability strategists and other staff in leading positions were carried out. Third, marketing material was collected from the stores (brochures and catalogues for examples) and from the retailers’ webpages (printed and saved digitally). Fourth, and finally, we also carried out observations of the stores. The observations focused on the cities of Lund, Helsingborg, and Göteborg. Approximately 20 observations have been carried out during 2012-2013.

The different types of materials generated are in the analysis treated symmetrically. Drawing on the performative perspective outlined above, I see these different materials as records of how Boomerang markets itself and its sustainability work. The media material allows us to read about what managers have said in interviews with journalists and how these utterances are framed in the media. They are simultaneously an example of how retailers market themselves using the media and how the media portrays the CSR strategies of companies. In the interviews we can see how managers market/describe their retail organization and CSR work when asked about it by academics. In the marketing material collected we see how Boomerang frames sustainability issues and markets itself and its products using both print and digital media. Through the observations made at the stores we can see how the retail space of Boomerang is used to market sustainability issues along with the products on display.

As will be illustrated in the analysis, there is considerable similarity among these different mediums. The articles in the media, the interviews with managers, the marketing material, and the store displays all tell a similar story.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. First I present a brief presentation of Boomerang and the ways in which this company markets itself and its products. Next I take a closer look at how Boomerang markets itself as sustainable. This is followed by an analysis of the kind of green consumer enacted in and through this marketing work. The paper ends with a discussion of the importance of tracing the enactment of green consumers and discussing the possible impact that these configurations may have on sustainability issues.

**Marketing the Boomerang Lifestyle**

Boomerang, one can read on the webpage, was started in 1976 by the two enthusiasts Kenneth Andram and Peter Wilton. The plan was to develop a Scandinavian
brand of “premium quality clothes” and the first collection consisted of a range of piques, shirts, cords, and canvas trousers. On the webpage one can read that:

….the two colleagues bonded over a dream about something different. Freedom. Something of their own. They also shared the same fundamental ethical values and the conviction that quality is always better than quantity. (www.boomerang.com 7 March 2012)

Today the Boomerang Company has 32 privately owned stores, more than 200 retailers and operates in 6 countries. They develop and carry three collections of casual quality clothes: “Man”, “Woman” and “Junior”.

While Boomerang uses a broad range of channels and devices to market itself and its products, the stores are Boomerang’s main marketing tool. Boomerang stores are located at city centres – on shopping streets – or at shopping malls. Most stores are fairly small, well-organized and clearly thematized. At the Boomerang stores consumers can read up on products, ask store assistants’ advice, pick up brochures and other marketing material, and, of course, purchase Boomerang products. And, as I learned through my fieldwork, considerable work is also put into the window displays – which display the product lines and visualize the theme of the Boomerang brand. However, as the field note below illustrates, stores are not only thematized to communicate the Boomerang brand but also organized to make shopping practices easy to carry out, they are organized to enable shopping.

As I enter the store I am struck by how well-organized and clearly thematized this retail space is. The store has been newly renovated and the entrance is described as having a “New York style”. The store is spacious with plenty of room to move along the aisles. Sparse signage and tidy display tables and hangers give the impression of an efficient store. The clothes seem to follow a nautical theme – a lot of blue stripes. Shirts, piques, canvas trousers, jeans and dress jackets. But also t-shirts and hoodies are on display. The display tables, the shelves, and even the cashier counter are of dark wood. Behind the cashier counter there is a large poster depicting a landscape: rocky shores, a white and red lighthouse and a grouping of red wooden cabins. On some of the display tables one can find marketing material – brochures and catalogues. I pick one up and browse. It contains the same images and texts one can find on the company’s website. (Field notes, 13 February 2012)

The stores are in many ways smooth shopping spaces. The shopping trails of the Boomerang stores are easily manoeuvrable, the products easy to find, and store assistants helpful. The Boomerang stores are then marketing devices that make products available for shopping and simultaneously work to promote the Boomerang products lines and brand.

The Boomerang webpage is another important marketing device. The Boomerang webpage (boomerangstore.com) contains information about the company’s philosophy, history, its products, the stores’ locations, and business hours. Visitors can find customer service information and information regarding Boomerang’s customer club. The webpage also works to market Boomerang’s sustainability work. Here consumers can find information regarding charities that Boom-
ang supports, the company’s code of conduct, and details about Boomerang’s different sustainable product lines.

The page also links to two other virtual platforms used for the marketing of Boomerang: Facebook and YouTube. Visitors following these links find commercials, virtual catalogues, information about special offers, updates regarding new collections, and much more.

Finally, the Boomerang Company markets itself and its products by participating in a number of fashion fairs and events. The participation in different fairs is documented and used as marketing material in the other channels (most notably on the Facebook page).

So the Boomerang Company markets itself and its products through a number of practices and employs various channels and devices. But what is it more exactly that Boomerang offers its customers? I would argue that Boomerang sells more than clothes; like many other companies today they also sell a style and lifestyle. Boomerang calls its style “Scandinavian Preppy”.

Boomerang products, this retailer makes clear, are for those interested in high-end quality clothing and who wish to be associated with the “preppy style” that these products convey.

More specifically, this style is constructed by combining three different themes in the marketing of Boomerang clothing: the nautical, the Scandinavian, and the preppy. Scandinavian Preppy is here constructed as a desirable consumer identity. Being Scandinavian, this marketing material tells consumers, means being both design and nature-interested.

“Design interested” is in this context to be understood as a marker of sophisticated taste, a signifier of good taste. Being “design interested” then means having good taste. References to Scandinavian design, or simplicity connects this ethnic identity to both a specific aesthetic and a sophisticated taste. Similarly references to “quality” products or well-made products are not simply ways of saying that Boomerang products are properly manufactured and durable (although Boomerang says this too). References to “quality” signify “expensive”, “high-end products”. That is, products that only the affluent can afford.

Scandinavian is here also connected to nature, or “being natural”. Images of young (white) models dressed in Boomerang’s “preppy style” clothes standing on rocky shores, with the ocean behind them or standing in front of picturesque wooden cabins reproduces a romanticized image of Sweden and Swedes that one often sees in tourism advertisements (Gössling & Hultman 2006, Hultman &
Cederholm 2006). Being Scandinavian means having a special, even natural connection to nature. At play here are thus both ethnicity and class constructions.

Underlying this marketing work is the idea that consumers have lifestyles, consumers partake in a set of interlinked practices not only to fulfil utilitarian needs but also to express a narrative of self-identity (Giddens 1997). A lifestyle then is best expressed through the choosing and performing of a set of specific (consumption) practices. This is what Boomerang is aiming at. This company not only sells “quality products” – they market a lifestyle, a way of life, a set of interlinked practices through which a specific consumer identity – the Scandinavian Preppy – can be enacted and maintained (in different versions of course).

Greening the Boomerang Lifestyle

There is a reason our logo is a boomerang. We believe that what you give is also what you get back. That is why we have created the Boomerang Effect. That means you can return your Boomerang clothes to the shop when you no longer want them. As our thanks for your contribution, you will get a 10% discount on a new garment, but above all, you will be helping to make sure the clothing is re-used. (www.boomerang.se 27 February 2012)

When marketing itself as a sustainable company, Boomerang re-writes its own history, giving its logo and name a new meaning. The text above captures the core of the sustainability strategy of Boomerang: to encourage recycling and re-use in different ways. The company collects old garments and resells them, labelling them as “vintage” and thereby inscribing them with new value (see also Fredriksson 2013):

Boomerang Vintage garments are products that, although new to you, have history. They have been worn and loved by someone that then has chosen to pass them on. By doing this the garments are given a new life and you a style that is only yours. (www.boomerang.se 16 February 2013).

Products not suitable for reselling in the vintage line are instead remade into furniture (sofas or futons for example) in their “Boomerang Home” product line. Finally, waste products (pieces of textile and so on) from the manufacturing process of their regular products are used to make a separate line of products: The Boomerang Effect Collection. Boomerang works thus to encourage recycling, upcycling, and re-use. The company reports having received over 7,000 clothing items for recycling (www.boomerang.se 27 February 2012).

Boomerang uses its website and Facebook page to promote its sustainability work. Boomerang’s Facebook page, for example, promotes both its vintage products and the Boomerang effect product line. Here one can read posts that promote “Scandinavian Blue carpet made of recycled Boomerang garments!” or that inform consumers about Boomerang’s new charity work. Similarly, on the Boomerang webpage consumers can read about the company’s work to recycle their garments. Consumers can read texts presenting the Boomerang effect concept and
“philosophy”, the Vintage collection, the Boomerang effect collection (products made from the excess material generated by the regular manufacturing process of Boomerang’s clothes), and the Boomerang Home collection (furniture and carpets made from recycled Boomerang garments). The website also includes information about Boomerang’s Code of Conduct and the company’s broader commitment to selling quality (durable) products.

Boomerang has also been skilful in getting media attention for its sustainability efforts, which are covered in numerous articles. For example, in an article in *Dagens Industri*, Boomerang’s designer Catti Lange talks about the quality of Boomerang’s products:

Boomerang garments are very high quality and can be re-used several times before they wear out. And when they cannot be used anymore, they can be recycled as rag rugs, for instance. (Catti Lange, Boomerang designer, quoted in *Dagens Industri*, page 11, 8 November 2008)

Boomerang and its reselling and recycling concept has also been written about in home interior decorating magazines such as *Allt i Hemmet* and *Sköna Hem*, as well as in the daily papers such as *Dagens Nyheter*, *Svenska Dagbladet*, *Göteborgs Posten* and in such free papers as *Metro* and *City Stockholm*. For the most part, these articles describe the Boomerang sustainability concept and work. Critical questions are seldom included in the articles. The media is here just another marketing channel for Boomerang, a platform through which the company can communicate its sustainability concept to consumers.

In addition, Boomerang does some advertisement for its sustainability line “the Boomerang effect” and it also markets its sustainability work at different events such as the Econow Fair and Stockholm Fashion Week.

Within marketing the stores are regarded as the main marketing tool for retailers (see, e.g. Turley & Milliman 2000; Kent 2007; Soars 2009). This is the interface between company and products and a meeting point between products and consumers. It is at the stores that consumers can touch, feel, and even smell the products. It is through the stores that consumers can try out products, consult store assistants, read marketing material, and educate themselves about the brand and its CSR activities.

At the Boomerang stores consumers can find information regarding the special “hand in old Boomerang garments get 10 % off on a new product” offer and, of course, also hand in old Boomerang products. Consumers can also shop the Boomerang effect collection, which is often displayed separately. Here consumers can browse through this line, pick up a brochure, and read up on the sustainability project or simply note that there is such a thing as a sustainability line at Boomerang. In some of the Boomerang stores, consumers can also find the vintage line consisting of old Boomerang garments. Although far from the messy, alternative, and informal second-hand marketplaces described in the literature (Crewe & Gregson 1998; Gregson & Crewe 1998 Gregson et al. 2000), the vintage line
gives these Boomerang stores an air of “retro retailer” (Crewe et al. 2003) and makes the sustainability theme more visible for consumers.

In sum, the Boomerang stores work to educate consumers on the company’s sustainability efforts, make it possible for them to recycle old garments, and offer them the opportunity to purchase the company’s “green” products.

So, Boomerang markets its sustainability efforts mainly through its PR relations, website, and stores. But what does this sustainability work offer the Boomerang consumers? How do the company’s marketing practices work to make sustainability meaningful to these consumers?

Drawing on the idea of the Scandinavian Preppy, Boomerang formulates a specific sustainability problem and solution. To frame its sustainability work and products Boomerang reproduces the notion that we live in a consumer society. Focusing on the environmental problems of the throwaway consumer society the company tells consumers that we purchase too many easily discarded products. The answer, however, is not to stop consuming altogether. Instead the solution to this problem, Boomerang tells consumers, is twofold. First, to purchase quality products that can stand the test of time and, second, when these products for some reason become obsolete in the eyes of their owners, to re-sell or re-cycle them:

Ever since we started Boomerang in 1976, nature has been our great source of inspiration. The sea, the rocks and the waves which never abate. The ice and snow that freezes and melts, and freezes again. A never-ending cycle. Exactly the way we want our clothes to be.

That is why we have created The Boomerang Effect. This means that you can hand in your old Boomerang garments in the shop when you no longer use them. Some of them we will mark with the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation “Good Environmental Choice” and give a second chance as Boomerang Vintage in selected shops. But even the garments which cannot be sold will be recycled in other forms.

When you come in to have a look at what’s new this spring, bring the jacket or the favourite shirt that’s been worn. To show our gratitude, we will give you a 10% discount when you buy something new and at the same time you are contributing to a more durable and better world. (www.boomerang.com 7 March 2012)

In this text we see how Boomerang and its products are connected to nature. Instead of being a part of the ever-faster “cycle of invention, acceptance, and discard” that is fashion (Fletcher 2012: 225), Boomerang, we are told, wants its products to be part of a never-ending cycle, to be part of a “natural” cycle. In a way, Boomerang is here addressing both the material and social dimensions of product obsolescence (on design and obsolescence see, e.g. Tham 2008, Fletcher 2012). When it is simply a matter of social obsolescence – previous owners might want to change style or simply want something new – the garment is resold and given new value as “vintage”. When instead the clothing item is too worn, it is used to make a new product, such as a rug or a piece of furniture (so-called up-cycle).
What we can see here is that Boomerang, just as other corporations, enacts a specific version of sustainability (Jones et al. 2008; Frostenson et al. 2010). For Boomerang sustainability is not primarily about consuming products that are labelled sustainable, but rather about buying things that last, re-using old things and re-cycling those that can no longer be reused. Thus, the specific “service” that Boomerang provides is that it enables its consumers to be sustainable while continuing to consume the (Boomerang) products they (presumably) enjoy so much. Boomerang allows consumers to construct a sustainable Scandinavian Preppy style.

Enacting the Green Scandinavian Preppy

What kind of green consumer is enacted through this marketing work and what sustainability role can this consumer play? Through the marketing work of Boomerang a version of the green consumer is enacted. Through the marketing carried out at the stores, websites, and media the Green Scandinavian Preppy is enacted. It is through this set of practices and artefacts that Boomerang’s specific model of the green consumers is brought to life.

This version of the green consumer has, as every version does, a specific set of qualities that define it. The design-interested nature-loving Boomerang consumer envisioned by this retailer and enacted by its marketing practices is a combination of the knowledgeable green connoisseur – a consumer that knows quality when he/she sees it – and the green hedonist in search of the good life (see, e.g., Soper 2007; Connolly & Prothero 2008). The Green Scandinavian Preppy is thus neither rebel nor activist. The model of the consumer enacted by this company is not political in the traditional sense. Instead he or she is a pleasure seeker with a green conscience. The green Scandinavian Preppy is someone (a white Swede) who wants to enjoy nature and go sailing. It is someone who knows quality and appreciates design and has the means to pay for both.

It is easy to see the benefits that this model of the green consumer has for the Boomerang Company. This company has much to gain commercially by enacting this version of the green consumer and hopefully (from its perspective) also configure consumers to act and feel in accordance with this model. Enacting the Green Scandinavian Preppy allows Boomerang to position itself as sustainable – receive positive press, add value to the brand, and perhaps even attract new customers – without having to make many changes to its current business practices. It can continue to manufacture and sell high-end and expensive fashion items very much in the same way it did before re-positioning itself as a sustainable fashion retailer. It can continue to sell the Scandinavian Preppy lifestyle that has worked so well in the past. The only difference is that now “green” is added to the mix.

The commercial and strategic benefits for Boomerang then seem obvious. But what does this model entail for the promotion of environmental sustainability? If
we accept that images are performative, that they have the possibility to configure consumers, to shape in some way how they act, think and feel, what then? Enacting the green consumer as a pleasure-seeking connoisseur can have important consequences for how consumers understand and approach sustainability.

On one hand, the green consumer as a pleasure-seeking connoisseur image can be a powerful agent that works to enlist consumers in green consumption. Because it resonates with central notions of contemporary consumer culture it may attract consumers that otherwise would not have been interested in sustainability issues. The Boomerang Company shows its consumers (and potential consumers) that it is possible to consume in a greener way. Through the marketing practices of this retailer consumers are assigned co-responsibility for the environment, both problem and solution (Heiskanen & Pantzar 1997; Halkier 1999), while at the same time showing these consumers that consuming green can be a pleasurable and rewarding experience. Green consumption is here not framed as difficult or complex. It does not seem to involve any sacrifice or trade-offs. This is, one can imagine, a seductive version of the green consumer.

On the other hand, there are also a number of potential drawbacks with the model of the green consumer enacted by the Boomerang Company. To begin with, as the green consumer is translated from activist/rebel and into a pleasure-seeking connoisseur, the image also loses much of its political force. For while a rebel fights against an established government or mainstream and an activist focuses on making change happen through action, a pleasure-seeking connoisseur is only concerned with choosing adequate products that reflect and develop a sophisticated taste and bring about pleasure. Here green consumption becomes something else. It becomes simply another way of enjoying ourselves and constructing our consumer identities.

Also, the message produced by the Boomerang Company (and other companies engaging in green marketing) is that environmental issues are to be approached primarily as consumer issues. More than this, it tells consumers that environmental issues are only relevant as long as they can be combined with the pleasurable consumption of desired products. In the process of marketing the Green Scandinavian Preppy this retailer is also reproducing “the idea that the individual consumer, making decisions to buy one product in preference to another, can painlessly and almost effortlessly create social and political change” (Low & Davenport 2007: 336). For the Green Scandinavian Preppy complicated environmental issues are simple. Achieving environmental sustainability is merely a matter of buying the right product. Through this marketing work the environmental critique – which often targets our whole way of life – is contained and made uncomplicated and manageable.
Discussion and Conclusions

In this paper a performativity approach is used to bring to the fore the manner in which marketing enacts specific images of green consumers and to discuss the performative capabilities of these images. More specifically, in this paper I have tried to do two things.

First I have tried to show how the green marketing work of a retailer – the Boomerang Company – leads to the reformulation of sustainability and the enactment of a specific version of the green consumer, here called the Green Scandinavian Preppy.

Second, departing from this analysis, I have discussed the potentials and limitations of this specific green consumer image. I have argued that while this is a version of the green consumer that might be appealing to consumers and thus have the potential to promote a version of green consumption, this is also a green consumer image that has lost much of its political power.

To be clear, the objective has not been to criticize Boomerang per se. This company and its marketing work is just an example of a broader phenomenon. Instead, my goal has been to illustrate how critical analysis of green consumer enactment can be accomplished and also demonstrate the importance of carrying out this type of analysis. That is, the ambition has been to develop an approach to the study of green consumer enactment and illustrate its importance.

Obviously the enactment of the Green Scandinavian Preppy model by the Boomerang Company does not mean that consumers will automatically adopt this model. As consumer culture studies have taught us, consumers do not simply passively receive and accept messages and products from organizations. Instead they actively translate and reconfigure them to fit into their practices and life projects (see, e.g. Miller 1995; Miller et al. 1998; Kozinets et al. 2002; Ilmonen 2004; Kozinets et al. 2004; Campbell 2005). It is thus very likely that a specific study of this retailer’s customers and potential customers would reveal greater heterogeneity.

Nevertheless, as previous research has shown, the performative power of marketing is considerable (see e.g. Kjellberg & Helgesson 2006; Araujo 2007; Skålén et al. 2008; Fuentes 2011). Although no mass of Green Scandinavian Preppies will instantly emerge, the marketing work carried out by this retailer has the potential to shape how consumers understand and approach sustainability and consumption.

This is why we need to study the commercial enactment of green consumer images. By determining whom the green consumer is/should be we are also to some extent determining how sustainability is to be approached. And if retailers and other companies are through their marketing practices shaping (in some way) how we understand and approach sustainability, it is important to examine and critically discuss how this is accomplished and with what consequences.
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Notes

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References


Independent Articles
The Nature$_2$ of Society$_2$
Enmapping Nature, Space and Society into a Town-green Hybrid

By Louis Rice

Abstract
The paper describes the transformation of derelict land into a ‘town-green’ and the role legislation played in transforming social and natural relationships. Town green denotes a legal status under the Great Britain Commons Act (2006) that protects certain open spaces from building development; the status requires that a space must simultaneously have a specific social quality (i.e. ‘town-ness’) and a specific natural quality (i.e. ‘green-ness’). This hybrid condition requires an alliance between society and nature in a certain configuration (referred to here as nature$_2$ and society$_2$). In this empirical study it involved the participation and consensus of local residents, volunteer gardeners as well as nature itself; flowers needed to bloom and grass had to grow in order for the hybrid town-green status to be conferred. There are two distinct phases of this transformation; the first is the change in identities and configuration of the constituents of town and green. This involved the production of a modified ‘real’ world with: different plants and flowers; reconfigured spatial arrangements; as well as different social actors. The second phase is a shift from changes in the ‘real’ world towards an ‘enmap’ – a displacement of myriad actors into documentation. This transfer from a complex messy reality into an enmap permitted the legitimation of the new network to be accepted as a ‘town-green’. What the research reveals, other than hints for gardeners and community activists, is how material and non-material; social and natural; spatial, discursive and temporal worlds are hybridised.

Keywords: Hybrid, actor-network, space, power, informal, urban.
Introduction

The research describes how a derelict piece of land was modified by local residents to fit the legislative definition as a ‘town-green’. It is an account of how these actors attempted to use the Great Britain Commons Act 2006 (more commonly referred to as the ‘Town-Green’ Act) to facilitate a small area of their neighbourhood being defined as a town-green. ‘Town-green’ refers to a legislative mechanism that designates undeveloped land as a kind of parkland and forbids further development of that space. The process is interesting in its stipulation that both nature and society must form an alliance; the term town-green is an inherently hybrid conception – in that it is simultaneously social (town) and natural (green). The research uses empirical evidence from a case-study in the UK.

Town-Green Legislation

The Great Britain Commons Act (2006) concerns town-green legislation and defines itself (rather neutrally) as ‘An Act to make provision about common land and town or village greens’. The Commons Act provides legal protection for an open space to be used for the purposes of a town-green, the corollary of which is that the space cannot be developed or built on. This Act is currently being used in the UK for a number of high profile cases of communities attempting to use this legislation to block development of open land (BBC 2008). The legislation from this Act pertains only to land that has no clear owner or land ownership is ambiguous. Land that has an owner cannot be registered as a town-green. Town-greens are somewhat transgressive in that this condition often requires users of space to trespass on land that does not belong to them in order to invoke the town-green legislative mechanisms. The legislation states that any space must meet the conditions pertaining to the notions of ‘town’ and ‘green’. However what these terms denote mean is far from clear; the Act does not stipulate comprehensively what these might be; the next subsections examine how these terms are contextually interpreted.

Defining Town-ness

The definition of ‘town’ relates to a notion of communal and social use; ‘a significant number of the inhabitants of any locality, or of any neighbourhood within a locality’ (Act 2006: Section 15.2). This definition is significant in what it excludes rather than it describes. For example a town-green may not be enjoyed by all humans or all society, it is only applicable to certain humans. Rather than all of ‘society’ being eligible (this population is referred to as ‘society1’), for example, visitors to the area or friends of the local residents only a small subset of the population can be considered eligible within this Act (henceforth referred to as society2). The stipulation that town must be formed specifically from ‘inhabitants from the locality’ differentiates between these human actors (i.e. society2) from society1.
‘Inhabitants’ in this legislation is restricted exclusively to humans rather than the many other inhabitants (i.e. flora and fauna) of the space (although this is implied rather than explicitly stated).

**Defining Green-ness**

The Commons Act 2006 does not define what is meant by ‘green’; instead this is a concept that adjusts/distorts/conforms according to local contexts, cultures, knowledges and practices. ‘Green’ from a UK perspective invariably requires ‘grass’. There are, for example, few parks (if any) in the UK that are not green, i.e. predominantly grassed, other than in some very built-up areas, but these would perhaps be defined as ‘play-areas’, playgrounds or multi-purpose sports areas. A patch of land that would be considered appropriate for a town-green must be both literally and symbolically ‘green’ to fit the UK socio-legal definition of green; i.e. grass-y. Nature\(^1\) describes here the ‘natural’ state of the informal space at the start of the process: brambles, weeds, slugs, snails, ants, mud, wasps, bees, mice, rats, trees, ivy, mushrooms, mud, lichens, moths and nettles. The definition of weeds is a culturally specific term; not a scientific fact – some plants, such as flowers, are deemed ‘good’ whilst others, such as funghi and brambles, are deemed ‘bad’. Nature\(^2\) describes the configuration of the biological and organic actors when constituted as a ‘garden’ (situated specifically within the cultural context of an English garden) i.e. mostly an expanse of grass, with certain species of flowering plants, typically arranged in flowerbeds (which must be devoid of grass). Nature\(^2\) denotes the assemblage of flora and fauna that fits the definition of ‘green’ in the town-green legislation.

**Defining History**

There is a third aspect to the Act, and it relates to the temporal: ‘the inhabitants ... have indulged... in lawful sports ... for a period of at least 20 years’ (Act 2006: Section 15.2). ‘History’ has to be part of the equation. It is up to the Local Government to deem what those pastimes might be. What this definition raises is the timeframe for this Act; the town-green must have had the qualities of town-green-ness for at least 20 years. There is therefore a degree of historicity to the interpretation and identity of town-green. Town-green legislation requires that the space must be used in a specific mode for a period of twenty years, this register of history is referred to here as history\(^2\). The full, unedited and extra-legislative version of the previous twenty years (which also includes unlawful events) is referred to as history\(^1\).

**The Town+Green equation**

A town-green must fulfill all of these criteria: that it acts as a ‘town’ i.e. it has a some ‘social’ quality and that it is ‘green’ i.e. it has some ‘natural’ quality; it
must comprise both of these qualities, one quality cannot be achieved at the cost of the other, a hybrid socio-natural space is required. The status quo of town-green must also have been maintained for at least twenty years; thus ‘history’ is enmeshed as part of the process. These three elements thus form the equation: society+nature+history. Although each of the three elements are complex entities that could be broken down further into more discrete parts; they are applied here to marry the terms used in the Commons Act. Furthermore it is when these elements successfully elide that the hybrid ‘town-green’ will come into existence.

Research Framework: Introducing the ‘Actors’

The term ‘actor’ is used throughout this account. Whilst the term ‘actor’ is used in some sociological narratives to indicate action with a concomitant subjective meaning – this is not universally accepted. According to Weber (1997) social action rarely has any subjective meaning that can be attributed to it. Bourdieu & Eagleton (1992: 113) go further and suggest that ‘the social world doesn't work in terms of consciousness, it works in terms of practices’. These practices are synonymous with the activities of the actors in this account. Action is carried out by actors who, as Latour asserts straightforwardly, are ‘entities that do things’ (Latour 1992:241). The term, as used here, marries that of Actor-Network Theory (ANT). ANT examines how ‘things’ (i.e. actors) come together, interact, alter identities and/or relate conflictually qua networks (Law 1999). ANT describes how almost any object or entity can be an actor in a network, for example examining humans in the same way as scallops (Callon 1986) or hinges (Latour 1992). This research, more specifically, appropriates the ‘translation’ framework as proposed by Callon (1986). Translation was originally used for ‘the study of the role played by science and technology in structuring power relationships’ (Callon 1986: 196). Translation has subsequently been used to explore power relationships in a much wider variety of contexts than science and technology, for example: pop music (Hennion 1989), ‘things’ (Preda 1999), museums (Star & Griesemer 1989), sustainability (Rice 2011) and ecology (Lee & Roth 2001). Translation involves the construction of meaning, identity and knowledge (Law 1986).

Actor Power

The use of a term such as ‘power’ is often used as a metanarrative for explaining or describing a context or phenomenon (Castells 1997). Power is conceived here as the effect of one entity or network on another; power is operating, ‘speaking’ or ‘visible’ when one actor makes another ‘act’ (Westwood 2002). The process of translation is a study of power-relationships. Power can be conceived of as not merely something owned or maintained by one group to be meted out on another,
but more as a relational network, where power is exerted through consensus, from one group to another (Harrison 2011). Power is not immanent to some actors and external to others; nor is it an abstract force that operates invisibly across this scene (Foucault 1980). To put it another way, if there is no action, then there has been no transference of power.

**Introducing Hybrids**


The research describes how a network of actors forms during the process of constructing a town-green. At the heart of this dynamic is the production (and reproduction) of a hybrid entity ‘town-green’. The term town-green is an inherently hybrid conception – in that it is simultaneously social (town) and natural (green). Hybridity is used specifically in much ANT literature (Latour 1993, 1996; Callon & Law 1995; Michael 1998; Elam 1999; Albertsen & Diken 2000; Tironi 2010). The term hybrid has sometimes referred (pejoratively) to the crossbreeding of races, particularly in the context of colonised and coloniser (Hall 1993; Said 1994; Soja 1996). However the term has more positive connotations, for example under the guise of multi-culturalism (Mavrommati 2010) or the outcome of the inter-relativity of two (or more) cultures (Bhabha 1994; Saldanha 2006; Haraway 2008). Hybridity is not restricted to inter-cultural conditions; it might arise within a relatively homogenous group via socio-political change or new technologies, materials beliefs, practices and innovations (Callon 1991). Hybrids are not isolated from their contexts, they are contingent organisations that are deformed and/or affected by their adjacencies; there is dialogue, interaction and conflict with the network. Hybridisation is metamorphic and processual, Hall describes this ‘as a production which is never complete, always in process,’ (1993: 392). This double-meaning captures the dynamics of the empirical study which is both an examination of the production and product of a town-green. Hybridity forms a fundamental part of the intellectual framing of this research and the basis upon which the approach to the empirical work is established. The case-study follows the creation of a town-green; from its inception as a derelict wasteland into a new socio-natural reality. In this study the imbroglio of material, non-material, social, natural and semiotics worlds are presented as they are in reality – as hybrid.

**Case-study Findings**

The research examines a case-study site in the UK. This empirical research traces the changes to an informal derelict space and loosely-organised residents into a town-green. It is difficult to ascertain precisely where the process of becoming town-green began. As such this research picks up at the point when some of the local human residents (society2) are musing over the hypothesis ‘what is this in-
formal space for?’ This first ‘dialogue’ is still a theoretical proposition (that will eventually lead to action). The informal space had been a derelict wasteland – the remains of a bombed out row of housing (damage from World War Two) and subsequently used intermittently as: an illegal dumping ground; an informal playground by local children; a home for a family of urban foxes; and was partially covered in dirt, weeds and trees.

Some of the local residents decided to transform the informal derelict site and at this point simultaneously established themselves as indispensible to the process. Their second ‘dialogue’ moves from general uncertainty to stabilized specificity: this involved the shift from indefinite questions such as ‘what is this informal space for?’ into more focused questions, such as ‘is this space a town-green?’ It is this second dialogue that begins a process of hybridisation; because up to that point there had been little relationship between any of the actors society+nature+history on the informal space. The second dialogue brings a heterogeneous group of actors together to hybridise (whether they want to or not) in relation to the legislative apparatus. In the production of the town-green the three crucial elements: society+nature+history form a tripartite alliance; and all three must unite to answer the question ‘is this space a town-green?’

Modifying Networks

There is no inherent need or requirement, in or of itself, for this space to be considered as a town-green. The weeds do not call for it, nor the mud or nature: they were all operating independently from legal status and social groups. The local government does not invoke the Act of its own volition; rather it is encumbent on others to instigate the legislation. It is society2 who determined that town-green status was desirable. The previously isolated entities: society+nature+history that must become amalgamated, have other actors or relationships vying for their attention/attracting them/luring them in different directions or simply forcing them to act in a certain way. What must happen is that any unwanted links must be cut – as Gore Vidal proposed ‘it is not enough to succeed – others must fail’. It is through this process that certain actors are barred from the process and ultimately excluded from the use of the informal space. In the construction of the town-green on this case-study site, it was necessary to extirpate the previous occupants, uses and users of the space. Weeds, errant humans, dirt and other actors were all removed or othered in this procedure. The town-green legislation is used to block new building development, in particular by removing links with the original landowners. The original landowners could potentially still return to claim their land and build a house on it. Any links or relationships between these owners (and the legislative apparatus that simultaneously connects them) and the informal space must also be modified.
The Production of Nature$_2$

The ‘idea’ of gardening is one thing; but it is the actual ‘practice’ of gardening that is carried out which matters. If nature$_2$ is to be produced, certain flora must be willing to perform as desired. The (good) plants must actually grow in accordance with society$_2$’s wishes: the gardening process begins. In order for nature$_1$ to be transformed into nature$_2$ a number of approaches and devices were used. The network of actors qua nature$_2$ were transformed through the bringing of an assemblage of heterogeneous entities to act together and break other unwanted links or associations. A poster advertising Spring Planting asks the local society to ‘Please bring plants and bulbs, forks and trowels trowels.’ In this request we see that it is not sufficient to succeed in bringing the local residents together on the site, nor merely gain their willingness to do some gardening, but that there is also a need for society to provide the tools with which to carry out these activities. This also points to the need for more than purely societal influences on the site – they must come with tools and materials to perform the task (Graf 2014). For example: metallic spades were used (in alliance with a member of the human society) to remove certain actors – particularly the bracken and weeds. Secateurs were used on the ivy; as ivy depends structurally on another entity to survive (usually a nearby tree) along with a connection to the ground for water and nutrients; this cutting of links with secateurs works in two directions to not only cut ties with the ground but cuts the tie with the tree as support. Some gardeners whispered to the plants in the belief that the flowers respond well to this. A few gardeners resorted to invoking God to help with matters such as removing pests, encouraging blooming and auspicious climactic forecasts. Even with all these materials, non-materials, supernatural beings and hope; it transpired that it was quite difficult to break links with existing nature$_1$ and build new connections with nature$_2$. Society$_2$ adopted multiple strategies, for example, they: mowed the grass, trimmed its edges, planted flowers and removed any tenacious weeds that tried to return. Indeed society$_2$ discovered that nature$_2$ must be almost constantly reminded, prodded, cut, trimmed, weeded, removed, planted and maintained in order to achieve the (ostensibly) static condition of garden.

In practice however, it was rare anyone could be encouraged to do these tasks more than once a week, in general a monthly gardening session was carried out. The cutting of ties with weeds needed to be performed more frequently. Additional actors were needed to act on a different temporal range, actors that would work more frequently, day and night if possible. If there was any relenting, then the weeds and the brambles and ivy come back. Flowers were too easily attacked by slugs and other predatory fauna. In practice the involvement of nature$_2$ was difficult to achieve; these actors cannot be controlled very easily; they are signs of the wrong type of nature – the wrong type of green-ness and the possibility that nature$_2$ relapses back into a wasteland (nature$_1$). Society$_2$ expanded their network of
alliances to produce nature2. Flowerbeds were used to control slugs and snails; not only were the flowers put into delineated flowerbeds but the chemico-biological actor of manure was added to strengthen the relationships with certain flowers. The aim was for fertilizer to act across a temporal landscape; working day and night for weeks on end to maintain alliances with the necessary flora of nature2. The existing links the weeds had with the soil were stronger than could be cut with secateurs or dug with a trowel. The roots systems and rhizomes of these weeds were too deep (literally). Other apparatus had to be used to further break unwanted ties, one came in the form of a bio-weapon: the pesticide ‘Weedol’. This weed-killer was much more effective in cutting the links between the weeds and the soil (which is the primary datum of the space). Weed-killer also has the advantage of working for an extended period of time, and not just when a society member can be convinced to go and weed with a spade on a rainy afternoon. The weed-killer kept on cutting unwanted bonds day and night for weeks and weeks (until effectively all traces of unwanted weeds were removed).

**The Production of Society2**

The few local residents who dreamed up the proposition of a town-green were too small a network to successfully create a town-green; their numbers were not deemed to be ‘a significant number of the inhabitants’ (Act 2006: Section 15.2). Accordingly a much larger group of humans needed to be involved (and form part of the network) if they were to meet legislation’s ‘town’ stipulations (society2). Society2 is a much more distinct collection of human actors: specifically those who meet the legislative requirements of the Commons Act (2006); society2 is restricted specifically to ‘inhabitants from the locality’ who have engaged in ‘lawful past-times or sports’ on the land for the prior 20 years.

*How did they do this?* In a variety of ways (different to those for nature2), for example they used words; initially through conversations – they went around to residents’ associations and drummed up support, and changed the composition and direction of existing community groups so that they too were aligned with the movement. In practice, the conversations and discussions made for turning the derelict space into a town-green, was often made along the lines of increasing safety. The ‘broken windows’ theory (Wilson and Kelling 1982) was used to convince the local residents to support society2’s ideas. Broken window theory is the concept that criminal activity is attracted to signs of dilapidation and decay. In brief, (it is argued) if a person sees a broken window they feel it is acceptable to break another window. In this context, it was argued that the derelict land was a ‘sign’ that it was okay to throw away rubbish or dump waste in the neighbourhood (Edensor 2005). This would be bad in and of itself, however it might also attract further criminal behaviour, such as, car crime and burglary. These arguments were used to try to ensure that the derelict space was made to fail, and the town-green
was made to succeed. The semiotics of space become embroiled in the production of a town-green. The conversations from these meetings were minuted with notes, text and diagrams. These documented minutes acted as devices to cajole society\textsubscript{1} into acting as society\textsubscript{2} in subsequent community meetings and social forums.

A number of other strategies and tactics were required to act on/with society\textsubscript{2}. Tactics intended to act on/with human actors to form society\textsubscript{2} included: inducements to free coffee, meetings in the living rooms of nearby residents, cups of tea, biscuits, minutes from meetings, dialogue, conversations, ideas, signs, posters, placards, gardening mornings and Neighbourhood Watch sessions. All of these are used to form not just ‘a’ society, but more importantly, the right type of society (one that will later act as a proxy for ‘town’ in the town-green application) – i.e. society\textsubscript{2}.

The Production of History\textsubscript{2}

The approach taken to enmesh the history of that space into one co-incident with town-green activities was to fabricate documentary materials: questionnaires, letters, photographs and written statements to help shift the balance of power towards the requirements of a town-green (rather than any other outcome). History was implicated through text and images principally in the form of the ‘evidence questionnaires’ submitted as part of the ‘Application For Registration Of Land … As A Town Green Under The Commons Act 2006’. This documentary material was used to translate the (re)telling of the history of the space. In order to create these documentary materials; the newly formed society\textsubscript{2} wrote testimonies, filled in leaflets, submitted photographs and completed questionnaires to substantiate the correct version of the history of the informal space.

The Production of Society+Nature+History

The process so far had mostly involved creating, modifying and augmenting a plexus to form the desired equation: society+nature+history. This had involved ‘real’ changes in the physical world, most evident in the condition of the informal space that had changed from a wasteland (nature\textsubscript{1}) into a neat and tidy garden (nature\textsubscript{2}); similarly the residents had been galvanized into the appropriate agglomeration qua society\textsubscript{2}. This had been a messy, iterative and inchoate process; operating across a network of actors; sometimes acting on individual people, sometimes on larger social groupings, sometimes on plants and flowers and on inanimate materials – stones, mud, spades, pieces of paper, croissants and cups of coffee; sometimes as signs, posters, prayers, dialogues and discourse. This alliance of heterogeneous actors perform their roles and responsibilities in a reliable and durable manner; until their identity appears to be ‘permanent’ (Latour 1986).
Enmap

A significant modification in the mode of action by the multifarious actors was in a shift from the ‘real world’ to a ‘documentary world’. Part(s) of the town-green hybrid could now be maintained, not through the actions of the many actors, but where documentary representations could ‘en-map’ actors. The neologism ‘enmap’ comes from the notion of a ‘map’ representing (but not replacing) reality as a more stable, fixed equivalence (Serres 2007); ‘en-’ refers etymologically to an ‘expression of entry into a specified state or location’ (Oxford English Dictionary 1993). Thus ‘enmapping’ is the process of transporting myriad actors into a more fixed, static representation. The mode of each en-map is invariably in the form of words, but also includes pictures, graphs and diagrams. In this case-study, nature$_2$ is enmapped to be concomitant with the required notion of ‘green’ in ‘town-green’. Similarly the local residents (society$_2$) were enmapped as equivalences of ‘town’ in ‘town-green’. Enmapping does not (and cannot) replace all of the activities of these actors, there is still a need to go and weed the garden etc. Each enmap can act on behalf of many others, indeed as we shall see, the process of enmapment is an exponential effect, where fewer and fewer enmaps can represent ever-larger numbers of actors in the network. An enmap succeeds in displacing a large number of actors in a network (which are often changing, shifting, modifying, kinetic and fluxive) into a single documentary entity that is more easily accessed, transportable (moved from the space of the garden to the space of the local government’s offices), stable and fixed.

It is worth pointing out that this article is also an enmap: all of the actions, actors, hybrids and hybridizations that took place ‘in reality’ are now (re)presented here in this article, in absentia.

History$_2$ Enmap

In the case of ‘history$_2$’ – this was enmapped to satisfy (and displace alternative accounts of) the requisite legislative definition of the history of the informal space. Individuals supplied testimonies to the local authority about the length of time that the space had been used as town-green. Archive documents and photographs ‘prove’ that this space has been used for ‘lawful sports and pastimes on the land for a period of at least 20 years’ (Act 2006: Section 15.2), i.e. as a town-green for two decades. The ‘documentary world’ is hybridized within the ‘real world’ – the enmap forms part of the hybrid rather than merely acting as proxy. Documents and photographs constitute an enmap that confirm that the space has been acting as a town-green. The individual sheets of paper can be seen as acting in this context. Akin to voters in a poll, each sheet of paper acts like a ‘yes’ vote in the ballot box. The case-study application lists the documentary ‘exhibits’ as: ‘Land registry search, Garden plaque, Gardening and maintenance sessions, ...
Photographs, Evidence questionnaires + Statements.’ Images or documents that portray something else or ‘act’ against the collective are omitted from the enmap process and remain outside of the negotiations. For example, the space was previously used as an informal play area for children. These actors have been extirpated with the creation of a town-green; there are no specific play facilities for children and most child’s play is effectively prohibited for fear of damaging the delicate flowers. Notably none of the ‘broken window’ material was mentioned within the ‘official’ history of the site. Similarly, images that might originally have different meanings and signification or bore different histories are subverted and appropriated to tell the ‘correct’ story of history (history2). The ‘true’ identities of ‘actors’ such as photographs are modified and changed through the process. A family picnic or a family photo is now implicated as evidence; the photograph itself becomes an actor. Twenty years of varying activities, interests and past-times have been elided and displaced into an appendix section of the legislative report. Even further; ‘148 indexed evidence questionnaires and statements’ of individual testimonies provided as an appendix to the application are collated and displaced into an even briefer executive summary. The plurality of voices are displaced into an enmap qua bullet point list of 15 items that will be accepted as evidence of town-ness. These enmapped documents act as the apparatus through which history2 is enrolled into the town-green.

Society2 Enmap

Once the formal application for town-green status was made; two key events occur; the first is a visit by local government officials to the space to ‘see’ for themselves; the second is at the Council House (aka City Hall) where the application will be assessed and judgement passed. When the two government officials arrive at the site to ‘see’ for themselves whether the application is appropriate, their eyes are made to see for the many other government officials whom are expected to objectively adjudicate on the application. It is the report by these two officials that will represent the view of many others at the Council House. Similarly those at the Council will be acting on behalf of a much bigger legislative body and for the whole of the city populous for whom they have been charged with representing.

Only a few actors are represented or involved at any one time. It is those few who ‘speak’ that represent and displace the many silent others. Society2 speak on behalf of the wider society1. The thirty-one residents who completed the ‘evidence questionnaires’ are acting on behalf of the silent majority of residents (many hundred ‘inhabitants of the locality’) who did not fill in a questionnaire, nor endorse nor verify the application. The active population is represented through the questionnaires via displacement from the neighbourhood into the Council House. Not everyone can speak at such a council meeting, due to time constraints and the size of room; many people do not ‘speak’ at all; it is their words in the questionnaires
that act on their behalf. It is those who completed their questionnaires who have acted for those who remained silent; the many are represented by the few. The questionnaires enmap the multiple living voices and conversations, discussions and disagreements that existed in reality and occurred over a twenty year period.

**Nature₂ Enmap**

Those silent residents could have acted if they so wished: they were consulted with notices posted along the street, leaflets through the letterbox and displays in the society noticeboards. (It could be argued the posters and leaflets did not exercise power effectively over the local residents, as so few acted as a result of their presence). However, how does nature act (or speak) for itself and how is nature represented or enmapped? The two officials who visit the site must ascertain whether the space is ‘green’; i.e. if nature₂ is present. Neither official is an expert on nature, nor particularly knowledgeable to any extent on horticulture, botany or ecology. Their assessment of what nature₂ should be is based entirely upon expectations of what it should look like; i.e. a neat grassed area with some flowers and trees. In this study; the officials were convinced and could put forward their findings that the space was indeed ‘green’. The council officials did not invent nor magically construct this representation of nature₂. Nature₂ communicates directly to the council officials; nature₂ was acting. The grass itself can say nothing verbally, but can enact its own form of representation. Like a form of direct democracy or a union group showing their support by raising their hand in the air, ready to be counted; each blade of grass ‘acts’ as a voting system; each blade of grass that can stand up and ‘vote’ is in effect being counted by the council officials. If the grass had not managed to survive, (which was quite possible without the support of society₂) the garden would be bare earth, with perhaps a few weeds. This would not have satisfied the requirements by the local authority for the ‘green’ of town-green. Similarly the flowers in the flowerbeds are also counted in this way, and the trees too. The council representatives are merely carrying out their role, like a union delegate, of counting up those votes for and against. The voting system of grass/flowers/trees is enmapped as a series of numbers, photographs and words written down in the officials report.

Nature₂ has been enmapped from the garden into the council chambers without the need to be physically ‘there’ nor literally ‘speak’. This has the effect of further stabilizing and rigidifying the representation of nature₂. The essentiality of nature₂ has been enmapped and made permanent via the written report. The difficulties and flux of maintaining nature₂ in this state, the constant battle against weeds, pests, weather and the indifference of residents is now supplanted into a permanent, unchanging and immutable mode of representation *qua* enmap. An equivalence is made between the static words in the report and the ever-changing natural world of the space.
**Town-Green Enmap**

In this case study: the town-green status is successful. Any controversies that might have arisen from these conflicting voices were quelled at the point when the Local Government made their decision to determine the space as a town-green. It was at this point, in the local council’s chambers at 12.00 on 19th January, when the governmental committee voted in favour of the application that the question ‘is this a town-green?’ was converted into the definitive statement ‘this is a town-green’. Multiple actors have been displaced into single enmap (in the form of a folder of reports, minutes and notes) that act in unity as one coherent, immutable, fixed, representation of a ‘town-green’. In this moment, the controversy is closed and all of the various actors; the society, the garden and history are effectively incarcerated within the juridical infrastructure. Once this decision was made, and operating in a reverse direction, the full power of the legislative apparatus acts to maintain this status. Simultaneously in this hybrid: nature2 is deemed the correct type; society2 really exists and history2 is revealed.

**Conclusions**

The empirical study is in many ways a rather boring and everyday scenario. There is no dramatic finale or radical event (just the rubber-stamping of a report in a local government office). However, the field study reveals, over many years of observations and interviews, a significant change in the socio-spatial constitution of the actors involved. The process fundamentally transformed the local natural world; the flora and fauna changed; even the chemical make-up of the soil was altered over this process; ‘town’ was produced with different human actors forming a new community; history was altered through this process in a retroactive manoeuvre.

Town-green is a hybrid. There are many actors that constitute the town-green: social and non-social. The signs and posters that lined the streets and letterboxes over the years form part of the collective. Living rooms, coffee, tea, biscuits, trowels, spades, prayers, emails and fertilizers were all found in the liminal space generated between the juridical ‘town-green’ and the existing prior realities of society1 and nature1. It is here, in the final lines of this article, where it is appropriate to remove the conventions of terminology: society+nature+time. These terms are perhaps less meaningful in practice, they merely provided a series of convenient readymade labels to identify actors (in the interim). Grouping all the humans in one pile whilst putting nature over there and consigning history to yet another category rarely captured the identities emergent in the study. The networks of association and indeed existence are transgressed, cut across and blurred – practice is considerably more complex than these three neat categories. The case study reveals that, on occasion: some humans had closer links to animals; flora...
were at odds with history; communities existed as documentation; spades created society; gardening was political; mythical spirits came to kill slugs; green-ness was cultural; time is limited to twenty years and living rooms became devices to hothouse communities. Hybrids are messy, multifarious, unanticipated and heterogeneous – they resist shorthand descriptions to capture their identity and constituents.

An enmap facilitates the translation of the events, practices and actors into a form of discourse. In this instance, the enmap is now in the same ‘language’ as legislation. Beforehand it was not possible for the events in the informal space to communicate with, or form part of, the legislative domain. The construction of an enmap is a specific modality of how power ‘acts’. Each enmap is incredibly powerful as it provides and equivalence for all of the many years of heterogeneous activities and actors into a single, fixed, unvarying, consensual source. An enmap is dependent on the translation of action into discourse, texts, images and photographs. The town-green discourse is part of a larger, complex, comprehensive, legislative regime of discourse. The ‘power’ of this legislation is compelling as it is part of an actor-network that includes: legal institutions, judiciary power, council barristers, penal codes, police forces, incarceration facilities and enforcement officers.

It is perhaps too assertive to conclude that ‘power is hybrid’; nonetheless, power in this empirical study is distributed throughout the actor-network qua multifarious practices, iterative performances, physical interventions, spatial conditions, signs and discourses. It is a complex imbroglio of: fiction, legislation, nature, economics, knowledge, society and inter-relationships.

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**References**


Blogging Family-like Relations when Visiting Theme and Amusement Parks: The Use of Children in Displays Online

By Anne-Li Lindgren & Anna Sparrman

Abstract

This paper combines sociological perspectives on family display, internet studies on family and private photography and a child studies perspective on the display of children. The paper proposes that blogging practices related to visits to theme and amusement parks in Sweden provide a new arena for people to display family-like relationships. In the different displays, adults mainly use pictures of children in the blogs to demonstrate their ability to perform family-like relationships. The paper suggests that this form of child-centred display, a visualized child-centredness, done during the park visit as well as in the blogging, is part of the construction of contemporary childhoods and what it means to be a child today and has not been theorized in earlier research on the display of family-like relations.

Keywords: Family-like relations, blog posts, visualized child-centredness, online displays, theme and amusement parks
Introduction

The Internet has been highlighted as a social forum for making and remaking identities. Blogging is one of several social practices taking place on the web where ‘different kinds of selves’ and ‘blogging subjectivity’ are displayed for virtually anyone to see, comment on or engage with (Dean 2010: 47, 50). We want to combine this theory of blogging with what has been referred to in sociological literature as the display of family-like relations (Finch 2007; James & Curtis 2010). Janet Finch (2007) argues that display is a necessary ingredient of doing family relations since it conveys and at the same time confirms that a practice is about doing family. Mary Jane Kehily and Rachel Thomson (2011) interpret Finch’s concept of display as a way of thinking about the audience when family practices are being made. In their study of motherhood, they argue that this display is about embodied visual practices, family narratives and naming practices (Kehily & Thomson 2011). The empirical material investigated in this paper – blog posts – is also highly visual; it is a form of visual stories (Sparrman & Lindgren 2010) and embodied visual practices (Kehily & Thomson 2011) constructed in order to attract an Internet audience. We use this as a point of departure to empirically investigate how the Internet is used as a technology to support photographs and written texts that display family-like relations after visits to theme and amusement parks. It was an unexpected finding that the highly visual stories created on the Internet mainly display children, as if children make the performance of family-like relations legitimate in a specifically normalizing way. We became interested in what this child focus does with ‘the links between display and the power of politics of contemporary relational life’ (Heapy 2011: 19) and particularly with the notions of children and childhood produced in the displays.

The empirical basis of this paper is blog posts constructed after visits to one theme park (Astrid Lindgren’s World, ALW) and one amusement park (Liseberg) in Sweden. According to a report about world-class tourism experiences, visiting theme and amusement parks is a common activity in contemporary society; the parks studied here are specifically mentioned in the report (Danielsson et al. 2011: 28, 37). The same report highlights how people visiting amusement parks, museums, zoos and other attractions are increasingly engaged in documenting their visits. Digital photography and filming are the most common documentation techniques used for uploading experiences onto the Internet or sending them to friends and family (Danielsson et al. 2011: 26). The blog posts we analyze are part of this widespread practice of documenting and uploading a park visit onto the Internet.

In addition to the research mentioned above, which focuses on adults in the display of family-like relations, we focus on the subjects visualized in the displays: the children. We perform detailed analyses of the ways in which norms of child autonomy, child activity and children’s need for protection (Cannella & Vi-
ruru 2004; Smith 2012) are brought into play in these displays and how different power relations related to age and the adult-child divide are enacted (Sparrman & Lindgren 2010; Lindgren 2012). The paper suggests that adults use children to display family-like relationships in varying ways, creating what we refer to as visualized child-centredness. In the conclusion we discuss what the implications of adults’ widespread use of children in displays might mean for children, and what notions of children and childhood are produced by visualized child-centredness. To help us explore this, one key question guided the analysis: What kind of adult-child relations are created by adults in blog posts displaying family-like relations after visits to theme and amusement parks?

Contextualizing Blogging and Family Display

Blogging is a widespread practice that started during the late 1990s when the first free software was introduced (Dean 2010). Even though there are no numbers for how many blogs are produced by Swedes, studies from the US claim that there are hundreds of millions of blogs produced every day (Dean 2010: 36, 137–138; Kapidzic & Herring 2011: 7). Like other web documents, blogs can be multimodal or purely textual, and variants exist that feature photos, voice recordings (audio blogs), branding blogs (slogs), and videos (vlogs) (Dean 2010; Kapidzic & Herring 2011).

A number of characteristics of the blog are relevant when relating them to theories of the display of family-like relations. According to Jodi Dean (2010), a blog can contain anything that communicates something; an image, reaction, feeling or event, and it captures oral communication in linear writing. Blogs are also saved, stored, archived and accessible, and they leave traces. They signal engagement and participation, that ‘I am participating in the construction and extension of a manner of being together’ (2010: 47). We would like to suggest that this perspective on participation is similar to descriptions of how family display is presented. For example, it is similar to Finch’s description of how displaying family is done in small, intimate and social everyday practices, where ‘the meaning of one’s actions has to be both conveyed to and understood by relevant others’ (Finch 2007: 66). Finch argues that interaction and feedback, as two markers of acceptance, both in the private sphere and among family members, are critical factors in determining whether a display is successful or not (Finch 2007). As we will show, blogging to create family-like relations after visits to theme and amusement parks is about being seen by others, even though one cannot control who those others might be. The blogs exemplify displays that are free-floating (on the Internet) and at the same time connected to specific public places – theme and amusement parks – where displays of children play a major role in how adults construct their understanding of what being together ought to mean. Previous research on the
display of family-like relations has not addressed how adults make use of children putting them on display with the aim of creating themselves.

The blog posts we studied are part of the everyday and mainstream flow of information on the Internet. They caught our attention more or less by chance, surfacing as a spin-off while we were studying the park websites. The blog posts appeared at first glance to be banal, narcissistic, pointless and even parasitic (adults using children to create stories about themselves). But, as Dean (2010) argues, it is exactly these features that make blogging interesting. The mundane recounting of people’s everyday experiences is what makes them attractive. We relate this to how Gillian Rose (2001) theorizes about advertisements. They are not meant to deal with serious business, but part of their power is that they are not seen as serious. The ‘reception regime’ of advertisements suggests that they are superficial and this is also part of their power (2001: 95). Using this as our starting point, we consider blogs to be a powerful form of communication and hence to have an importance for social notions of family-like relations and, more importantly, for the notions of children and childhood that are constructed in these displays created by adults for an adult audience.

A theoretical starting point for this paper is that social and cultural interpretations of the idea of family-like relations differ between individuals, groups, societies and situations; therefore, the meaning of ‘family’ is under constant negotiation and needs to be analyzed in its cultural context (Silva & Smart 1999; Haldén 2001; Finch 2007; Dermott & Seymour (eds.) 2011; James & Curtis 2010). The individual blog posts analyzed here exemplify ideas of what a family-like event ought to be as well as what places are suited to the display of family-like relations; each blog post presents a story about how family-like relationships can be lived. This is achieved through the creators’ perceptions of a location, a specific place constituted in and through amateur photographic practices (Pink 2011), through the feelings they want to share with others and how they want to be seen by others (Richter & Schadler 2009: 175). The bloggers are the main characters in visually displaying photos and written texts. As will be demonstrated, they undertake different positions as family creators and thereby express different understandings of what a family-like relationship should be. And they use children to create these stories about themselves, and that is what we are particularly interested in investigating further.

**Empirical Investigation**

The blog posts are analyzed as part of a larger ethnographic study (VR Dnr 2009–2384) of children’s and families’ use of amusement parks and were ‘found’ as a spin-off when the amusement park websites were explored. In addition to the ethnographic study, this particular paper is inspired by virtual ethnography addressing the use of the Internet as a social practice in which online and offline practices
converge. What people do online is of importance for their offline activities and vice versa (Hine 2001/2003).

In retrieving material for the analysis, the organizing principle was to search on Google for the names of the Swedish theme and amusement parks concerned, i.e. Astrid Lindgren’s World (ALW) and Liseberg. There were 14,800 blog post hits for Liseberg and 12,300 for ALW. We focused on the first page of hits (15–20 hits per park). We purposefully selected blog posts focusing on issues around the display of family-like relationships.

In visiting the blog posts, we decided to focus on the topics discussed, how photographs and texts were presented and whether the posts attracted comments and, if so, what kind. We followed the links from the individual blog posts to the full blogs in order to gain an overall impression of the context in which each post was created. In selected cases, we also explored links to blogs ‘liked’ by the blogger under study. One blog post stood out as exceptional, prompting 37 comments. As the analytical work could go on forever following threads, people posting images and people commenting on blog posts, when to stop the data collection became a pragmatic decision. Following ethnographic practices, we decided to stop when we felt we had a good understanding of the context of each blog post (Hine 2001/2003). This qualitative part of the analysis is time consuming but necessary in order to gain an overall understanding of the organization and categorization of the material. The analysis generated three key stories which we will elaborate upon further below: one about hegemonic family-like relations, one about extended family-like relations, and a third story about being a single parent displaying family-like relations. In each of the three types of stories, the creator of the blog post stood out as a key figure even though he or she was seldom seen in any displays. The stories are subjective and purposefully made for others to share, and we highlight how children are being created in these self-presentations. But first, more needs to be said about the photographs in the blog posts.

The photographs published in the blog posts stood out as the main communicating element. Although studies have noted the increased publicness of the use of personal photography on websites and in blogs (Pauwels 2008; Van House 2011), Internet studies of blogs have focused mainly on the practice of blogging (Dean 2010), the textuality of blogs (Papacharissi 2007; Kapidzic & Herring 2011), or the way in which people actively type themselves into being (Sundén 2009). Luc Pauwels (2008), in his studies of family photography on homepages, observes in his analysis that: ‘web-based versions of family albums suggest that text often takes precedence over the image’ (2008: 40). Bearing this in mind, we found the prevalence of images in blog posts about theme park visits particularly interesting. In fact, no blog posts on park visits lacked photographs, although some lacked written comments. Amateur photography in this sense becomes a way of visually narrating and presenting oneself via the display of family-like relations when visiting a park, and, as argued earlier, we focus on how children are used in these
displays. The high prevalence of photographs made us analyze them carefully; taking note of body postures, clothing, the environment, and how adult-child relations are created in the photographs. In the next step we related this to the written comments.

To be clear, we analyze blog posts, and this is different from analyzing blogs. Blog posts are parts of a blog that could be part of or connected to one or more blogging communities. This means that we cover a wide range of different blogs connected to various blogging communities. The blog posts also appeared on various blogging sites, for example, blogspot, wordpress, and blog.se. Conducting research on blogs and, more specifically, the visuality of the blogs, and the fact that children are on display, raises ethical considerations. Since it is not the main topic of our argument, we have chosen not to include images of the blog posts or the people shown in them. Nor do we use any real blog usernames. As mentioned above, we found three key stories, and we will now explore these in more detail.

**Blogging Hegemonic Family-like Relations**

The personal form of expression influencing individual blogs is demonstrated well in the blog ‘In mummy’s tummy’. It was created by a woman who wanted to share her experience of pregnancy; described by Kehily and Thomson (2011: 80) as part of ‘family-in-the-making’. The blogging woman also maintained and wrote in the blog after her baby – a daughter – was born. She explains that after the birth of her daughter her life has become very different ‘in a fantastic and wonderful way’, implying that motherhood and family life are positive experiences that she wants to share and circulate within popular culture (cf. Kehily & Thomson 2011). Since this blogger is very specific about why she blogs, and that it is related to her way of displaying family-like relationships, we will describe her blog in more detail before turning to the specific blog post about her visit to Liseberg.

The blog is explicitly addressing her unborn daughter, who might read it in the future: ‘Siri, if you ever read this you will understand that I love you and am thankful to all kinds of Gods for sending you to us.’ The objective expressed by the blogger is that the blog she has created should be kept for the future. This is an example of how an individual participates in the construction of being together (Dean 2010) and, moreover, uses the Internet to lay the foundations for her future family relationships and her own motherhood (cf. Kehily & Thomson 2011). What makes this blog special in relation to Kehily and Thomson’s (2011) study of how pregnancy is used as a resource for women in relation to popular culture, is the way in which the daughter is addressed. The daughter is expected, in the future, to learn more about her early life, and her relationships with her parents, through the use of this blog on the Internet. This blog represents what Van House (2011: 128) is referring to when talking about the ‘increased publicness of person-
al images’ made possible by digitalization, as both relationship maintaining and memory work. The blogger uses a discourse of intimacy similar to the diary genre, and at the same time deliberately publishes her writing for the public eye, using the publicness as an asset rather than a restraint or negative aspect (cf. Papacharissi 2007). Since this blogger has the explicit aim of uploading photographs and telling us about her family’s life, it is plausible to assume that she is a frequent user of private photography for a definite purpose. She has a clear strategy about how photographs ought to be used and disseminated, and this strategy is in play even while she is taking the photographs (Cohen 2005).

This blogger’s post about a visit to the amusement park Liseberg starts with a formal written description of who went to the park together, informing the presumed audience in a matter-of-fact tone that the visitors – a mother, father and daughter – are ‘the whole family’. In this example the blogger presents, in writing, the constellation as a family and the visit as a family visit. In making these formulations, she is actively generating her own identity as a blogger (Sundén 2009) creating family-like relations through the text. Implicitly, this is a family founded according to a heteronormative hegemonic discourse; she is in a biological, heterosexual relationship (woman-man-offspring/child). The process of making these family relationships visible and possible for others to observe seems to be a significant part of this blogger’s making of family-like relations. After this brief written introduction, the remainder of the blog post contains photographs.

All in all, there are four photographs of the daughter in the blog post. In two of these the father is included. The two ‘family members’ are, however, presented very differently. The focus is on the daughter. She is neither facing the camera nor returning the gaze of the beholder, still she is at the centre of each composition. She is fairly young (about 22–24 months) and in one photograph is presented as moving around on her own without any obvious supervision from adults. She is exploring her environment according to valued norms of child autonomy and activity (Smith 2012). The father, when portrayed, is directing his attention towards his daughter; guarding her or holding her in his arms. In the fourth picture, the girl is sitting comfortably and safely in her pram, eating a waffle. Thus, alongside norms of autonomy and activity, the girl is also presented in terms of norms about the need for protection, a highly valued childhood commodity in contemporary western societies (Canella & Viruru 2004; Smith 2012).

The girl is presented as both active and autonomous, and at the same time in need of care and protection from her close family members; this is the family-like relationship put up for display. The father is giving support and protection and the mother is taking an active part as documenter and blogger. She is constructing both herself and her husband as competent, protective parents who give their baby girl the opportunity to be active in a supposedly culturally rich, challenging and safe environment at the amusement park. The display of family-like relations is thus accomplished by a joint adult activity focusing on the girl and this includes put-
ting the girl on display to attract an imagined Internet audience. In fact, there are no people other than family members in these photographs. These family-like relations are thus being done in close relation to each other and with no intervention from others apart from the blog post audience. The notion of a traditional hegemonic family ideal is perceived through the gender of its members as well as by the presentation of the family as being in a separate, private sphere within the public space. We argue that the Internet audience is invited, by the blogger, to look into a private, supposedly intimate moment played out in public. Both the practice played out at the park in real life and the practice of looking at the display online are about displaying family-like relations and the child plays a crucial part in this adult-created self-presentation.

The next example of how hegemonic family-like relations can be put on display is performed by ‘Fibbe’. He is a ‘23-year-old father with two children’ who visited Astrid Lindgren’s World (ALW). The blog post about ALW starts with the blog enlistment form that Fibbe had partly filled in and partly made ironic comments about. The question ‘number of wives’ was commented upon with: ‘only one partner [Swedish: Sambo] with whom I have two star boys.’ He then made a specific comment about the fact that he had the two kids with the same woman. After this comment he states, in capital letters: ‘NOW IT IS ENOUGH!’ According to this father, the family-like relationship ought to be apparent to anyone without further explanation. He is fed up with having to explain the obvious; that his heterosexual, two-child unit, is – even without marriage – a (hegemonic) ‘family’.

Fibbe’s blog post about the family visit to ALW includes 13 photographs, 11 of which are close-ups of one of the two sons. Each photograph is accompanied by a written comment of his own. The interplay between photographs and text is used to create a humorous, joyful tone. For example, a picture of the eldest son (approximately 38 months) displays the boy as confidently and determinedly walking along one of the streets in ALW. The text for this photo reads that the boy is ‘running around in his own little world,’ as though the boy was not aware of what was going on around him. Instead of describing the boy as autonomous and active according to idealized western notions of children and childhood (Smith 2012), this father is mocking the idea of the supposedly idyllic childhood being played out in the ALW park (Lindgren 2013; Lindgren et al. 2014). The joking tone continues. Another photograph of the same boy shows him standing behind a closed barrier in one of the houses in the park. The written comment to this photo reads: ‘There came a point when we could not stand it any longer and had to lock him up.’ The photograph and the father’s comment together connote a jail-like situation in which the boy is behind bars, put there by his parents. The smaller boy (approximately 10 months), is shown sitting in a pram, facing the photographer and trying to get hold of the camera; he gets the comment: ‘He was also with us on the trip.’ As these examples illustrate, this father, in the blog post,
resists the idea of the idyllic as a necessary ingredient for displaying family-like relationships. Instead of invoking the idyllic, he is using a joking and ironic tone to display – visually and via the written comments – his family-like relationships online. He uses humour to protect his family and himself against notions of the idyllic family (Halldén 2001). This is a discourse of fatherhood that Gunilla Hall-dén (2001) found to be prevalent in the stories of teenage boys writing about their future families in Sweden. In his blog post, Fibbe is using a discourse that makes it possible to joke about the idyllic and at the same time to display family-like relations where his own role as father is emphasized through visualized displays of his children.

As shown so far, photographs of children are the material and virtual foundation used for the actual making of heteronormative, white, family-like relations online. But there are also other stories being produced and put on display, as we will now go on to discuss.

**Blogging Extended Family-like Relations**

A female blogger visited Liseberg with her partner [Swedish: Sambo] and her sister’s daughter in December during the annual Christmas bazaar. She created a blog post out of seven photographs with associated written comments. The blogger frames the circumstances of the visit quite elaborately. It was sponsored by her employer, and she arrived together with her male partner and her sister’s daughter in the afternoon, and stayed for a few hours. When making the presentation, the blogger explains that her partner’s daughter could not join them. Her partner’s daughter is named her ‘pretend-daughter’. Eventually, when she presents her own sister’s daughter, her biological relative, she is named as ‘her niece’. By making these distinctions, the blogger presents the niece as a real relative and not something pretended. The blogger creates a close connection between herself and the biologically related child, at the same time as she presents herself as interested in her partner’s daughter. In creating this blog story, she is presenting herself as competent in the various practices of social mothering; she makes it clear that she can take care of both socially related and biologically related girls in family-like activities. These activities are also related to having fun; according to the blogger, the three visitors experienced ‘great fun’ at Liseberg and this is also a reason to ‘share some pictures’.

Three photographs of the Liseberg environment visually emphasize that Christmas is close, and this is also reinforced in the written text. The blogger talks about the ‘beautiful light’ and the atmosphere created in the park. She also points out the presence of live reindeer. After this atmospheric description, the tone of voice changes abruptly. In a humorous tone the blogger encourages the viewer to notice that one of the reindeer ‘looks headless’. In the last photograph the partner stands, with ‘his silly cap’, holding a huge chocolate bar he won in the lottery. In
a joking tone the blogger comments: ‘He’d better hide the chocolate otherwise I’ll eat most of it.’ Several members of the blog community took up the joking tone in their comments by asking whether the chocolate was a teaser for themselves or not.

We will now focus on the three photographs in this blog post portraying the blogger’s sister’s daughter. Two of them focus on the girl (approximately 24 months) without any adults visible. One is a close-up of her face with a text commenting that she is looking at the partner’s ‘silly hat’. The other is of the girl playing with a model pig. Both these pictures present her as autonomous, active and independent, similar to the photographs of the girl in the ‘mummy’s tummy’ blog post, and to the boys in Fibbe’s blog post above. In contrast to Fibbe’s way of using humour to resist the idyllic, this female blogger is instead using the idyllic to display family-like relations. She is in fact part of a blog community that places a strong emphasis on the idyllic, romantic and nostalgic, which could be identified as being involved in struggles to ‘sustain the idea of home and family’ (Furlong 1995: 185) by blogging about their homes and lives. The blogger is presenting the girl within the context of a hegemonic discourse where nostalgia and imaginative play are key elements in what is defined as a good childhood (Canella & Viruru 2004; Lindgren 2006; Chudacoff 2007; Smith 2012).

The third picture of the girl presents her together with the blogger. The blogger, looking into the camera, is holding the girl in a firm grip around her chest, while the girl is looking in another direction. They are almost cheek to cheek. In this example, the blogger positions herself alongside the child, connecting to her in the position of being looked at by the photographer, even though it is the blogger and not the child who is meeting the camera’s eye. Their bodies are close, as is their biological relationship, the photograph communicates. In the written comment to this photograph, the girl is described as the aunt’s ‘doll’, suggesting that the child actually belongs to her. Moreover, she aligns herself with the girl in opposition to her male partner, who is taking the photograph and about whom she is making jokes. This blogger is thus creating a notion of herself and the girl as being connected in a ‘we-ness’ from which the adult male is excluded. Concomitantly, the female blogger uses the girl and her male partner to create herself both as a (social) mother and as competent in the displaying of extended family-like relations at Liseberg. The blogger received plenty of direct recognition in comments from the blog community she belongs to, indicating that her blogging strategy was successful. One woman writes in a comment that she visited Liseberg in 1979, ‘with my boyfriend who later became my husband. We were very young then and had so much fun.’ She concludes by commenting that it is probably time to go back again. In saying this, she confirms the blogger’s presentation of Liseberg as a place where you can foster different kinds of family-like relationships and it was the displays that made this shared understanding possible. It was the display of the blogger herself together with the girl child that attracted most
reactions from the Internet audience, indicating that, in addition to herself (Dean 2010), the child played an important role in interesting an imagined audience.

Blogging Single-parent Family-like Relations

A blogging father went to visit Liseberg with his disabled son at Christmas time. The father’s blog is used to raise questions about how well-suited society, and family homes, are for people using a wheelchair. He is also informing readers and commenting about how private homes can be built in order to meet disabled people’s needs and ‘people’ related to disabled people. ‘Anyone’ can have a friend or family member who suddenly begins to use a wheelchair or to need one, he argues.

The blog post is a story about how this father, as a single parent, brings his son to Liseberg for, as we interpret it, a ‘normal’ single-parent ‘family’ activity. This blog post makes much of a pun based on the similarity in Swedish between the words for Christmas [Swedish: jul] and wheel [Swedish: hjul]; making his son’s disability stand out as both particular and normal at the same time. This struggle to create disability as something that is simultaneously specific and normal is also highlighted in the text commenting on the first photograph in the blog post. The blogger writes under a photograph of his son: ‘There were a lot of people at Liseberg today. It was crowded, and people confined to wheelchairs [Swedish: rullstolsbundna] were no exception.’ There were so many that all the disabled parking spaces in front of Liseberg were taken, and this father and son had to use another car park. This is directly followed by a description of the most essential activity for this specific visit: buying mustard and honey, food related to Swedish Christmas traditions and hence shared by many. In the middle of this process, the father explains, a ‘couple’ unexpectedly gave the son a supporter’s cap (for the local football team). The father then makes a comment explicitly addressing the imagined blog post audience, encouraging their gazes towards the photograph of his son: ‘Look how happy he is.’ In addition to the actual photograph, the father uses a happy smiley in the written comment, thereby adding to the importance of communicating his son’s happiness with visual cues.

Three of the five photographs in the blog post portray the son as active, happy and autonomous, in line with notions of a good, normal childhood, as we have discussed in the earlier examples. In the photographs, the fact that the boy is using a wheelchair is downplayed visually; only a careful examination of details reveals the wheelchair. Much like the father Fibbe, above, who was displaying nuclear family-like relationships, this blog post discusses the son, telling in photographs and written comments what happened to him and what he was feeling during the visit. This father also makes jokes. An obvious difference, however, is that this father does not make jokes about his son but instead about himself. It is fathers, not children, who cannot resist their impulses, he writes, which is a different way
of presenting children and adults compared to the blogger Fibbe and the author of ‘In mummy’s tummy’. In addition, as discussed above, this blogger is using different visual strategies to encourage the implied viewer to share his interpretation that his son is happy. The alleged normality of the activity – going to an amusement park – is, we argue, used firstly to create both the disabled son and the father as ‘normal’, and secondly to display a family-like activity being engaged in by a single, biological parent.

The last example in this analysis is that of a single mother with two biological children of different genders going to ALW. This mother went to the park with her children and her own sister. It is her sister and the children that she tells stories about in her blog. She is also interested in, and supports, the idea that her daughter should develop as a blogger and create a blog of her own. As far as one can see, this woman’s blog community is exclusively female. Our interpretation is that this blogger is mainly addressing a female blog community, shared by ‘sisters’ in line with a feminist discourse highlighting the importance of women and sisterhood, and female community-building and solidarity that has its roots in the late 1960s (Friedan 1976/1998). This female blogger also presents herself in front of the camera with her biological daughter, a strategy similar to that used by the aunt who was creating herself as displaying social motherhood and extended family at Liseberg, as discussed earlier. Whereas the aunt displaying social motherhood was in close bodily contact with the girl she was displaying as part of her extended family, this *biological* mother is standing beside her daughter, in a position where she and the girl face the camera autonomously, as two separate individuals.

The blog post comprises 13 photographs and written text structured as a real-time story with a beginning, a middle and a clear ending. The beginning is the preparation for the trip and arrival at ALW, together with a direct address to the imagined blog community that: ‘Now at last the promised pictures will come.’ The middle tells about what happened at the park, while the ending of the story addresses the fact that the blog post has now, ‘finally’, been uploaded. The story-like aspect is also highlighted in the written text by statements such as: ‘the day started with…’ At the beginning, the pictures are composed as formal portraits of the participants taking part in the story, who are standing directly facing the camera. As in traditional family albums, each picture has a descriptive text associated with it. Hence, the blog post is organized to mimic a traditional display of pictures in a family album (Chalfen 1991; Rose 2001).

In this blog post, several photographs depict the two children exploring specific events at ALW. They interact with each other or experience the events side by side. These pictures stress the notion that the children are siblings, and in that sense part of a ‘family’, even though it is headed by a single mother. The photographs are part of this female blogger’s construction of her perception of the location, the feelings she wants to share with others and how she wants to be seen by
others (Richter & Schadler 2009: 175). We argue that the construction is about her desire to be seen as a single mother who can create family-like relations with her biological relations: her sister and children. The photographs represent more than they depict (Richter & Schadler 2009: 173), in this case a larger story of a single mother’s achievement in displaying family-like relationships (Finch 2007). The story tells about a complex process of which she is in charge; that she has planned the trip, paid for it, taken part in it, documented it and, when the blog post is constructed, she finalizes the last but by no means the least important step of the process, namely, investing time after the actual activity to display the visit for others. Both the photographs and the display itself signal the greatness of the achievement she has performed as a female, single parent. She is using visualized child-centredness to acknowledge her own achievement.

**Concluding Discussion: Blogging Visualized Child-centredness**

Our analysis of blog posts about visits to theme and amusement parks confirms the arguments of Finch (2007), James and Curtis (2010) and Kehily and Thomson (2011), that doing family is increasingly becoming dependent on public places for public display, in addition to the importance of doing family at home (Furlong 1995). This paper offers more empirical evidence supporting the argument that there is diversity in what is regarded as family-like relationships. We found both single mothers and single fathers positioning themselves as providers of biological family-like relationships. We also found mothers and fathers as providers of biological, heteronormative families. In addition, one woman created herself as social mother to a girl, using a family-like event to achieve this status. It is, we argue, ‘fatherhood’ and ‘motherhood’ (Halldén 2001) that are being displayed in the blog posts, rather than a general ‘parenthood’. We argue that the display of family-like relations, and hence also the idea of family (James & Curtis 2010), is used in blogs as an idea that people relate to as a way of conveying oneself as a mother or father by displaying children. What the paper highlights is the prominent part that children play in adults’ self-created stories, and we argue that adult displays of family-like relations create a new form of child centredness, a visualized child-centredness, to attract an imagined (adult) audience on the Internet, and we will now discuss the implications of this.

Using the Internet means that bloggers combine traditional and new photographic strategies in novel practices. In displaying family-like relationships, the bloggers make direct use of the Internet – as a public medium – to create stories not only for the private sphere, in accordance with traditional activities around creating family photograph albums (Chalfen 1991; Rose 2001), but additionally, and this is new, for an imagined public audience, both known and unknown. This known and unknown audience consists of the people taking part in the activity that was used to create the stories displayed in photographs and written com-
ments, other visitors to the park, a wider community of close or distant friends in a blog community and perfect strangers who want to share these stories that are made available on the Internet. In fact, to have a real audience from whom to gain recognition, confirming that a display is about performing family (Finch 2007), seems in the blog posts we have analyzed to be of minor or zero importance. The fact that the Internet serves as a place for public display, where family-like relations can be watched and shared, seems to be enough. Making the family-like activity public and visible seems to be regarded as sufficient to be accepted as recognized from the blog post creator’s point of view, and these displays performs visualized child centredness.

This analysis of blog posts shows not only that photographs are a key tool in making displays about visits to theme and amusement parks but, in addition, that the bloggers choose to use photographs of and comments about children when creating their blog stories. Children are displayed by adults as part of the adults’ visual stories of family-like relationships. Moreover, the blog stories are re-inscribing notions of ‘family’ as safe, planned, child-centred and idyllic (Halldén 2001). There are, however, different strategies brought into play to illustrate this notion of the idyllic; we found examples where the idyllic is embraced and used to constitute the family-like state as well as examples of how resistance towards it, expressed with the help of humour, serves as a means of displaying family-like relations. The overall interpretation is that the blog posts are part of a re-inscription of these parks as places where you ‘do’ a joyful childhood by interacting with supposedly safe childhood culture, in an allegedly positive family-like environment (cf. Lindgren 2013; Lindgren et al. 2014). The adults are the organizers of the visits and the creators of the blog post stories, and hence also of the displayed, supposedly joyful, untroubled childhoods. Being the creators of joyful childhoods seems to create a privileged position that these adults strive to inhabit.

It is important to notice the distinction between the adult actors who are performing the display and the children who are being used for the display, and hence are the ones being put on display. Adults are happy and joyful when accomplishing the display if the children are happy in the visualizations. This supports the emphasis on paying attention to the power relations involved in display practices using technology, particularly when children are involved (Sparrman & Lindgren 2010; Lindgren 2012). In addition to paying attention to differences between the actors ‘displaying’ and those witnessing the displays (Dermott & Seymour 2011; Doucet 2011), our analysis emphasizes the importance of also taking into account who is putting whom on display and for what purpose when power relations between adults and children come into play. Children are in fact used by adults and are repeatedly put in the position of being looked at; they are put on visual display by adults positioning themselves and other adults as the presumed onlookers (Sparrman & Lindgren 2010; Lindgren 2012). In this way, adults uploading photographs of children onto the Internet position themselves as well as
the imagined audience as adult onlookers taking part in the display of family-like relations. Taken together, they create an adult ‘we-ness’. This is a ‘we-ness’ that is different from the one that downplays generational differences, or creates a narrative of a family ‘we-ness’ (James & Curtis 2010). The ‘we-ness’ constructed in the blog posts, and as part of making a heteronormative, child-centred idea of family, creates a gap between generations; the adults constitute a ‘we’ from which the children are excluded. The specific ‘we-ness’ performed in these blog posts is, as already mentioned, used by the adults to take the position of being onlookers in relation to children, while the children are given the position of being looked at. Thus, the blog posts use and create what we choose to name a new form of visualized child-centredness in displays of family-like relations. Since this child-centredness enacts asymmetrical power relations, it cannot be taken for granted as empowering the children or notions of childhood in society.

Despite societal efforts to create a sense of equality between the generations, the blog stories displaying family-like relations give adults and children opposing positions, where adults are the ones looking at children and the children are being looked at. The asymmetrical power relations created in these visual practices are similar to what Mindy Blaise (2013: 814) refers to as adults being the ‘knower’ and children being the ‘known’, a ‘reductionist logic of developmental paradigms’ that she wants to move beyond by using a postdevelopmental approach in which these logics become mixed up and rethought. We have shown how such traditional asymmetrical developmental-based power relations are reinforced in displays of joyful childhoods in blogs; the displays are alleged to be fun for both adults and children. From a child’s perspective, however, the joyful childhoods might translate into something less positive; to be put on display by close adults who create stories about themselves. We regard this as part of how display, according to Jacqui Gabb (2011: 39), ‘with its incumbent audience reinforces a normalising gaze that legitimises certain displays at the expense of others.’ It would be interesting to see what children’s displays of visits to parks would include and in what unexpected ways their visions may open up new, perhaps messy and unknown perspectives on the display of family-like relationships.

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Notes

1 This was a question about how many times a person had been divorced and engaged in a new marriage.

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The Malady of UNESCO’s Archive

By Peter Jackson

Abstract
This paper offers a critical examination of UNESCO’s cultural heritage conventions with special regard to the declared transhumanism of the organization’s first director-general, Sir Julian Huxley. While Huxley’s advocation of eugenics is a well-established fact, this part of his intellectual heritage is usually not considered overtly aligned to his ideas about cultural preservation. On closer consideration, however, improvement and preservation (both cultural and biological) turn out to be closely associated concerns in the field of Huxley’s intellectual vision.

Keywords: Cultural heritage, Eugenics, Julian Huxley, Transhumanism, UNESCO, Voyager spacecrafts
Messages in a Bottle

This is an image of a young man from Guatemala, perhaps a worker on a sugar plantation. Alongside other snippets of information, such as the first movement of Bach’s *Brandenburg Concerto* No. 2 in F, and a group of pygmy girls’ initiation song, the image of the young man from Guatemala is stored on a 12-inch gold-plated copper disc deposited inside the Voyager spacecrafts. The messages on the disc have been recorded for posterity, not by humans in the present addressing future generations of humans, but by the alleged inhabitants (the “we”) of planet Earth seeking contact with the unknown inhabitants of other worlds.

According to NASA’s official website, the record is said to be a “kind of time capsule, intended to communicate a story of our world to extraterrestrials.” In addition to the record, the two probes also contain printed messages from President Jimmy Carter and the UN Secretary General Kurt Waldheim. Waldheim’s message runs as follows:

As the Secretary General of the United Nations, an organization of the 147 member states who represent almost all of the human inhabitants of the planet Earth, I send greetings on behalf of the people of our planet. We step out of our solar system into the universe seeking only peace and friendship, to teach if we are called upon, to be taught if we are fortunate. We know full well that our planet and all its inhabitants are but a small part of the immense universe that surrounds us and it is with humility and hope that we take this step. (my italics)
On September 12, 2013, Voyager 1 was announced by NASA to have left the so-called heliopause, the farthest reach of the stream of charged particles cast out by the Sun, known as the solar wind. We have good reasons to contemplate the wider significance of this announcement. Especially since, at this late point in its life-cycle (the spacecraft was launched in 1977), Voyager 1 will soon have little left to tell the scientific community. Around 2025, its dwindling power supply is estimated to prevent it from sending back any further data to Earth.² It may henceforth only endure in terms of what we already know about it, how we remember it, as a sort of votive offering, or as a bottle carrying a message into the void of interstellar space. Since the unknown addressee is fated to remain an object of pure imagination, the more relevant questions to ask in this connection are rather: What do the messages inside this uncannily isolated probe tell us about the archival representation of human culture? What do they tell us about ourselves?

Waldheim’s statement is not only sheltered by the notion of a peacefully inclined humanity reaching beyond its own bounds, for it also speaks on behalf of an organization that seeks to provide such a shelter. I am not so much thinking of the aims of the United Nations to support peace efforts and promote higher standards of living, but more specifically about the international cooperation agreements sponsored by UNESCO to promote cultural variation and secure the world cultural heritage.

**Safeguarding the Intangible Heritage**

It is easy to recognize strong affinities between NASA’s golden record initiative and UNESCO’s mission to produce a lasting archive of human heritage for posterity. Both archives are designed to speak on behalf of mankind’s past and present through a carefully selected body of worthy delegates. No matter how noble such aims may appear at a first glance, it is nonetheless striking that the executive bodies in charge of their implementation typically conceal their own origin and short-term historical contingency (UNESCO’s own cultural heritage), thus making such aims seem guided by either mysteriously revealed, universally commonsensical, or naturally given principles. To the same extent that the tenets dictating UNESCO’s safeguarding measures are surrounded by a sense of unconditionality, they assume a sense of unconditional selectivity. Despite the threat of deterioration, everything recognized by a community as part of its own cultural heritage cannot be embraced by UNESCO’s safeguarding measures. By way of example, the inscription of an element on the so-called Representative List must contribute to ensure visibility and awareness of the element’s significance, it must encourage dialogue in order to reflect cultural diversity, and testify to human creativity.³ Furthermore, the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage solely gives consideration to such intangible heritage as is compatible “with existing international human rights instruments, as well as the requirements of
mutual respect among communities, groups, and of sustainable development” (p. 2).

Since a community (the so-called “indigenous” community) has to lack the resources for maintaining its own cultural heritage in order to be recognized by the Convention, UNESCO’s safeguarding measures are suggestive of an artificial life-sustaining system. In stating what safeguarding actually means in this regard, the text of the Convention points, in rather univocal terms, to the logic and semantics of the archive: “identification, documentation, research, preservation, protection, promotion, enhancement, transmission” (p. 2). What is the logic of this particular archive (supposing that it is not just any archive)? What about its principles of selection? What about the ideology that informs it?

I wish to provide a preliminary answer to these questions by revisiting one of the archive’s putative “lawgivers.” A man who, in the case of UNESCO’s ever growing heritage, personifies the archontic principle endemic to the archive: the British scientist and philosopher Sir Julian Huxley.

**Tracing the Heritage of UNESCO’s Cultural Heritage Conventions**

Serving as UNESCO’s first director-general between 1946 and 1948, Huxley was a seminal figure in the formative phase of the organization. I have no intention of scrutinizing his role during this formative phase. With one significant exception, I will not discuss explicit responses from the organization with regard to the contemporary pertinence of his ideas. What I wish to do is rather to indicate certain recurrent themes in his writings that may put his humanism into perspective while simultaneously serving as foil for the current undertakings of UNESCO. Needless to say, the common background of such themes cannot be made properly explicit before a more detailed comparative analysis of Huxley’s writings and UNESCO’s policy documents has been undertaken. I should therefore make immediately clear, before I go on to discuss Huxley’s writings, that I do not aspire to such a detailed analysis. My intention is merely to elucidate the sense of logic that connects apparently distinct themes in Huxley’s musings on the curses and blessings of the human species, from the flourishing variety of cultural expressions to the deteriorating gene pool. The logic at work here is neither unfamiliar nor inevitable, yet it does call for critical attention as soon as the contemporary rhetoric of cultural safeguarding starts to rehearse, albeit in rather vague terms, its familiar principles of validity.

Julian Huxley was an evolutionary biologist, educated at Balliol College, Oxford. He held teaching and research positions at Rice University in Texas (1913-16) and at King’s College, London University (1935-42). In 1935 he was also appointed secretary of the Zoological Society of London. A devoted humanist,
Huxley published numerous essays addressing topics such as religion and the global population explosion.

One of Huxley’s major assumptions as a scientist, which also appears to have influenced the doctrinal underpinnings of UNESCO, was the notion of a biologically informed cultural evolution. In a paper presented at a conference in 1954, he points out that:

Biological evolution depends on natural selection, which was made possible when matter became capable of self-reproduction and self-variation. Psychosocial or cultural evolution depends on cumulative tradition, which was made possible when mind and its products became capable of self-production and self-variation.5 (Huxley 1957: 44-5)

In UNESCO’s *Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity* – adopted at the 31st Session of the General Conference of UNESCO in Paris, on November 2, 2001 – the first article clearly reverberates with Huxley’s assumption:

As a source of exchange, innovation and creativity, cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature.6

Despite its apparently sympathetic cause – how could we not wish for a world brimming with life and an exuberant cultural diversity – the argument’s naturalizing rhetoric has a dark pedigree. It displays the age-old temptation to submit the negotiable foundations of human jurisdiction (*nomos*) to the laws of nature (*physis*).7 Such arguments bring an end to further argumentation by disguising opinions as statements of undeniable factuality. *because I said so, because it’s God’s will, because nature demands it.*

Huxley was apparently well aware of the distrust that any appeal to scientistic dogmatism might incur. In an early document concerning UNESCO’s purpose and philosophy from 1946, he ponders the circumstance that the facts of chemical combination, the facts of chromosomal and Mendelian heredity, and so forth “can be modified and extended, but not overthrown.” Because of their inherent plasticity, scientific facts should not, he seems to claim, be considered dogma, but perhaps rather described as a form of doctrine (Huxley 1946: 37). A similar trust in scientific doctrine should also define the purpose of the Humanities, whose chief task it is to grasp the development of the human mind in its highest cultural achievements (Huxley 1946: 42). When former director-general Koichiro Matsuura spoke on the occasion of the completion of UNESCO’s project *History of Civilizations of Central Asia* in 2005, he began by evoking the “gigantic enterprise” of the Humanities that Huxley had envisioned back in 1946.8 Matsuura was merely paying respect to his predecessor by implying that Huxley’s vision had come to fruition in the so-called General and Regional Histories project, which was launched in the mid 1970s. Nevertheless, it is a gesture that confirms the still foundational status of a document that contains all the hallmarks of Huxley’s transhumanism, including his plea for eugenics (for which see further below).9
A Religion Without Revelation

Huxley’s notion of man’s role as a guiding agent for evolution is clearly in line with UNESCO’s vocation to ensure cultural preservation and variation without compromising the unity of the global community. He imagined modern man, guided by a universal principle of cooperation and conservation, to be facing “[t]he most important […] tasks of our time,” namely:

[T]he development of a new set of integrative, directive and transmissive mechanisms for human societies and for their continuity down the generations. They must include systems in which the community at large can share – systems of shared interpretation, shared belief, shared activity and shared faith (Huxley 1964: 122).

As clearly implied by this statement, Huxley did not fear to jeopardize his position as a declared atheist by evoking religious sentiments. He claimed that the emergence of a humanist religion (sometimes referred to as transhumanism or evolutionary humanism) was the only counterpoise to a self-defeating psychosocial evolution (Huxley 1964: 115). While this religion did not recognize any God in the pre-modern sense of the term, but rather a divine force attuned to a modernist definition as “universal reality,” it still had to work out its own rituals and basic symbolism, it had to reformulate religious ideas and concepts in a new idiom.10

Devoted to the blessings of modern science, Huxley was convinced that religion could still be “usefully regarded as applied spiritual ecology,” admitting that some sort of religion was probably necessary (Huxley 1964: 108). But religion “is not necessarily a good thing,” Huxley warns us, mentioning phenomena such as human sacrifice, fundamentalism, refusal of birth-control, and persecution of heretics (Huxley 1964: 87-8). The emergent religion of the near future had to be a good thing, however, because it was destined to believe in knowledge (Huxley 1964: 88).

It is obvious that Huxley’s urge to conserve certain expressions of human culture also implied their relocation. What was to become of all the marvels of cultural diversity and creativity that never served a strictly pragmatic or scientific end? As long as they did no harm to reason, nor to the evolution of mankind, they might still serve a quasi-utilitarian purpose by helping us escape the dullness of material needs and everyday routine. Huxley’s choice of catchphrase in this regard is unabashedly straightforward: cultural variety is the spice of life (Huxley 1964: 85). In stressing the recreational aspects of world culture, he is apparently (and perhaps intentionally) infusing an aesthetic concept of culture into the all-inclusive anthropological category human culture, subjecting the redundant aspects of the latter to a sort of pick and chose activity. Cultural surplus is turned into savory dishes, into transcultural tapas.

In an essay about Teilhard de Chardin, Huxley agrees with the palentologist and Jesuit mystic that man was able to transcend himself in personality, so that evolution, in the mind of modern scientific man, was at last becoming aware of itself (Huxley 1964: 210).11 This point is crucial with regard to everything that
Huxley tacitly understands to be “indigenous,” because “persons” are conceived as individuals who have transcended their organic individuality (their indigenous-ness as it were) in conscious participation (Huxley 1964: 210). To understand this new revelation, invigorated through the growth of knowledge, humanism is seminal. And for the sake of this mission, he urges:

[W]e must learn what it means, then disseminate Humanist ideas, and finally inject them whenever possible into practical affairs as a guiding framework for policy and action (my italics) (Huxley 1964: 115).

Since modern scientific man is the only true person, indigenous man must remain an unfulfilled individual, and ultimately an obstacle to the gradual immersion in a global community that seeks to transform the cultural heritage of such indigenous subjects into piquancies and curiosities. Being indigenous thus implies a constant exposure to the willing spirit of humanism, which Huxley chillingly conceived as the injecting force of transhumanism. We need to recall the rhetoric of cultural improvement in Kurt Waldheim’s aforementioned message to a community of unknown aliens: to teach if we are called upon, to be taught if we are fortunate. The dynamic of civilization is conceived as a gradual process of responsive, self-regulating progression, dictated by the obligation of the superior teacher’s commitment to the fortunate and inferior pupil.

The Immunological Injection

I have so far merely hinted at a crucial detail in the intellectual biography of Huxley. On its closer consideration, however, we are no longer entitled to treat his choice of metaphor as an arbitrary affair. Let us keep in mind how he considered humanism (wherever it is called for) to ensure a sense of global concern that is not always sustained within a self-regulating immune system – the self-regulatory properties of the indigenous community – but sometimes has to be injected into it like a vaccine.

It is well-known that Huxley was a proponent of eugenics, and that he maintained this conviction, albeit in a non-racist idiom, long after the II World War. In one of his postwar essays he writes favorably about measures designed to artificially accelerate the tempo of psychosocial evolution by mimicking the way in which natural selection obtains its results (Huxley 1964: 272). The method is referred to as EID (eugenic insemination by deliberately preferred donors) (Huxley 1964: 272). It would prevent genetically subnormal humans within so-called “social problem groups” from decreasing the evolutionary fitness of mankind.

Here again, voluntary fertilization could be useful. But our best hope, I think, must lie in the perfection of new, simple and acceptable methods of birth control, whether by an oral contraceptive or perhaps preferably by immunological methods involving injections (Huxley 1964: 270).
Along a similar line of argument, the threat of genetic deterioration through nuclear fallout is said to be best prevented through cryotechnologies.

Deep-frozen mammalian sperm will survive, with its fertilizing and genetic properties unimpaired, for a long period of time and perhaps indefinitely, and accordingly [allow us] to build deep shelters for sperm-banks – collections of deep frozen sperm from representative samples of healthy and intelligent males (Huxley 1964: 271).

As the reader will already have noticed, we have returned to our point of departure: to the time capsule, to a reservoir of carefully selected samples of psychosocial evolution.

The Second Death of Eurydice

It may seem exaggerated to make such a fuss about an unhappy metaphor in the writings of a man who should not be reduced to a mad scientist à la Doctor Moreau, and who no doubt fought against forces much more ruthless and ignorant than those he sought to defend. Nevertheless, while hesitating to lapse into simplistic ad hominem argumentation, I need to concede that the transition between the domains of metaphor and literal sense, between the humanist injection and the immunological injection, is informed by the same logic of improvement and preservation. According to this logic, any cultural item cannot be unique and spectacular enough to deserve a file in the time capsule. Something diverse has to be foreign to a diversity already defined and secured. Furthermore, despite all good intents and negotiations involved, we must acknowledge that there is a force within the archive that works against the elements subjected to safeguarding, a force that initiates the deterioration of an ever changing living memory incumbent on those in charge of the archive.

I am reminded of the second death of Eurydice in the tragic story, as retold by the Roman poet Ovid. When Orpheus, eager for sight (metuens avidusque videnti) of his beloved wife, stretched out his arms, he clasped nothing but the yielding air as she fell back into the depths whence she had come due to the killing bite of a snake (Metamorphoses X, 56). Are the endangered traditions facing a similar second death? They first died while their indigenous custodians were being exploited (infected, enslaved, prostituted, proselytized), and then while scholars and travelers – the humanist heroes of the last two centuries – sought to rescue the few remains from the depths of living memory. They were eager for sight of them, trying to capture them by means of note pads, tape recorders, and cameras – all those writing instruments of ethnography – to help fixating an image (or a snapshot) of the assorted remains by means of which they could be remembered, studied, and desired. Does a taint of scandal still remain? Are UNESCO’s cooperative and preservationist undertakings irreversibly worthy causes? Is true cooperation really possible if the rules of cooperation, and the roles to be played according to these rules, have been given by one of the involved parties beforehand?
Let us be mindful of how the forgetfulness of UNESCO not only applies to the archiviolithic concept of the archive in general, but also, and more specifically, to some less memorable instances in the writings of its first director-general.\textsuperscript{12}

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### Notes

\textsuperscript{1} http://voyager.jpl.nasa.gov/spacecraft/goldenrec.html. Carl Sagan, who assisted NASA in selecting the contents of the record, expounds on the project in his 1978 book *Murmurs of Earth: The Voyager Interstellar Record*.

\textsuperscript{2} Newsletter posted at NASA’s official website (www.jpl.nasa.gov) on September 12, 2013.

\textsuperscript{3} Cf. the document *Operational Directives for the Implementation of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*, which was adopted by the General Assembly at its ordinary session in Paris, June 16-19, 2008 [retrievable from www.unesco.org/culture/ich].

\textsuperscript{4} For a critical assessment of the logic and semantics of the archive, see especially Jacques Derrida’s essay *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (*Mal d’archive: Une impression freudienne* [Derrida 1995: 22]).

\textsuperscript{5} The title of the paper, “Man’s place and role in nature”, alludes to a book by Julian Huxley’s grandfather, Thomas Henry Huxley’s *Evidence as to Man’s Place in Nature* (1863).


\textsuperscript{7} For two fairly recent treatments of this theme, see Carlo Ginzburg’s *Menahem Stern Lectures* (Ginzburg 1999) and Marshal Sahlins’s *The Western Illusion of Human Nature* (2008).

\textsuperscript{8} Address by Mr Koichiro Matsuura on the occasion of the completion of the UNESCO project *History of Civilizations of Central Asia: results and perspectives*. UNESCO, 5 December 2005 (DG/2005/194).

\textsuperscript{9} “It is […] essential that eugenics should be brought entirely within the borders of science, for, as already indicated, in the not very remote future the problem of improving the average quality of human beings is likely to become urgent; and this can only be accomplished by applying the findings of a truly scientific eugenics.” (Huxley 1946: 38).

\textsuperscript{10} Cf. the essays “Education and Humanism” (Huxley 1964: 109) and “The New Divinity” (Huxley 1964: 222-4).

\textsuperscript{11} Huxley’s musings curiously recur in an influential and much more recent work, the american anthropologist Roy A. Rappaport’s posthumously published *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*. One such point of intersection is Rappaport’s somewhat quirky plea for a reconciliation of science and religion as the means to enhance ecological awareness, which echoes Huxley’s notion of “applied spiritual ecology” (see above) (Huxley 1964: 109). Another point of intersection is the idealistic trope, involving nature’s, evolution’s, or culture’s emergent self-awareness, which concludes Rappaport’s study like an epitaph: “Humanity […]
is not only a species among species. It is that part of the world through which the world as a whole can think about itself.” (Rappaport 1999: 461).

12 Derrida, in the aforementioned essay, employs the neologism archiviolithic (composed of the words archive, violent/violence, and lithic) to indicate the archival violence through which living matter or memory petrifies (Derrida 1995: 12 [and passim]).

References
A Critical Study of Informal New Media Uses in Sweden

By Yiannis Mylonas

Abstract
This study looks at a variety of “informal” uses of new media and ICTs. The term informal describes popular uses of digital technologies that often exist outside the norms, laws, and codes that dictate how digital technologies and networks are to be used. Such activities include what is commonly described as “piracy,” but also embrace different peer-to-peer practices. Informal activities develop due to the affordances of digital technologies, which allow space for creativity and personalization of use, but are also due to broader sociocultural variables and contextual issues. In general terms, informal activities are those that concern the amateur activities of people using digital programs, tools, and networks. Media scholars see great potential in new media/ICT affordances, as related to the proliferation of grassroots participation, communication, and creativity. Nevertheless, a growing critical literature forces us to examine the actualization of such potential. This paper discusses the aforementioned issues by looking at new media/ICT uses in Sweden; it departs from critical perspectives that take into consideration the political economy of new media, and the cultural-political critiques of late-modern consumer societies.

Keywords: New media, informalization, ICT, civic culture, Sweden, late capitalism
Social Potentialities and Limitations of New Media and ICTs

This paper studies “informal” new media uses, from a critical and empirical perspective, by employing relevant literature on the promises of new media and everyday life culture, and by interviewing various people engaged with different informal new media/ICT activities in Sweden. By new media and ICTs, I refer to portable, mass-produced and consumed digital devices (for example, tablets, smartphones, or laptops among other), and a variety of software programs and applications that enable individuals to do things on their own or with others. I am also including digital portals, platforms, the so-called social media, communicational networks, as well as peer-to-peer structures and open-source/free software systems and licenses enabled by digital technologies. These elements bring important changes to social life; they alter the ways in which we perceive the world, the ways we work, the ways we inform ourselves and learn new skills, and the ways that politics are performed by authorities and by citizens. Informal activities through digital technologies, systems, and networks not only include what is commonly described as “piracy,” but also hacking and various peer-to-peer (P2P) practices. In broader terms, informal activities are those that concern the amateur activities of people using digital programs, tools, and networks, which can lead to the production of a new culture of communicating, producing, consuming, or distributing.

The study is particularly interested in critically assessing the civic and “socially progressive” potentialities that media scholars see developing through new media/ICT affordances, which are related to participation, communication, and creativity. These possibilities are often viewed as key variables for the further development of social modernization; the deepening of democracy and citizenship; the humanization of work in capitalism or the revival of communities; and the creation of understanding and intimate social relations among different people sharing different identities.

Indeed, various scholars (Jenkins 2006; Castells 2009; Gauntlett 2011) express great optimism for what the advent of new media networks and communication technologies means for societies and individuals across the globe. New media are often seen as the tools required to further modernize societies, or to develop Beck’s (1996) “second modernity” or Giddens’ “high modernity,” as they relate to the advance of reflexive individuals and reflexive societies (Giddens 1991; Webster 2006: 203; Gauntlett 2008: 123). New media/ICTs provide rich resources for the development of reflexive subjectivity that can allow individuals to understand their time challenges, and to monitor themselves, others, and institutions. For example, Beck (2002) talks about problems with the risks posed by the globalized society with its connections to international conflicts and cultural encounters between different people. In a similar fashion, Giddens also discusses a variety of high-modern challenges, such as surveillance, war, ecology, and poverty.
Scholars, as well as focusing on the democratic (other than the modernizing) possibilities of the Internet and its digital tools, also look at the concrete instances of politicization of the subversive potentials of the Internet with broader issues that relate to identity, class, exclusion, and exploitation. Scholars (for example, Dahlgren 2005: 147) note the civic potential of the Internet in fostering public spheres of political communication, representation, deliberation, or agonism. Activists use digital media to create autonomous spaces of “imagination and creativity, contingent, open and unpredictable [...] that continuously acknowledge difference” (Fenton 2012: 166). The open nature of new media and ICTs allows possibilities for political participation and representation, inclusion and equality. It may thus deepen democratic structures by cultivating a democratic culture of active citizens that no longer needs the paternalistic (and often dysfunctional) role of the state. Simultaneously, individual-collective empowerment can also be accomplished. Digital technologies and digital networks allow a variety of individuals and social groups – often excluded by the mainstream public sphere or by the structures and opportunities of mainstream society (still dominated by white, bourgeois, and masculine power) – to develop their own voices, agendas, and discourses, and thus challenge established discourses, interests, and identities (Couldry 2010).

Finally, the issue of creativity is often highlighted because digital tools can empower the productive capacities of groups and individuals to develop alternative economic models and lifestyles beyond the competitive and consumeristic structure of contemporary societies (Bauwens 2006, 2009; Benkler 2006). Open collaboration across a variety of people democratizes production by blurring the distinctions between producer and consumer, thus developing a culture of sharing and cooperation across disciplines and cultures that is also enjoyable (Freedman 2012: 75). For his part, Bauwens (2009) underlines the development of “gift economy” networks that can progressively replace the capitalist modes of production, distribution, and consumption, due to the crises that the latter encounters. All these features are seen to be crucial elements in overcoming many problematic issues that surround today’s social life in an increasingly globalized realm that is more competitive, abstract, and uncertain.

However, critical literature (Fuchs 2009, 2011; Dean 2009; Curran et al. 2011) problematizes such potentials by analyzing the political economy of new media and ICTs, as well as the culture of late capitalism (Bauman 2005; Sennett 2006; Holloway 2011/2010) and its social norms. One therefore needs to stress critical questions concerning digital potentiality (that is, concerning the political economy of those contexts where various informal or lifeworld practices occur through the use of digital tools and networks). In this way, one will be able to problematize not only claims relating to reflexivity, citizenship, and democracy, but also empowerment and inclusion. Otherwise, one might fail to see the broader picture where different practices develop, and one might risk falling into reductionist no-
tions of the modern social life that only confirm mainstream master narratives of progress and optimism.

The critical approach towards new media and ICT uses and culture is connected with the political-economic approach to media today. Structural problems with institutional issues related to policy, ownership, or control are crucial determinants of the potentials of communicational and informational tools (Dahlgren 2005: 149). As Freedman (2012: 83) argues, it is important to emphasize the existence of both a commoditized and a non-commoditized form of the Internet. However, in reality, these are difficult to separate; the different forms are configured according to the discourses and uses of people. Research has shown that parallel activities occur in informal media practices that are related to civic and political issues, and simultaneously to market-orientated practices concerning failures of supply and demand mechanisms (Kiriya 2012: 446). Furthermore, “users,” amateur content producers, or participants of new media/ICT cultures are not a homogenous whole, but a socially diverse and fragmented group of people whose beliefs, interests, and social relations define the content of uses (van Dijck 2009: 55).

Web 2.0, in particular, provides limitless opportunities “for the renewal and intensification of private enterprise” (Freedman 2012: 77). Fuchs (2011: 3) argues that Web 2.0 tools (like Google) are monopolistic industries advancing private interests under a public facet, reproducing consumerist ideology, monitoring users’ activities without being transparent, capitalizing these activities as well as the data stored from them, censoring users, and advancing the political and cultural dominance of “the West.” An important aspect behind the critique of new media/ICT cultures concerns their exploitative character. Web 2.0 user practices are exploited by those private companies who own the Web 2.0 platforms and services (which are widely used across the globe) by commodifying the attention time of users (Fuchs 2011: 7). This is achieved by capturing the creative practices of users to produce new consumer desires – participation is also connected to the expansion of the “experience economy” (van Dijck 2009: 46) – or to optimize the production potential existing in the informal space of leisure activities, and thus to minimize labor costs through informal labor. Andrejevic (2002: 233) argues that surveillance is connected to processes of scientific management, where the monitoring of worker as well as user (or, consumer) practices serves to standardize digital production and to create new markets.

Jakobsson and Stiernstedt (2010) deploy Harvey’s (2010) conceptualization of “accumulation through dispossession” to describe the ways that capitalist industries enclose the Internet infrastructure and Web 2.0 platforms. Their aim is to exploit for productive purposes the intimate habits, human characteristics, and private interests of users. Web 2.0 businesses operate on the principles of venture capitalism (Fuchs 2011: 2). Online user activity is seen by policy makers and business think tanks as a source of activity where new business models and new
forms of value production can arise (Freedman 2012: 73); this is particularly due to the potentials of creativity and innovation for economic growth. Openness is lately understood as necessary for a competitive economy (Jakobsson & Stiernstedt 2012: 52). Recent media policy developments recognize the growth of free and communal activity in digital networks and the economic potential. Policy therefore strives to fuse user activity to the market, and to exploit it through new business models (Jakobsson & Stierstedt 2012: 53). Openness in use is therefore encouraged within a proprietary framework (Freedman 2012: 92).

Finally, new media/ICT cultures often appear regressive and non-democratic due to the advance of non-democratic ideologies in Western societies. Some scholars (Mouffe 2004/2000; Bauman 2005; Agamben et al. 2009) foreground the structural inequality of neoliberal capitalism. Economic globalization and the rise of expert forms of governance weaken the likelihood of citizens producing meaningful social change. The rise of poverty across the globe disempowers citizens by foregrounding individual solutions rather than collective ones (Curran 2012: 14). Xenophobic, racist, and generally anti-democratic mobilization, which often propagates physical violence, also advances through the use of new media/ICT tools (Curran 2012: 10).

The Informal: Cultural and Structural Issues of Informality

The term “informal” describes practices and ICT/media uses that may fall outside the norms, laws/codes, and (generally) standards that organize how digital technologies and networks are to be managed. Everyday life is a locus of freedom and self-determination, where social identities and communal bonds – as well as tactics and strategies – develop in response to societal power inequalities and structural determination (DeCerteau 1990). Media literature highlights the communicative and creative capacities that new media structures allow users to develop in informal settings. These connect to the realm of the personal, the everyday, and the unofficial. Informal new media activities stem from the affordance of digital technologies that allow space for creativity and personalization of use, but they are also due to broader socio-cultural variables and contextual issues.

The category of the informal is used to describe different social trajectories that often go beyond the realm of media and technology uses. The media infrastructure is central in the process that sociologists describe as “informalization,” related to the globalization of economic activity and the deregulation of state protectionist policies adhering to the “Fordist” mode of economic organization and social reproduction (Webster 2006). Informalization seems to be a major trend in late modern societies (Harvey 1989; Sassen 1994; Slavnic 2010). It describes the organization of a decentralized and reflexive commodity production and distribution process based on informational networks and marketing knowledge and strategies. Informalization occurs both from above and below (Slavnic 2010). Informaliza-
tion from above concerns state policy changes in economic organization and production paradigms. Informalization from below concerns the tactics and strategies of different “lay” actors in coping, resisting, performing, and expressing themselves within particular social contexts.

Informal economic practices often exist outside the scope of formal institutions that regulate economic activity, such as taxation rules or the production relations. Although informal economic practices do not constitute markets, they are regularly interconnected with market functions and often operate as supplementary to markets. Market competition relies on innovation, which can be boosted by the creative and productive potentials of new media and ICT uses that often occur outside the scope of established socioeconomic norms, rules, and policies. Informal practices can be compatible with free market regulations that favor a non-protectionist agenda on economic activity. Loose economic regulations are noted to advance informal sites of economic practices (Davis 2006; Lobato et al. 2011). Different kinds of antinomies and tensions thus rest behind a democratic realization of the polyvalent forms of potentiality epitomized by new media and ICTs. Such tensions are linked to contextual matters concerning local media, labor, welfare, or other social policy regulations. Informal media/ICT practices and networks are tied to issues of context and related to power relations and social divisions. Like peer production (Bauwens 2009), they appear to cover immaterial needs related to meaning, and social and cultural capital; however, peer and amateur producers are dependent for income and hardware infrastructure on market and industrial structures.

To move to the empirical study of the aforementioned phenomena and to assess their actuality, the concept of the informal is used to address new media/ICT uses that extend beyond the scope of the legal rules and socially accepted norms guiding social practices (Castells & Cardoso 2012: 826; Lobato et al. 2011: 900). Among others, examples of informal media practices concern amateur and DIY content production; peer-to-peer (P2P) file-sharing of informational material; digital activism; and the organization of practices, communities, and subcultural activities through digital networks. New media are sources where ideas proliferate and reciprocal communication patterns develop among individuals and social groups (Carpentier 2011: 94). New media platforms and ICTs are tools where creative practices develop, which enable people to solve a variety of problems and to empower themselves and others through community building, and through the materialization of alternative worlds (Gauntlett 2011: 226). The development of social change is connected to the production of a new culture related to new social subjectivities, social values, and new practices.
Case Study: Creative and Communicative Online Practices in Sweden

This paper is connected to the critical tradition of social research, departing from critical political economy and critical cultural studies perspectives that concern new media culture and contemporary society. The analysis of interview data looks at the concrete social realities that involve respondents’ own habitus, material scarcities, global influences, and encounters; it further queries the sociopolitically progressive or regressive character of informal new media uses, and it also looks at issues of the exploitation of such uses by media corporations. In this way, the analysis wishes to unfold the potentials of new media/ICT uses, their limits, and the concrete issues of potential actualization.

Sweden is an interesting case study due to various civic developments that occurred there that involved popular uses of new media/ICTs. Sweden has one of the highest rates of Internet penetration (Servaes 2002: 440), with 92.7% of the population connected to the Internet (http://www.internetworldstats.com/europa.htm#se accessed June, 12, 2014). At the same time, Sweden, along other Scandinavian countries, has one of the most developed sectors in ICT production and innovation. As Hilson (2012/2008) notes, the development of high communication and information technologies and ICT expertise was a decisive factor in the economic recovery and economic growth of Scandinavian countries, moving them away from the deep economic crisis that struck Sweden during the late 1980s and the early 1990s. Alongside the development of an economically and technologically strong IT (information technology) sector, Sweden also saw the rise of various civic initiatives that explored, socialized, and politicized ICT uses and structures in ways that often contradicted IT policies and the economic objectives of IT industries. Swedish citizens were pioneers in materializing the potential of the Internet to advance free information exchange from a post-capitalist perspective; Swedish civic organizations were also quick to successfully politicize the right to freedom-of-information exchange. This was in opposition to the segregation of information produced through intellectual property rights regimes internationally, as well as to the circumvention of civic rights and personal privacy that the Internet had made possible through the surveillance and control that it had allowed to third parties.

A critical study of the Swedish new media culture, also underlines the conservative and neoliberal changes that have been occurring in Sweden (and in other Nordic countries such as Denmark and Finland) since the 1990s. This applies particularly to recent decades with the EU’s structural adjustment agendas in coordinating with “free market” (sic) imperatives. Such forms of institutional and social restructuring, together with the withdrawal of welfare and the emphasis on competition, and along with the cultivation of economistic social morals (where individuals are expected to assume responsibility for all aspects of their life, to func-
tion as self-entrepreneurs, and to apotheosize private property), broadly connect to the phenomenon of informalization. However, the development of informal, life-world tactics – aside from their defensive role in a neoliberal Hobbesian society – may also operate proactively and subversively against the rules of a “free market.”

Media scholars (Dahlgren 2009; Miegel & Olsson 2008, 2012; Lindgren & Linde 2011; Andersson 2012) working in the Swedish new media/ICT context focus on the civic affordances that new media practices carry. The “pirate element” is something that has been stressed by the aforementioned scholars. It refers to theories on new social movements and emerging forms of politicization as potentially subversive, and which might reflect broader tendencies that relate to the eclipse of mass political mobilizations, or to the difficulty in producing social change through conventional means of liberal democratic politics. The generational experience (Dahlgren 2009: 200) of young Swedes shows that pirate practices, such as file sharing, are part of the everyday online activities that people engage in; in that sense, they do not consider it illegal (Andersson 2012: 585). Andersson (2009: 65) argues that illicit file sharing is the norm rather than the exception of digitally-mediated consumption. Research (Miegel & Olsson 2012) showed that generational issues are connected to the destabilization of established rules and norms, and also to the foregrounding of issues that young people consider important. Generational issues, as well as participatory trends that develop in online environments, can produce civic cultures (Dahlgren 2009). These can potentially relate to broader political issues in given spatiotemporal moments. The popularity of “pirate practices” has also been argued to be a form of informal resistance practice, or what Ulrich Beck describes as “subpolitics” and Backardjeva as “subactivism” (Lindgren & Linde 2011). Pirate acts can be viewed as informal political acts because they are grounded on existing social conflicts, such as the one that concerns freedom of information versus copyright enclosures.

One needs further to problematize the possibility of developments related to informal new media uses and practices to produce social change. One also needs to discuss their limitations while understanding that structures and systems require more than changes on individual or informal levels. As Jodi Dean (2009: 23) argues, “Expanded and intensified communicativity neither enhances opportunities for linking together political struggles, nor enlivens radical democratic practices.” In addition, one needs to consider the importance of particular events that can radicalize grassroots, informal changes, and alternatives to the mainstream towards political changes and struggles. The current economic crisis event – as the Southern European context now shows – can be one of those events allowing the emergence of new political demands and social struggles.

Semi-structured private interviews and a small focus group interview session were conducted with twelve people from different cities of South Sweden from March to May 2012. Respondents were contacted through snowballing (Bryman 2010: 184). The group of respondents comprised people involved in Internet poli-
tics (such as the Pirate Party and other grassroots initiatives), as well as people involved in various creative practices such as music making and writing, where the Internet and ICT tools and structures are crucial to what they do. The respondents were asked about issues related to their creative practices, and also about their communicative experiences through new media tools/structures. Respondents were asked how they used digital communication devices and networks. The emphasis was on amateur practices of artistic production, file sharing, P2P production, and informational and knowledge exchange; there was a particular focus on counter-informational possibilities. The issues reflexively organized the questions, which concerned the respondents’ views on copyright, amateur content production, privacy, and politics. Interviews were conducted through face-to-face meetings and by telephone (including Skype) sessions. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. Pseudonyms were used in the respondents’ citations deployed in the analysis. The respondents ranged from “regular” new media/ICT users, to amateur producers of content, as well as people involved in the Internet and information-related politics.

Analysis: The Civic Circuit Model

The analysis uses Dahlgren’s (2009: 102) civic circuit model reflexively, in order to approach the researched object from a civic/political perspective. Although the phenomena studied are not explicitly political, the emphasis on political economy and social change involves a political or civic understanding of social phenomena. Furthermore, a civic (or political in broad terms) approach to the contextual realities of informal digital practices allows us to assess the different ideas and aspirations (positivist and critical), and to theorize as to what digital tools and networks mean for society, individuals, and the future. Developed by Dahlgren (2005: 157), the civic circuit model is primarily concerned with the development of forms of democratic cultures in emerging, informal public spheres in contemporary mediascapes. The civic element is concerned with inexplicit political moments in everyday life, which are connected to the quality and specific processes that underlie a given political culture. The possibility of civic discussion is Dahlgren’s main interest since politics emerges through talking. The research also brings Dahlgren’s model into the analysis of practices, taking into consideration the “material” and practical aspects of culture – such as creativity and scarcity – and following the work of scholars (Sennett 2008; Holloway 2010) with broader political interests (in a similar line to Dahlgren’s own focus on the deepening of democracy). In that sense, the civic circuit model is analytically deployed to discuss aspects of social practices that concern not only communication, but broader everyday-life cultures related to creativity and to individual and collective habits, tactics, and strategies (Mylonas 2012a: 716). The categories of the civic circuit model are values, knowledge, trust, practice, space, and identity. The research aims to
evaluate the respondents’ accounts according to critical perspectives that stress the shortcomings of liberal democracy, consumer society, and global capitalism in specific localities.

Values

According to Dahlgren (2009: 112), the category of “values” refers to ideas that organize practices and social relations; values that underline what people do, and that arise through the ways people comment on their practices or their interests.

Most respondents spoke about their communicative or collaborative practices in broad equalitarian, liberal, and libertarian terms. Those involved in political media projects expressed explicitly political views, ranging from anti-capitalist to “realist,” including undemocratic positions.

It does not make sense to speak of ideology. I don’t get into left/right divisions. We are working with issues (copyright policies). I am a pragmatist and I want things to happen in society, things we can work together with. (Britta).

Such a “realist” position proposes a technocratic approach to politics, as in “making things work” (Crouch 2011: 17). Critical questions concerning power, structure, and agency are thus surpassed, and things are evaluated according to their utility or “usefulness” (Diken 2011: 154). Several respondents, who either claimed to be uninterested in politics or had affiliated themselves to the Pirate Party of Sweden, expressed similar ideas.

Respondents also commented on the commercial character of the Internet:

The main problem for me is that every time I use them [Web 2.0 platforms], I support them. I give them money – I mean capital – by using what they are doing because their business depends on me using them. I don’t feel controlled by that. I don’t feel I need to stop using the tools, I think it is perfectly fine to use them but I wish I didn’t. (Johan).

Some respondents theorized the objectification of the Internet user by Web 2.0 structures and his/her instrumental use for commercial purposes (Fuchs 2011: 8). Other respondents referred to the work of critical media projects, such as websites related to the work of the former Pirat Byrån in Sweden on the critical analysis of the corporate Internet. This was in regard to the emergence of “free labor” through users’ bandwidth consumption (Terranova 2000: 50); the construction of “big data” sources by surveillance systems monitoring and storing people’s online activities; and the development of algorithms that organize people’s net usage by prompting them to possible commercial paths in productive ways (creative marketing strategies) for corporation purposes (Andrejevic 2013: 100).

Activists present more explicit and somewhat “courageous” views on the liberating potential of new media/ICT. Technology can contribute to social change through the development of communicative and redistributive networks to counter processes of commodification and control (Mumford 2005/1967):
Everything is political because everything involves power. In a society where we have these cool machines capable of breaking loose from the circle of commodification – which increasingly governs so much of society, material, social relations, and our very selves – it allows people normally not in power to create commons of free exchange . . . It shifts the balance of power not only because we can use whatever to download the latest album by whoever, but because we can relate to each other in new ways. And also how we can bypass control over who is allowed to develop skills in information technology. (Fredrik).

Regressive values are also expressed through a broader resentment of global politics and the growing of surveillance capacities by governments:

The industry is also part of the broader big brother society bureaucracy. They want to break the common man, they want to enslave the common man, but they are a bit late. They should have done this twenty years ago because now the Internet has awoken. You and I, my friend, have more knowledge taken in the past two years than what humankind learned in a hundred years . . . The establishment does not like that. They originally made the Internet to track us . . . They are using technology against us, but at the same time we are using technology to benefit mankind. We are living in very interesting times where there is a race happening between the evil ones that want to use technology against mankind and mankind that wants to use technology to advance freedom and knowledge. (Peter).

A “control society” dystopia is stressed. It is concerned with the radical potential of the Internet and ICTs to produce individual and social “awakenings” against the alienating effects of dominant structures of political power. A view of global totalitarianism is expressed through eschatological narratives and conspiracy rationales, stressing discontent with globalization under nationalist and cultural identity configurations. Tanguieff (2010/2005) argues that by bringing everything to light, the “information society” produces more darkness. It creates a greater form of the unknown, giving the impression that reality is completely different to what it appears, and that the truth lies somewhere else. Furthermore, many forgers take advantage of that in line with the deceit strategies of the market society. An anti-enlightenment logic advances that aims to dig deep behind the plains of contemporary secular societies. Dean (2009: 149) concludes that in such contexts, “democracy remains caught in a pseudo-activity reducing politics to a single operation-revelation.”

Knowledge

The category of “knowledge” concerns the level, content, and quality of knowledge citizens have on sociopolitical issues (Dahlgren 2009: 145). This category is analytically used to observe the knowledge respondents have on those issues that this study is concerned with, particularly the most critical aspects on digital culture regarding surveillance and exploitation. The aim is to identify the ways in which online critical knowledge is approached by different users. Furthermore, I am also interested to find out what kinds of tacit knowledge people can accumulate through their practical engagements with digital systems and net-
works. Everyday life processes are connected to tacit forms of knowledge (DeCerteau 2008/1990) deriving from experience.

As respondents noted, being creative fulfills existential needs and develops the potential of individual autonomy (Dean 2003: 34). Simultaneously though, boredom and dullness also (re) emerge, possibly as symptoms of the unfulfilled potential of modernity (Debord, 1984/1967). Behind the technological hype, the separations and divisions of bourgeois society and lifestyle, advance disempowerment and cynicism. The absence of political utopias for a different society and life, foreground nostalgic ideas of a (supposedly) harmonious past:

People dare to do things, nowadays, because they have the equipment. People are happier if they are creative and if they are allowed to be creative. But there are negative things too. All these tools also makes us lazy. We are stuck in front of our computers without actually doing things, or speaking to people in person. You can hide behind computers. There is no looking forward, and looking forward is good for appreciation. We don’t appreciate anything. We get more creativity but we don’t stop; a lot of people get stressed by trying to be part of the hype. (Carolina).

Scholars (Dahlgren 2009: 121) note the empowering nature of the Internet. The Internet is a source for narratives and information that can challenge hegemonic discourses and advance the development of autonomous subjectivity. Nevertheless, the question of how do citizens respond when faced with disruptive contexts (Dahlgren 2009: 79) is much more complex. The regressive aspect of empowerment is apparent in many new media uses (Dean 2009: 23):

. . . Doctors are important but we don’t have to trust just what they say, we can look online, share experiences . . . A hundred people on this site say take this mineral or herb, don’t take the vaccines, don’t take that medicine, the doctor says, because it is dangerous. The establishment had power over a thousand years saying don’t trust other people, we are the ones who have the expertise, you are stupid people, we are the professionals . . . suddenly there is a democratization of not only knowledge but also status. It is not just because you have a college degree that you are better than I, it is not because you have money that you are better than I. The Internet puts us all on the same level . . . (Peter).

The “democratization” of knowledge and truth, though, often results in their relativization being based on ideological and aesthetic points of view (Dean 2009: 155). Challenging expertise may create problems related to the ideologies exposing “facts speaking on their own” (Dean 2009: 150) because “facts” and the gesture of exposure are usually mediated by intensions, ideas, and tactics. Social fragmentation and polarization are important consequences of such forms of “alternative” knowledge distribution networks. Furthermore, civic disempowerment is often the source of a mystification of authority.

Experience of sociopolitical realities foreground a tacit form of knowledge on the limits of media and technology. Users’ tacit experiences of systemic power show that the democratic, creative, and emancipatory potentials of media and technology are somehow deferred and often blocked. A political analysis of the experience of systemic power expresses civic disillusionment. In that sense, Dean
It seems like a dream that never really happens: people will organize and say what they want and do what they want . . . It is something that everyone is waiting to happen. I guess the Pirate Bay is the biggest activist thing in a way, but where does it lead in the end other than them getting fined and imprisoned? (Johan).

Trust

“Trust” is an analytical category used to discuss the kind of relations existing between the citizens of a given society and the relations of citizens to political authority (Dahlgren 2009: 112). In our context, trust concerns the social ties developing in mediated activities and collective practices utilizing information and communication technologies. Trust develops primarily through intimate relations that are defined by common activities, niche interests, and social beliefs.

Most respondents expressed trust in the Swedish state. Simultaneously, various degrees of discontent with political authority were also evident. Examples drawn from local and global experiences of political mobilizations, such as those related to the “Arab Spring,” were given by many respondents, underlining the potential of new media networks for critical information and political action against oppressive regimes. To that extent, the power of new media is crucial for the development of transnational bonds and struggles:

We have had the Arab Spring, there were several Swedish people helping setting up Tor networks. Tor is a way of concealing who is typing and from where, and this is very important in a dictatorship or in a government that tries to control people. And anonymity is a right, a human right, I think . . . (Jonas).

Dialogical politics, acknowledging difference, do not necessarily advance through transnational connectivity (Fenton 2012: 166). Varying degrees of stereotyping may permeate into the development of mediated forms of support for the causes of others. Simultaneously, a deepening of differences, polarization, cynicism, and enmity also arises in Internet culture. Dean (2009: 147) argues that “dissensus” is what characterizes contemporary political culture, and that this is related to distrust, fundamentalism, and competition between opposed opinions. The specter of totalitarian control haunts the Internet and exposes preferred readings of events and ideological affiliations:

Let me tell you about the Arab Spring. The Internet itself – regardless of program, Facebook, Twitter, email, fax machines in the Soviet Union, pamphlets in the American revolution . . . is getting information out about what is happening, how are we doing in the revolution . . . With that being said, I do not think that the Arab Spring is truly what people think it is. A lot of the people behind the Arab Spring are in bed with oil barons, Western powers, the globalists . . . They steer up student groups to get independence – that is another discussion . . . The Arab spring is not angelic. There are a lot of people behind the scenes happy to see this happening in the global game. I am not saying they were good dictators . . . When the dictators are helping, keep them. When they are getting too much, kill them, and make it look like a revolution. I am not saying that everyone behind the Arab Spring is necessarily bad.
There are lots of so-called “useful idiots” on-the-ground students who want freedom and hate these dictators. They are useful pawns. Do you know that Egypt has become less free since Mubarak? (Peter).

Cultural and racial prejudices towards Arabs surface in the excerpt above, and blend with knowledge of geopolitical interests and cynical political practices. Such prejudices are based on hegemonic beliefs that non-Westerners are not capable of achieving sovereignty and democracy (Dean 2009: 84). Ideological perspectives organize who has the potential of making a “true” revolution and who does not. What is interesting to note is that in the regressive utterance above, revolution is not discredited in terms of impossibility but in terms of authenticity.

Trust, though, develops reflexively when intimate relations are developed that are based on shared interests and passions in particular things. Amateur artists develop collaborative relations, mainly for fun and adventure. In this respect, Web 2.0 networks allow the extension of activities in unprecedented ways; events abroad can be organized, mediated production of digital content can occur, and transnational communities can be maintained with the reflexive use of new media. Intermediates are bypassed. Support is expressed voluntarily through the shared experience of amateur production, and a growing awareness of possible economic and social obstacles among people sharing similar interests.

. . . All the people involved in bands and in companies in our music genre – which is so unpopular – know each other . . . I am friends with people in Quebec, in Belgium, and in France. When you need live shows they book them for you. The whole community helps you out to build networks, and it is definitely Facebook where it happens right now. The labels are part of a big community and the guys there are even more dedicated than the bands . . . They lose more money than the bands . . . but they do it anyway because they love the music . . . I don’t understand why, if people like your music, why would you try to punish that person? It is insane. We want people to like our music. If you are an artist then the goal is to make as many people discover your music [as possible]. If they don’t pay for it they will pay for it because people are not stupid. They know that touring costs money and records cost money; they will eventually pay. (Patrik).

The spirit of amateurism challenges the identity and the status of the professional. Respondents, who worked as professional musicians, were in favor of new media, despite the fact that they opposed downloading and saw that downloading could not fully be restrained. Furthermore, professionals use new media to develop their work, but they also experience the rise of competition in their field due to the very rise of amateurism that is allowed by digital systems. As a result, they have to work more and under greater uncertainty. Further, they also need to be self-entrepreneurs to remain in the business. Consequently, competition and precarity challenge the foundations of trust, as creators often have to instrumentalize social relations developed online.
Practice

Dahlgren (2009: 146) develops the analytical category of “practice”, to address what people actually do online and whether this has any civic/democratic value. Informal media practices are polyvalent and reflexive, entailing many levels of performance, sociability and creative expression.

New media and ICTs allow the development of alternative modes of cultural production (David 2010: 146) that do more justice to artists than corporations:

The artists are never included in the revenues discussion. It is always the guys with the big cigar. As long as they get their money they will be satisfied. The best solution is selling your music directly from Spotify. This is what happened when the Pirate Bay exploded and the music industry crashed. The Indie labels took power because they never depended on sales but on people interested in music and artists... We have the platform to do it without them nowadays, as long as the music industries provide the platforms we use them, and if they don’t, someone else will create the platform. It is like selling tapes on the street. The difference is that you can reach six billion people or anyone with an Internet connection. (Henrik).

For professionals, informational and communicational tools are utilized to achieve professional production results with minimal costs (Spilker 2012: 786), and to promote their work through online networks and popular Web 2.0 platforms. Producers self-develop new skills, involving mass amounts of nonpaid work. The experience of artists in countries lacking the equalitarian aspects of Swedish social institutions (Mylonas 2012b) demonstrates the intensification of “doing” through the development of entrepreneurial artistic strategies enriched by social media and a free online culture.

Informal practices often relate to what Holloway (2011/2010) describes as the “creative, purposeful doing” of things. As a musician explains:

I like telling stories and having good lyrics. It is nice to share your music with people. When I feel I should make a living out of it, I get very uncreative. I feel pressured and I don’t think it is fun anymore... I am losing it, and I don’t think I would be very happy feeling that I always have to do new stuff, that I always have to go further, that I always have to develop. (Marja).

Joy, freedom, and inspiration meet their limits when encountering issues of productivity and optimization. Creative doing (Holloway 2011/2010: 154) is defended as a space of autonomy and identity, as well as a resort of privacy and freedom; it becomes a source of resistance by some respondents. Holloway underlines the constant attempt of capital to commodify “doing” because it does not reproduce the capitalist process – it potentially threatens it. Such attempts occur through the pervasive discourses of success and competition in consumerist societies, elevated to the form of social norms and personal values or life goals. Most importantly, though, a particular subjectivity is constructed through the production of material enclosures and scarcities that force today’s people to accept the aforementioned (neoliberal) norms as survival strategies.
Research, however, has shown (Mylonas 2012, 2014) that new media users are keen to develop entrepreneurial strategies in relation to their informal activities. This is due to a deficiency in other resources, material scarcities, and a lack of critical knowledge and reflection over the mainstream discursive hype of entrepreneurialism and the individual life choices in consumer society.

A further issue that can be raised here concerns the unconscious or “organic” ways in which market systems create value from Internet users’ activities. Although neoliberal values can be negated, either explicitly or tacitly, Web 2.0 structures create value not only from individuals’ online activities but their attendances as well. The capacities to monitor and store user online movements allow the building of databases that are sold for marketing practices (among other things). So user data is an important commodity for the “information society.” There is no easy way out of this process, as it could imply the opting out of mainstream Internet platforms (such as Facebook) and potentially all Web 2.0 Internet use, or could require special informatics knowledge that is not widely available.

**Space**

The category of “space” concerns the loci where communication occurs (Dahlgren 2009: 114) and the ways such spaces are organized. Space is a material as well as a symbolic dimension where human activities emerge. The very dimension of space (as well as its use) is determined by the discourses and practices defining it. The category of space is studied in relation to questions of ownership, use, and the organization of new media spaces for communicative, collaborative, and creative activities.

Although digital technologies and networks allow the reflexive production of new spaces of private and public activity, socioeconomic hierarchies and power relations organize the uses and the production of spaces. Enclosures produced by the economies of capital and subsequent informational and social policies (Harvey 2010: 245), as well as polity deficits associated with the minimalist opportunities of civic participation and representation (Carpentier 2011: 69), yield various forms of spatial exclusion that relate to the possibility of staging one’s voice publicly, or the possibility of participation in economic and social activities. Informal media practices develop new spaces of activity, where inequalities can be addressed and exclusion can be eradicated.

Respondents spoke about the development of “pirate” politics as something new that allows space for civic involvement and representation for people not represented by the traditional agents of parliamentary democracy (notably, unions and political parties). Issue politics seems to be more reflexive and may temporarily bracket deep ideological divisions; yet, such divisions do not disappear:

... I hope it will open up the way for the weird political parties. The Pirate Party is accused for being a one-issue party, which is very limited, but it is not true. Since the Party got members from the whole political spectrum, from Nazis to the black
block, from the extreme left and everything in between, it is actually required that some focus points are set and then developed. (Tobias).

Interest in sociopolitical issues motivates people to pursue political discussions online. The porous Internet structure permits the exposure of diverse views and opinions. Curiosity is assisted by anonymity; users often explore views opposite to their own. Despite various forms of fragmentation and cacophony, the possibility to encounter the “other” as an active (yet mediated) agent, and not as a representation, is there:

My blog is for art. But still, most blogs I read are not art blogs but political blogs, and I am debating a bit . . . I go to a person’s blog and see their influences. People are more complex than that, but you can get a clue of the influences a person has. I always try to challenge myself by reading things I don’t like, but it is often depressing . . . Although I know where I am standing, I still want to try to understand how others think and to get myself stronger in my opinions. I try to understand who a given person is, why he is thinking like that. I am trying to get to the source of things because it is very hard to convince people when you are angry. You have to try to see through what makes people angry or frustrated. If people write stupid, angry, racist things, they are usually very frustrated and I want to learn to debate in a good way against it. (Marja).

The dimension of space is connected to that of practice, because space provides the concrete possibility for alternatives to emerge. In that respect, the emergence of the so-called “network studio” (Spilker 2012: 775), enables remote cooperation and allows possibilities for amateur artistic production. The network studio works both inside and outside of the dominant economic mode of production. Altruistic co-operation for social and cultural capital flourishes in such spaces:

. . . He recorded the drums in a studio there, then he sent us the drum tracks and we did the guitars and bass at my place at the computer . . . You need a clean signal to play with the sound until you get good results. We knew someone in Gothenburg who has a studio and we recorded the lyrics there, and an old friend from school told us that we can also do the first takes for free. That was all we needed because we recorded only four songs. It is not finished yet but we are mixing it ourselves. (Patrik).

Informal practices occur in fragmented spaces alongside formal spaces of activity, like paid labor. Several respondents were able to maintain the boundaries of these spheres without the informal falling into the formal. The general high living standards of Sweden, and the country’s liberal constitution, allow considerable choices for Swedish citizens compared to those of citizens elsewhere (Mylonas 2014). Simultaneously, the transformation of the Scandinavian social model towards neoliberal ends (Crouch 2011: 23) prioritizes labor flexibility, whose effects are not yet as dramatic as in other parts of the world (Davis 2006). This is due to the “leading” position of Northern European countries in their “level of integration, competitive potential, and share of benefits from economic growth” (Castells 2010/1996: 134) in the networked global economy:

Would you like to be able to make a living out of your creative work? I don’t know to be honest. I did for about two years, but it was a lot of work and in the end it was
not worth the money, so I had to get out of it. On the other hand, if people would give me money I’d take it and be happy. But to be realistic, it is not a driving force at the moment. (Johan).

Widespread concerns with privacy and the sociopolitical control of people through the Internet primarily involves dimensions of space. Freedom emerges as an ideal that can trigger limitless forms of resistance, which can then lead to the passive destruction of illiberal spaces. Awareness of rights infringement is central in the triggering of forms of resistance:

People’s creativity when it comes to control issues is amazing. If you try to control the Internet by infringing people’s rights, control always leads to some kind of rebellion. In the worst case scenario, the Internet collapses and nobody wants to use it anymore. Or they use it and they do these illegal downloading things in other ways. (Henrik).

Concerns on spatial and temporal changes of place are also raised (Bauman 2005: 71). The excerpt below foregrounds concerns over privacy and corporate data mining. An important thing to further stress is the absence of an adequate critique over the commodification of the Internet itself, along with other aspects of the lifeworld:

The problem is that foreign companies can have more access to our data than our police . . . Companies have economic interests, and if they have money they can do a lot of things and hurt people . . . Swedish laws should be of highest importance, not American laws, under which most Internet companies are subjected to . . . I don’t believe that we have a corrupt government but someone can see what I do online. Since I don’t do anything illegal I am not paranoid. I am concerned for future uses of my data. (Carolina).

Identity

The subjective experience of private and public issues often provides a point of departure for people’s engagement with sociopolitical issues. Dahlgren (2009: 57) notes that personal identification to civic ideas is a crucial denominator of democracy. Analytically, the category of identity studies the civic relevance of the discourses expressed.

People with explicit political views express the importance of alternative information, lifeworld experiences, and social relations in the political use of ICTs and new media. Biographical references demonstrate the importance of informal context in the development of political subjectivities:

. . . When I grew up, my father worked as a computer technician, and my brother was involved in the BBS/phreaking scene and had computers at home at an early age. I read a book called Copyright Doesn’t Exist in the late 90s. That was probably the first time I connected Warez and the like to political activism. I was involved in the syndicalist youth federation (SUF) at the time, and met other syndicalists and anarchists who had a view of software as a kind of “commons”. (Fredrik).

A reciprocal relation lies between practices and civic/political identities:
Some of the things the Pirate Party has stood for I like very much, but I don’t like the whole hippy-socialist aspect. It is always these guys playing with the knit sweaters, “peace man, let’s go to get high, let’s go to make pot legal rally.” I am not into that whole aspect, but I can relate to some of the things they stand for . . . (Peter).

Political ideas organize the perspective under which social realities are viewed by subjects. Theory, ideas, and knowledge rationalize the experience of real-life contradictions in structural terms, produce identifications, and arrange the content of practices:

. . . When we copy, we don’t do this “on the Internet,” the cloud is somewhere else. . . Usually, we sit in the same boat – underpaid, unrepresented by politicians. The $100 million soccer arenas aren’t built to serve our cultural interests, they are built to provide a “new skyline” for creating “clusters of growth” for a “creative economy” we are no part of anyway . . . But I grew up on not only the demo-scene, but the DIY punk scene as well . . . DIY labels never made any profits but put out so much great music anyway. Not everyone experienced that, but sometimes I imagine a world in which all these changes actually created preconditions that made it impossible for new cultural material to be financed . . . I can sympathize with people who are afraid their profession is threatened by technological and political changes, but I never really understood the idea that making a living from it should be an eternal right either. (Fredrik).

A universal class identity is underlined above, through a critique of social and individual fantasies generated by late capitalism. As Harvey (2008: 64) argues, neoliberalism has failed in its aspirations to create sustained economic growth, while the socioeconomic system expands in ways that exclude vast numbers of populations and make a variety of skills and professions redundant (Holloway 2011/2010). Co-operative practices are thus often connected to anti-consumerist ideas.

Niche identities find expression through culture and media, but they relate to important experiences and events in people’s lives. Identity is affirmed and reproduced through the communities developing online. Digital tools and networks therefore function as tools challenging diverse forms of exclusion, and providing the opportunity for participation in social struggles (Holloway 2011/2010):

. . . We are basically lucky that the geek industry has been marginalized and had a tough time growing up, and that gives the text a unique perspective on bullying ‘cause that is what some governments are doing right now. So we managed to get a lot of money and influence, and hopefully we can sway some people. Well, it is a battle between the money and political interests. (Jonas).

Subcultural affiliations are also central in the developing of practices and spaces, which rely on attitudes and ideas and on specific procedural values (Dahlgren 2009: 111) shaping social relations. The impossibility of the full inclusion of “anyone” arises, as spaces of alternative activities are often produced in order to secure particular practices and identities from the (often competing) ways and logics of others:

It depends a lot between genres and scenes. Punk rock – or our genre, skate punk – is supportive, so in our community everyone is in a band or in a label. But there is no
fan base except for the people that work in the scene. If you look at hip-hop or more popular genres, I think people don’t care as much, because fans just listen to music without being in bands, because you need to know what it takes to make it, that is the reason why big bands and big labels are afraid of downloading, because you might end up not having the ignorant, narcissist fans that just don’t care and music is just entertainment for them. (Patrik).

Conclusions
This article presented the data and data analysis of one part of a broader qualitative research, looking at informal ICT/new media practices in different European countries. The research was theoretically orientated, aiming to foreground a variety of aspects concerning the concrete uses of digital technologies and networks, and to engage a variety of critical approaches that deal with many issues regarding digital culture (such as exploitation, alienation, ideology, and craftsmanship). Departing from a broad understanding of ICTs and Internet uses, the respondents’ identities also vary, and do not form a concrete sample of a population sharing specific characteristics. Instead, respondents are loosely connected by their nationality and by the reflexive use of the term “informal.”

The analysis of respondents’ accounts points towards a variety of often conflicting themes. New media/ICT affordances allow reflexive possibilities for the development of a variety of attitudes and practices with civic and political aspects and potentials. The practices studied occurred within precarious and complex sociopolitical and economic contexts that affect all countries, irrespective of their particularities. Discontent, frustration, disempowerment, and disillusionment towards sociopolitical affairs were expressed by nearly all respondents, while reflecting on their intimate practices and ICT and media uses. In Sweden, considerable material pressure is evident. This relates to the restriction of individual freedoms and popular sovereignty, and is connected to the global processes of economic enclosure – even though the socioeconomic situation is considerably different to that of other European and non-European countries.

Civic-political attitudes unfold through biographical references and contexts of a subjective nature. Various forms of democratic views, both moderate and radical, were often expressed. Regressive views were also apparent, targeting the scapegoats of the negative globalization (Bauman 2000: 92). Sociopolitical fragmentation is an important aspect of new media practices. Ideas develop in online spaces, but broader subjective contexts shape individual perspectives. Theory is essential in organizing coherent and critical views in understanding the complexity of the world today. One should use relevant theory to approach media practices along with social realities outside the scope of the media (Dean 2009: 64). Critical political economy, in that respect, is useful in understanding the stakes concerning informality and amateurism. New modes of production and distribution of content also relate to new modes of consumption. The tacit form of knowledge produced
in reflexive spaces of relative freedom may conditionally develop active forms of consciousness, where people play, explore, and challenge different things and possibilities. Nevertheless, the potential of play and tacit knowledge is what late capitalist industry aims to enclose and regulate for productive ends. In such potential – which is fragmented by locality, class, and other issues – lies the possibility of a post-capitalist democracy. New forms of political praxis and political thinking, though, will open the way towards a course for such possibility to emerge.

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**References**


Thematic Section:
Writing at Borders

Edited by
Tuulikki Kurki, Saija Kaskinen,
Kirsi Laurén & Mari Ristolainen
Preface: Writing at Borders

By Tuulikki Kurki, Saija Kaskinen, Kirsi Laurén & Mari Ristolainen

This special issue is produced within an Academy of Finland funded research project Writing Cultures and Traditions at Borders (2010–2014) that has examined writing practices, texts, and amateur and professional writers in the Finland–Russia and Estonia–Russia borderlands. The aim has been to give voice to those people whose perceptions of the borders and borderlands have often been neglected within institutionalised and dominant scholarly and artistic discourses. The research project has focused on the late 20th and early 21st century, and examines writing practices on the borderlands in their societal and historical contexts. Furthermore, the research has recognized the national borderlands as areas home to unique forms of writing cultures.

In this special issue, the practices of writing at borders are presented in an introductory article and four different article pairs. The introductory article written by the Writing Cultures and Traditions at Borders research project leader Tuulikki Kurki (University of Eastern Finland), claims that cultural studies and the humanist point of view has significant explanatory potential concerning the various borders and border crossings addressed in multidisciplinary border studies. Cultural and human understandings of borders and border crossings grow on one hand from the research of ethnographic particularities, and of the universal and culturally expressed human experiences of borders and border crossings on the other.

The first article pair examines territory-making and linguistic spaces relating to borders. Tiiu Jaago (University of Tartu) observes how Estonians have described political changes, especially the establishment of the Soviet rule in Estonia in the 1940s, in their autobiographical narratives. In the narratives, the relationship between the borders of Estonian territory, the borders of cultural space, and state borders are analyzed with the concepts of ‘continuity’ and ‘discontinuity’. Jaago claims that the entangled interplay of territorial, political and cultural borders reveals the polysemic and ambivalent nature of the concept of ‘border’. She argues that ideas of borders are constructed by three factors: the narrator’s experience of political change in Estonia, the method of narration, and the interpretation of the autobiographical narratives. Tuulikki Kurki (University of Eastern Finland) focuses on the construction of a non-Russian language space on the Soviet side of the Russian-Finnish national borderland from the 1940s until the 1970s. The article claims that the non-Russian language space and the national border differ from the official decrees dictated by Moscow, as can be determined from literature stemming from the late 1950s and early 1960s. She claims that the non-Russian language space and...
border gradually became more multi-voiced, ambivalent and controversial, and that this subsequently influenced the identity construction of the borderland people.

The following article pair focuses on border crossers and crossovers that are represented in travel narratives and stories. However, both studies discuss texts that are written beyond the official corpus of travel literature in Finland. Kirsi Laurén (University of Eastern Finland) analyses the personal written narratives of Finnish tourists who travelled across the sea from Finland to Soviet Estonia during the period of 1965–1991. She uses the concept of “otherness” as an analytical tool when studying the travellers’ experiences of border crossings and cultural encounters. The article concentrates on travellers’ relations and conceptions of Soviet Estonia and their descriptions of facing otherness during their travels. Kirsti Salmi-Nikkander (University of Helsinki) focuses on border crossings in travel stories in the 19th and early 20th century. The analysis is based on the methodological discussion of small stories and personal experience narratives that can be defined as “local event narratives”. The emphasis is on the aspects of time and space in the travel stories which often demarcate the boundaries of class and gender.

In the third article pair, the concept of border appears in contemporary national and political ideologies, and in people’s direct human experiences of the border. In her article, Thekla Musäus (Greifswald University) concentrates on Soviet Communism and Finnish Panfennism, and their influence on both the concrete national border and on more symbolically defined immaterial borders. The most important example of the latter concept are the so called ‘heroic borders.’ Heroic borders illustrate Soviet and Finnish nationalist ambitions which are often motivated by nations’ ideological ambitions. Using rhetorical analysis of the contemporary texts, Thekla Musäus shows how the evolution of international borders and expansionist ideologies complicates the ways in which ethnic, political, cultural and religious boundaries intersect and cross-cut each other. In Saija Kaskinen’s (University of Eastern Finland) article, the Finnish-Russian national border is examined utilizing a hybrid methodology. In it, she gives an example of one type of process in which the national border can be seen to become hybrid. The hybridization process of the national border is followed through various individual experiences (hybrid environments) that people have had about the border. In her article, she calls attention to the social and cultural realities that form different levels of hybridity, and which in turn, are embedded in the national border. These levels of hybridity are related to each other in complex ways that illustrate the nature of the national border as an entity of accommodation, resistance and change.

The final two articles focus on dislocated and symbolic borders that may appear as either conceptual or abstract. Dislocation of borders is examined in the constructs of both metaphorical writing and in communication at ‘borders’. In her article, Mari Ristolainen (University of Eastern Finland) discusses the figurative construction of Russian national borders and the symbolic meanings invested in them. She argues that borders can be written between areas that have no geographical connection, but
for example, due to a traumatic event, a border and a connection are formed. As such, she argues that whilst a geographical border may be perceived as real and supported by national policies, it has diminished meaning when not recognized or honoured by a ‘written border’. In an inter-personal and cultural context of ‘border’, Tarja Tanttu (University of Tallinn, University of Eastern Finland) examines metacommunication in conversations between Finnish employment officials and immigrants during service encounters. She suggests that the interactional situation between Finnish officials and immigrant clients forms a symbolic border, and thus an arena of border negotiation, where borders are crossed from one’s own culture into a foreign culture. Metacommunication can function as a means of crossing the border, whilst a lack of metacommunication and subsequent silence may form a symbolic boundary to integration, if the client is unfamiliar with the customs and practices of his or her new home country, and if these are not explained.

The articles in this special issue give voice to travelers, borderlanders, amateur and professional writers, migrants, soldiers, and their families who have had direct experiences of borders and border crossings which have in turn expanded understanding of borders. Therefore, the articles reflect critically on ideological discourses that have constructed dominant meanings for the borders and border crossings as well as national margins in Finland, Estonia and north-western Russia. The connecting idea between the articles show that borders and border crossings are seen from the viewpoint of individual experiences and at the level of micro-level encounters, and the crossed borders are not just territorial or topographical but they always include socially constructed symbolic and metaphorical layers. Cultural conventions regulate the narration as well as the construction of these layers. Sometimes, as the articles show, the socially constructed symbolic and metaphorical border may be drawn completely separately from the territorial borders.

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Dr. **Mari Ristolainen** is representative of the new Russian Literature and Culture scholars who are applying cross-disciplinary approaches to Border Studies. During the past years she has been working as a post-doctoral fellow at the University of Eastern Finland. Starting from November 1, 2014 she is working as a researcher at the UiT Norway’s Arctic University. E-mail: mari.ristolainen@uef.fi or mari.ristolainen@uit.no

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Borders from the Cultural Point of View: An Introduction to Writing at Borders

By Tuulikki Kurki

Abstract
This introductory article to the special issue Writing at Borders suggests that cultural studies and the humanist point of view have significant explanatory potential concerning various borders and border crossings in multidisciplinary border studies. Cultural and human understandings of borders and border crossings grow from the research of ethnographic particularities on one hand, and of universal and culturally expressed human experiences of borders and border crossings (however culturally expressed) on the other. In this article, this explanatory potential is made visible by examining the history of cultural anthropology, where borders and border crossings have been recognized in research since the late 19th century. The aim of this concise introductory article is to outline through selected examples how territorial, social, and cultural borders and border crossings have been acknowledged and understood conceptually in the history of Anglo-American and European anthropology. The selected examples illustrate the gradual evolution of the conceptualization of the border from a territorially placed boundary and filter, to a semantically constructed, ritualized and performed symbolic border, and finally to a discursive (textual) construction.

Keywords: Border, border crossing, diffusionism, symbolic anthropology, post-modern anthropology
Introduction

Border studies reclaimed its visibility in geography and created “a new generation of border studies” in the 1990s (Newman & Paasi 1998; Newman 2007: 30). This new generation made borders a widespread research theme, not only in geography but also in social sciences and cultural research globally. The reasons for the re-emergence of border studies can be found in geopolitical changes that initiated in Europe (e.g. the collapse of the Soviet Union and the formation of the EU), in the US-Mexico borderlands, and in the global context of strengthening migration movements (Heyman 1994; Alvaréz 1995; Vila 2003a; Schimanski & Wolfe 2007; Sadowski-Smith 2008). In addition, the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States made border related security concerns a prominent theme worldwide (Sadowski-Smith 2002b: 2, 8; Wastl-Walter 2011: 2).

In the multidisciplinary field of border studies, many disciplines share some ideas about the characteristics of studied borders and their functions. According to the political geographer David Newman (2007: 33), one of the shared ideas of the border is that “borders determine the nature of group (in some cases defined territorially) belonging, affiliation, and membership, and the way in which the processes of inclusion and exclusion are institutionalized”. The question of power relations that are closely connected with the processes of inclusion and exclusion and with defining borderland cultures and identities, has also become a very central and widely utilized question (Newman & Paasi 1998: 188; Sadowski-Smith 2002a; Vila 2003b; Aldama et al. 2012). However, depending on the conceptual, methodological and theoretical choices in each discipline, the representations and therefore the understandings of borders also vary.¹

According to political scientist Emmanuel Brunet-Jailly (2011: 3), in contemporary geopolitically and geographically oriented research, “borders are no longer only about territorially bounded authorities” and “they are not just sea and air ports of entry, or border crossing”, but “... also increasingly virtual or simply impalpable”.² Therefore, Brunet-Jailly (ibid.) suggests that such understandings of borders need to be developed to go “beyond our territorialist and geopolitical intellectual and policy traditions”. Some scholars (most notably Brunet-Jailly, Victor Konrad, Heather N. Nicol, and David Newman) have noted the gradually growing importance of the cultural and humanist point of view in understanding and conceptualizing borders in geopolitically and geographically oriented border studies (Brunet-Jailly 2005; Konrad & Nicol 2011: 74–75). Geographers Victor Konrad and Heather N. Nicol even suggest that culture and power are “the key variables for explaining how borders and borderlands originate, are sustained, and evolve” (Konrad & Nicol 2011: 75). Culturally oriented border research has been recently published in the fields of geography and social sciences (Wilson & Donnan 2012). However, what the concept culture stands for in research varies greatly. When the concept of “culture” is defined in geopolitically and geographically

¹ [1056]
oriented border research, it is understood for example as “a specific culture of borderland communities” (Brunet-Jailly 2005), “the way of life”, and also as a social construction, i.e. as a “representation of that life” (Konrad & Nicol 2011: 72, 74), although the later authors have suggested that the concept of culture should be explained more thoroughly in border studies (Konrad & Nicol 2011: 84).

Simultaneously, when social sciences and geography have noted the cultural aspect of borders, a rapidly growing amount of cultural research has been published on various levels of culture forms, as well as on sub-cultures, minority cultures, resistance and counter cultures, in and outside the territorial borderlands that construct, maintain, and deconstruct the dominating representations, ideas and meanings of borders and borderlands. These studies focus e.g. on forms of literary and visual culture (literature, poetry, art, photography) produced by writers and artists ranging from amateurs to professionals, oral narration (oral tradition and oral history), media, as well as aspects of every-day life (Donnan & Haller 2000b; Aldama et al. 2012; Kurki & Laurén 2012). This article agrees with Konrad’s & Nicols’ (2011: 84) claim that the concept of culture should be explained more thoroughly in border studies. At the same time, this article suggests that cultural studies and the humanist point of view has significant explanatory potential concerning various borders and border crossings in multidisciplinary border studies, since “drawing borders is the key to human cognition” and humans’ “identity and sense of difference from others is completely dependent on the existence of borders” (Donnan & Haller 2000a: 8). Cultural and human understandings of borders and border crossings grow on one hand from the research of ethnographic particulars, and on the other, from universal human experiences of borders and border crossings (however culturally expressed). In this article, this explanatory potential is made visible by examining the history of cultural anthropology, where borders and border crossings have been recognized in research since the late 19th century.

The aim of this introductory article is to outline through selected examples, how territorial, social, and cultural borders and border crossings have been acknowledged and understood conceptually in the history of Anglo-American and European anthropology. This is achieved by examining selected research examples which conceptualize the different ways that the idea of borders and border crossing is conceptualised in relation to the underlying ideas of culture and culture change. The studied research examples represent the diffusionist culture theory of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the symbolic anthropology of the mid-20th century, and the postmodern anthropology of the late 20th century. These examples have been selected because they illustrate the gradual evolution of the conceptualization of the border from being a territorially placed boundary and filter, to a semantically constructed, ritualized and performed symbolic border, and finally to a discursive (textual) construction. Each of these conceptualizations contributes to the understandings of borders and border crossings as research objects.
of today. In a way, this article is an exercise where classical works of anthropology are read from the viewpoint of borders and border crossings.

**Diffusionism and Geographically Influenced Viewpoint: Border as a Boundary and a Filter**

Territorial cultural areas, their borders and border crossings became acknowledged in European and Anglo-American cultural anthropology in the late 19th century and early 20th century when the concept of diffusionism was introduced in a refined form. Diffusionism was formulated as a theory of cultural change, where migration, cultural contacts and border crossings became the central factors in explaining the development of cultures worldwide. However, it was not a new idea in European anthropology, but rather one of “the major traditional paradigmatic alternatives structuring speculation about human differences, which were characteristically seen as products of change in time” (Stocking 1999: 180). Diffusionist ideas developed and diversified (such as in neo-diffusionism) over the early decades of the 20th century (Stocking 1999: 211–220). However, diffusionism lost its appeal in the 1930s–1940s when acculturation theories and other more differentiated sub-fields in anthropology started to develop (Voget 1975: 339, 346, 546–548).

In the general framework of diffusionism, anthropologists and ethnographers started to map cultural traits globally and draw cultural borders according to the distribution of cultural traits, including e.g. technologies, ideas, customs, and beliefs, first in Europe and later in the US (Voget 1975: 317–319; Eriksen & Nielsen 2001: 27). The diffusionists developed a research method which compared the cultural traits of various cultural areas systematically to each other (Boas 1966: 251–252). The aim of the systematic comparison was to make the distribution of the routes of some cultural traits globally more visible, by recognizing similarities and subtle changes between traits seen in different cultural regions. Recognized similarities revealed the cultural, linguistic and physical contacts between the cultural regions and their populations, and thus exposed the routes of diffusion of cultural traits from one area to another. In addition, the aim was to trace the geographical and temporal origins of some dominating cultural features (ibid.). As a final result, the aim was to reveal the global historical construction of different cultural-geographical areas (Stocking 1999: 211–220). Cartographically, cultures became represented as “patchwork quilts” of culture areas with various origins and histories, which nonetheless, did not necessarily form any unified or coherent whole (Stocking 1999: 218; Eriksen & Nielsen 2001: 27).

The diffusionist theory represented borders only implicitly. In the diffusionist model, borders can be understood as instruments denoting regional and temporal differences between cultures, and at the same time enabling the contacts between them. The territorially placed border is seen as a zone of cultural, linguistic or
physical contact, which enables the diffusion of cultural traits from one cultural area to another. However, during this diffusion, the cultural traits change. Thus, the diffusionist theory implicitly represented the border as a boundary and a filter which caused a change in cultural traits. The border allowed some cultural traits to pass through, but in doing so, the trait became either a more developed version of the original trait, or it decayed from its original form when some of its features were filtered out.

From a cultural center in which complex forms have developed, elements may radiate and impress themselves upon neighboring tribes, or the more complex forms may develop on an old, less differentiated basis. [...] the study of geographical distribution of cultural phenomena offers a means of determining their diffusion. (Boas 1966: 252)

The diffusionist model also established a relationship between the center and the margin – the borderlands of the cultural areas. According to the diffusionist model, the borderlands of the cultural areas represented more archaic and less developed forms of cultural traits, while the centers represented the sources of innovation from which novelty and developments travelled towards the margins. Furthermore, according to the model, cultural traits survived in more authentic forms in the margins than in the centers. Therefore, researchers looked for remnants of past culture forms in the national margins (Hautala 1954: 174–197). This was in accordance with the socio-spatial construction of borderlands in geography during the early 20th century, where the borderlands represented areas that “were to be tamed, settled and civilized and hence brought under the hegemony of the white dominion” (Newman & Paasi 1998: 189).

Although the diffusionist ideas of border, its functions as a boundary and a filter, as well as, the cartographic representation of cultures as “patch work quilts” was influenced by geography (Voget 1975: 319–320), a metaphorical border was conceptualized as it became visible through recognized cultural differences. Therefore the border denoted cultural “situations characterized by contradiction and contest”, which is one of the extended usages of the border concept in contemporary border research (Donnan & Wilson 2001: 40). The diffusionist idea of border as a boundary and filter may still influence the representations of borders today, however, the idea of the borderland as an archaic wasteland of novelties has had competing representations and conceptualizations raised in border studies. With the emergence of the new generation of border studies, the border areas also became understood as hybrid spaces where several cultural features fuse, and form a hybrid culture which cannot be returned to any previously existing forms (Garcia Canclini 1995; Bhabha 2007: 54–56). From this perspective, border areas and margins appear as areas of new, emerging cultural forms.
Symbolic Anthropology: Border as a Ritual and Performance

During the early 20th century, the development of anthropology took different directions in the US and in Europe, as it started to diverge into studies of cultural anthropology in the US, and social anthropology in the Great Britain (Eriksen & Nielsen 2001: 39). Furthermore, several sub-fields started to develop which later evolved for example into medical anthropology, cognitive anthropology, and ecological anthropology amongst others (Voget 1975: 541–546). Some of these sub-fields recognized symbolic borders and border crossings in their research. One of these trends was symbolic anthropology which developed in the 1950s and 1960s in Great Britain. It studied culture as a system of meanings expressed in the symbols, rituals, and performances which maintain social order, and organize cultural thinking and classification systems (Eriksen & Nielsen 2001: 98–99). The symbolic borders and border crossings, expressed through various rituals and performances, became visible when the dominating social order or cultural thinking models became breached. One of the first researchers to study symbolic border crossings in anthropology was French anthropologist Arnold van Gennep (1873–1957). His theoretical formulations became further applied by anthropologists Victor Turner (1920–1983) and Mary Douglas (1921–2007) in representing symbolic anthropology in Great Britain.

The idea of ritualized border crossing can be traced to van Gennep’s study The Rites of Passage (1909), where he examined the changes of the individual’s social position in a society during the individual’s course of life. Van Gennep defined these changes in social position as ritualized border crossings, and used the terms “separation”, “margin” and “aggregation” to describe the move from the old position to the new one. According to van Gennep’s model, in the first phase, the individual crosses the social border as she or he leaves her or his old social position. In the second phase, the individual shifts into the margin of the social order, and in the third phase re-joins the social order, albeit, in a new position. During a life course, this ritualized three phase movement shifts, for example, from a child to a youth, from a youth to an adult, and so forth (van Gennep 1909/1977.)

Victor Turner developed van Gennep’s three stage model further. In his study, Ritual Process (1969/1977), Turner examined social order in an African society with the concepts of “structure”, “antistructure”, and “liminality”. Turner claims that in a society, a member moves from one social position to another through liminality which forms a ritual process. Those who move to a socially higher position, for example, are first separated from the social and institutional structures and placed in the liminal space socially, institutionally and spatially. In this liminal space, no ordinary rules prevail but the candidates for the new social position must bare various trials and tribulations, even humiliation. After these liminal experiences, the candidates can become members of the social structure and gain a new higher social position (Turner 1977: 95–97; 102–106.).
In Turner’s study, candidates for the new social position have crossed the borders of social order, and they are betwixt and between of the positions defined by the laws, customs and ceremonies in the society (Turner 1977: 95). Therefore, liminality means a withdrawal from the ordinary forms of social interaction, ambivalence, and being in a state of transition (Turner 1977: 167). Border-crossings and liminality are represented in many symbolic and ritualized performances, and Turner claims that liminality and marginality are themselves conditions which regularly create art, myths, and symbols (Turner 1977: 95–97; 102–106; 128). Therefore, it can be claimed that social borders, which are otherwise invisible in the society, become perceivable and understandable only through rituals, symbols and performances. For example, Turner describes young men’s border crossings and entering a liminal space in the African Ndembu circumcision rite, as a ritual where “the novices are “stripped” of their secular clothing when they are passed beneath a symbolic gateway; they are “leveled” in that their former names are discarded and all are assigned the common designator mwadyi or “novice”, and treated alike” (Turner 1977: 108). Removing secular clothing from the novices, and discarding their former names denote crossing the border and entering the liminal space. According to Turner (1977: 108), entering into the liminal space is also ritualized and symbolized in similar ways in other societies and institutions, such as monasteries. However, the liminal state gives the candidates ritualistic power. With the aid of their liminal, and betwixt and between positions, these individuals can question the dominating power structures of the society, and criticize those who have power in the social structure. Therefore, it can be claimed that the border and border crossing also function as “leverage” and source of empowerment for those who cross the border of social order.

Turner’s concepts of “structure”, “antistructure” and “liminality”, and their relation to the use of power have had some applicability in contemporary border studies regarding national borders and border crossings, cultural production across the national border, experiencing the betwixt and between position, as well as in questioning the dominating social order and dominating power structures through the liminal position (Gilsenan Nordin & Holmsten 2009; Wilkinson 2010; Andrews & Roberts 2012; Cocker 2012). Crossing national borders can be described as a ritualized process which moves the border crossers to a liminal space in the new society before they are able to join its societal structures. According to Turner (1977: 108–111), the betwixt and between position can develop into a more permanent position in some individuals. Therefore, Turner’s concepts could be applied to analyse those individuals who have crossed the national border more permanently, but have not yet become full members of the new society. These individuals can remain in liminal spaces for long periods of time that may both humiliate and empower them. Therefore, the liminality concepts such as the “culturally dangerous” and “culturally creative middle stage” also include a strong idea of potential cultural criticism (Weber 1995). Though its frequent usage and
popularity especially in the 1970s and 1980s, Turner’s liminality concept has been
criticized for representing cultural change through rites as consensual, and omit-
ting for example the identity politics of those liminal persons who may resist in-
corporation into the prevailing social order (Weber 1995: 530) and these argu-
ments have been stressed in recent cultural studies on borders (Vila 2003a; Alda-
ma et al. 2012).

The other well-known representative of symbolic anthropology, Mary Douglas
studied classification systems and cultural order in an African society in her clas-

sic study Purity and Danger (1966). The study pays attention also to symbolic
borders, especially cognitive and psychological borders, and border crossings that
are defined by cultural thinking. To analyse these borders and border crossings,
Douglas uses the terms “classification”, “ordering”, “ambiguity”, and “anomaly”
which are particularly interesting from the point of view of border studies. Doug-
las regards the ambiguity and anomaly as “rejected elements of ordered system”,
and “systematic by-products of ordering in a culture and society” (Douglas 1966:
35). Therefore, border crossing makes the border crosser appear as alien and un-
suitable, even dangerous, dirty and polluting. What is important in Douglas’ defi-
nition of anomaly and ambiguity is that they exist only in relation to the dominat-
ning order and cultural thinking models. As such, border crossing phenomena are
not necessarily ambiguous or polluting: “food is not dirty in itself but its dirty to
leave cooking utensils in the bedroom, or food bespattered on clothing” (Douglas
1966: 35–36). In this example, the context of cultural thinking, categorization, and
violating these categorizations, define an item as “dirt”.

Although Douglas focused mostly on cognitive and psychological categoriza-
tions and the borders of culturally defined order, her conceptual models also have
the potential to analyse the cultural, cognitive and psychological layers attached to
territorial and national borders, border crossings, and bordering (inclusion and
exclusion) processes which create the differences between “us” and “them”. The
cultural and social aspects of territorial and national borders (Donnan & Wilson
2001: 26–35) and the theme of “symbolization and (discursive) institutionalisation
of differences in space” have become central themes in border and mobility re-
search during the past ten to fifteen years (van Houtum & van Naerssen 2001:
125).

Simultaneous to Turner and Douglas, and the flourishing of symbolic anthro-
pology in Great Britain, American anthropology started to focus more on its own
territorial and symbolic borders. In the 1950s and 60s, the US-Mexico border and
questions of migration became visible research themes in American Anthropology
(Alvaréz 1995: 452–453). Gradually, questions concerning identity formation in
the territorial and metaphorical borderlands and transnational spaces came to the
fore. The cultural research of borders that began at the U.S.-Mexico border, sig-
nificantly influenced the development of cultural research on borders and border-
lands in the rest of the Anglo-American and European world. Some of the most
influential works in this area have been Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands: The New Mestiza—La Frontera* (1987) which focused on the multiply marginalized question of constructing feminine borderland identity in writing in the U.S.-Mexico borderland, Nestor García Canclini’s *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity* (1995), and Renato Rosaldo’s *Culture and Truth* (1989) which were among the first works to articulate the theoretical ideas of “border culture” (Heyman 2012: 49).

### After the Cultural Turn: Border as a Text

The next interesting point in time in regard to border studies is the cultural turn which meant major epistemological changes for cultural studies and other humanistic fields of research in the 1980s (Bonnell & Hunt 1999). This turn emphasized social reality as a linguistic and social construction, and in cultural studies, various cultural and social phenomena became studied as texts and as discursively (e.g. narratively, rhetorically, visually) constructed phenomena (Clifford & Marcus 1986; Bonnell & Hunt 1999; Jameson 2009). At the same time, the global migration movements started to strengthen. The centrality of nationalistic discourses on territorial borders and borderlands lessened and they became objects of critical scrutiny (Anderson 1991; Newman & Paasi 1998). In anthropology, dissatisfaction grew against those classic anthropological views of culture “which emphasized patterns of meaning that are shared and consensual”, and which practically deny the possibility of cultural change, inconsistency and contradiction (Donnan & Wilson 2001: 35).

After this cultural turn, several other turns emerged which have subsequently affected the ways of studying borders in cultural research. These have been termed as the co-called spatial turn and the emergence of the motion paradigm. There is no single definition of what the spatial turn is. However, there is agreement on some of the conceptual and theoretical preferences that can be used to characterize the spatial turn in cultural research. These include for example, the visible position detailed in the works of Henry Lefebvre, Edward Soja and Homi Bhabha, as well as a keen interest in spaces, places, borders, mobility and identity (Gupta & Ferguson 2001; Weigel 2009; Berenschmeyer & Ehland 2013). On the other hand, the motion paradigm “questioned the naturalized relations between bounded spaces and certain groups of people” (Paasi 2011: 20). As these topics emerged, borders were able to be newly conceived as a research object in cultural studies. In this context, borders and borderlands became seen as formations that are constructed against the idea of territorially bounded culture areas and identities, and against the concept of the so-called territorial trap (Newman & Paasi 1998: 192; Paasi 2011: 20). In anthropology, borderlands became seen not only as the meeting places of various cultures, and ethnic and linguistic groups, but as hybrid spaces, spaces of flows – borderland cultures in their own right (Gupta &
Since the 1990s, anthropological and cultural research on borders has exploded in terms of the number of publications and the diversity of approaches adopted. Whilst it is not the purpose of this introductory article to list all of the research that has been published, two main approaches to studying borders can be isolated in the published research: one studies borders, border crossings and bordering processes in connection with national and territorial borders, while the other focuses on metaphorical borders, border crossings, and bordering processes which may have no territorial dimension (Donnan & Wilson 2001; Wilson & Donnan 2012). Thus, borders and border crossings may be, for example “cultural, social, territorial, political, sexual, racial or psychological”, however, they are not necessarily seen as entirely different categories (Donnan & Wilson 2001: 19–20, 35).

What unites most contemporary approaches in border studies are the post-structuralist works of Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, and their formulations about discourse, power, and the construction of difference (Sarup 1988: 34) which have visibly influenced contemporary border studies (van Houtum & van Naesser 2001). It can be claimed that the concepts of discourse, power and difference are elementary parts of the common pool of intellectual means used in border studies today, regardless of discipline. For example, contemporary cultural research seeks to recognize the various levels of discourse and the power hierarchies between them, that influence the construction of identities, social reality and cultures in the borderlands (Donnan & Wilson 2001; Sadowski-Smith 2002a; Schimanski & Wolfe 2007).

These influences can be seen in the following example of cultural research: Since the 1990s and early 2000s, cultural studies did not focus only on issues of migration or identity formation that took place in national borderlands, but also on the literature and art relating to borders, borderlands, and border crossings (Alvarez 1995; Sadowski-Smith 2002b: 2; Wilkinson 2010). As mentioned previously, as early as the 1960s Victor Turner suggested that liminal spaces create poetry, myths, and art. Now these aspects became keys by which to understand the experiences at borders and border crossings. It can be claimed that borders and border crossings include such understandings, experiences and emotions that contribute to the construction of borderland identities, that cannot be expressed precisely in everyday language, but rather through artistic genres. Indeed, art may even become the only forum by which these understandings, experiences and emotions can be expressed. The following example highlights the power of artistic language in expressing the ambiguous phenomena and anomalies that are related to border crossings between an individual and solid or liquid substances, and the way these contribute to one’s identity formation. Taken from Jean Paul Sartre’s *Being and
Nothingness (1966: 777), the example describes the border crossing through individual’s physical sensations when he plunges his hand into a “slimy” substance and finds it difficult to differentiate between himself and the substance:

But at the same time the slimy is myself, by the very fact that I outline an appropriation of the slimy substance. That sucking of the slimy which I feel on my hands outlines a kind of continuity of the slimy substance in myself. These long soft strings of substance which fall from me to the slimy body (when, for example, I plunge my hand into it and then pull it out again) symbolize a rolling off of myself in the slime. And the hysteresis which I establish in the fusion of the ends of these strings with the larger body symbolizes the resistance of my being to absorption into the In-itself. If I dive into the water, if I plunge into it, if I let myself sink in it, I experience no discomfort, for I do not have any fear whatsoever that I may dissolve in it; I remain a solid in its liquidity. […] In the very apprehension of the slimy there is a gluey substance, compromising and without equilibrium, like the haunting memory of metamorphosis. (Sartre 1966: 777)

The experience of plunging his hand into slimy matter reminds the narrator of metamorphosis; a change of the body’s form and characteristics that could aptly reflect the experience of the hybridization of identity, the experience of the third space, and of being in-between. The artistic and poetic expressions of Sartre’s text exemplify well the effectiveness of artistic genres in expressing human experiences of borders and border crossings. It is important to recognize these fundamental experiences and meanings given to borders as objects of research. Borders do not exist without humans (as Sartre (1966) points out – the world is human), and therefore, when discussing the meanings, functions and possible consequences of establishing various borders, the human perspective and understanding of borders should be stressed, in addition to the political, economic, or social understandings.

This article proposes that recognizing individual and human aspects of borders and borderlands, expressed for example in borderland literature and art but not necessarily in everyday life, can be used as a means for cultural criticism, and criticism of the colonializing and homogenizing “gazes” which are directed towards borderlands. These “gazes” refer to Jean-Paul Sartre’s idea of “becoming the object of look” and “a mode of being when it apprehends itself as having become an object for another consciousness” (Macey 2001: 154). Furthermore, “being the object of the other’s look or gaze is often accompanied by a feeling of shame” (ibid.). Therefore, the idea of gaze includes a power relationship between the looker and the object of the look, where the looker seeks to create unifying and homogeneous representations of the object, such as the people and cultures which feature in territorial and metaphorical borderlands. Recognizing borderland literature and art as a critical voice against the homogenizing “gaze” is an important, empowering act. Good examples of studies of borderland cultures and identities that are used as a means for cultural criticism are the recent studies of the U.S.-Mexico border. Since the late 1980s, the people living in the U.S.-Mexico national borderland have become authors of border ethnographies, so making the voice of so-called “indigenous scholars” audible, and thus they have
become analyzing subjects in their own right (Alvaréz 1995: 459; Vila 2003b). The emergence of these indigenous scholars has been due to conscious acting against the “intellectual colonialism” that the borderland people have experienced at the U.S.-Mexico national border (Weber 1995: 532; Castillo & Córdoba 2002: 4). Later, this development led to the founding of so-called “borderlands performance studies”; in other words “de-colonizing performatics” that focus on the Latin population of the U.S.-Mexico national border (Sandoval et al. 2012: 3–4). Decolonizing performatics studies the various forms of Latina/o art as a decolonizing performative process which aims to achieve individual or collective empowerment, and to generate a pause in the colonial activities (Aldama et al. 2012; Sandoval et al. 2012: 2–3).

Conclusions

What can cultural studies convey or contribute to the multidisciplinary field of border studies, and how can the cultural point of view increase the understanding of borders? It seems self-evident that cultural studies have the potential to convey individual and micro-level perspectives and understandings to several of the research perspectives applied in border studies. When the concept of culture is defined more thoroughly in border studies, cultural research can reveal the wide spectrum of meanings that is attached to the borders from the human perspective, starting from micro-level perspectives and ethnographic particularities, and leading to the perspectives maintained by the dominating political and ideological discourses that are reflected in the dominating cultural forms.

One of the key areas in which cultural research seems to have great explanatory potential is studying borders through art, literature, symbols and borderland culture forms where individual experiences are paramount. Defying classifications, being betwixt and between positions, as well as the emotions, fears and wishes that are projected onto the border and the “Other” on the other side of the border, all belong to the sphere of human experiences. By further investigation of poetry, art, and literature, cultural studies can gain a deeper understanding about hybrid and diasporic identities, cultures, and the experiences of liminality and third space that are part of the global human understandings about the border in various territorial and metaphoric borderlands. However, these understandings and conceptualizations are not necessarily recognized in the dominating border discourses maintained by the groups in power, and the experience based narratives and discourses of migrants or various minority groups may be silenced for political reasons. On the other hand, border discourses that are generated by dominating economic or political interests may represent borders as being completely different (e.g. as open and problem free) from the borders that appear in people’s observations and experiences at the regional level (see the articles in this special issue). Therefore micro-level perspectives, ethnographies of specific borderland
cultures, and border art forms have the potential for providing cultural criticism and deconstructing the dominating discourses which are directed towards both territorial and metaphorical borderlands, and their people and cultures (see: Abu-Lughog 1991: 147–150). Focusing on micro-level and individual cases is a means to critically study institutionalized and dominating ideas of borders, and the colonizing gazes which often result in marginalizing and homogenizing conceptualizations of borderland cultures and identities.

The second concluding note of this article concerns the scholarly conceptualization and terminology used in border studies. Some researchers have suggested of writing a shared glossary of the terminology used within border studies (Newman 2007), and successful crossings across the associated disciplinary boundaries have been made. However, it is important to also maintain a connection between the concepts of each discipline and the core discussions of these disciplines. If the concepts are detached from the disciplinary core, they risk losing their efficiency as analytical tools. Thus, both the disciplines studying borders and the overall field of multidisciplinary border studies would benefit when analytical concepts are developed in a close relation to the disciplinary core of each discipline, and at the same time, maintaining shared dialog with the relevant questions within the border studies field. In this way, the multifaceted and sometimes even enigmatic borders may be understood in intellectually diversified and more profound ways.

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Notes
1 In this context, representation means the various conceptualizations and representations provided through different media that are at the same time historically constructed entities (Knuuttila & Lehtinen 2010: 25).
2 As examples of these borders, Brunet-Jailly (2011: 3) mentions “electronic borders, non-visible borders – biometric identification & control, or electronic devices set to track flows of goods or people such as tracking financial transactions, spywares of all kinds”.
3 The other major explanatory paradigm was evolutionism.
One of the earliest anthropologists to do so was Franz Boas (1858–1942) whose aim was to study “regional distribution of folklore elements”, and to “reconstruct the original myths of each people, and to trace the migration of myths” in the North-West Coast America (Stocking 1999: 12).

References


Discontinuity and Continuity in Representations of 20th Century Estonian History

By Tiiu Jaago

Abstract

The theme of this article is how Estonians have described political changes in their autobiographical narratives. The discussion is based on the observation that the establishment of Soviet rule in Estonia in the 1940s is construed in the studies of life stories, on the one hand, as a discontinuity of ‘normal life’, and on the other hand, as continuity. It is remarkable that irrespective of the demarcation of state borders by political decisions, Estonian territory is still perceived as a single and eternal whole. To what extent is the perception of discontinuity or continuity related to experiencing political change and to what extent is it related to the method of narration, and to what extent does it depend on the choices made by the researcher? An analysis of the three life histories discussed in the article indicates that experiencing discontinuity or continuity in a specific historical context does not coincide with its depiction in life histories. The texts reflect both the diversity of narrative methods (coherent representation of different layers of recollections, the comparison and contrast of different situations, etc.), and the context of narratives – for example the interviewer’s effect on discussing a topic or the relation of a story to publicly discussed topics. Recollections are characterised by variability, however this may not become evident as studies focus on certain aspects of the narrative or interrelations of the topic and public discourses. The polysemic and ambivalent nature of the ’border’ unfolds through the entangled interplay of territorial, political and cultural borders, their narrative articulation in life story telling as well as researchers’ choices.

Keywords: Cultural border, cultural continuity and discontinuity, cultural self-description, life story, the Soviet period
Introduction

This article deals with the terms ‘discontinuity’ and ‘continuity’, and ‘boundary’ or ‘delimiting’ associated with both the self-description of culture and the specifics of narrating about the past. I use the terms ‘continuity’ and ‘discontinuity’ in derivation from their narrative meaning: how these concepts are revealed when past events are organised into a coherent narrative. On the theoretical level, I rely on the approach by Juri Lotman relating to the mutual balance of the statics and dynamics of the (culturally meaningful) semiotic system: ‘how can a system develop and yet remain true to itself’ (Lotman 1992/2009: 1). In the article I pose three questions: Firstly; for what reason do life history researchers prefer to interpret the drastic changes of the 1940s in Estonia through expressions of discontinuity or continuity? Secondly; how does the mutual relation between continuity and discontinuity reveal itself spontaneously narrated life stories if the researcher does not aim to uncover either of these concepts. Thirdly; in such cases, how does the topic of changing the territorial, political and cultural borders manifests it? The texts analysed in this article are drawn from the collection of Estonian Life Histories preserved in the Estonian Cultural History Archives in Tartu (EKLA f 350).

The first part of the article introduces the general theoretical background for the study. The events that help to place the analysis of life histories in context will be discussed, and the question will be raised how the concepts of ‘discontinuity’ and ‘continuity’ are construed in studies of life narratives and the self-description of Estonian culture. The third part of the article is dedicated to an analysis of life histories, and in particular, how the theme of Soviet rule (a recurrent motif in these texts) is expressed in the contexts of continuity or discontinuity. Three life histories are discussed and I will compare the narrators’ descriptions of the events that altered the state borders in the 1940s, when Estonia was incorporated into the Soviet Union.

Theoretical Framework for the Study: The Interdisciplinarity of Border Studies

Traditionally, the research of territorial borders and state borders belongs to the realm of human or political geography. The boundaries presented in life stories result from the narrator’s point of view and are multi-level by nature. This article focuses on the topic of the relationships between the territorial, political and cultural borders in the context of the continuity and discontinuity presented in the self-description of culture: what role is played by the physical space (the territory), the culture, the language; and in what aspect is the geopolitically established border different from the border created by the self-description tools of culture?
To answer these questions, a view into the history of academic border studies is provided. The convergence of different fields of research started in the 1970s, and aimed to explain how we may interpret the interactive relations between the physical (administrative) borders established by the authorities and the subjective borders of the inhabitants. This task brought geographers closer to cultural researchers, linguists and sociologists. In the renewed research context of the geographical space, Anssi Paasi underlines the socio-cultural viewpoint, in which the focal analytical framework includes the oppositions ‘we’– ‘other’ and ‘here’–‘there’ (Paasi 1996: 14). The boundary is observed in this case as the ‘general principles of territorial organization’ (Paasi 1996: 27). At the same time, cultural researchers looked for possibilities to comprehend abstract borders. In this case the border is perceived as the meeting point of two cultures, where the marker of the border is the need to ‘translate’ the ‘other’: ‘The border is a bilingual mechanism, translating external communications into the internal language of the semiosphere and visa versa’ (Lotman 1984/2005: 210). Lotman gives an example, according to which certain persons, due to their particular talent or employment (magicians, blacksmiths, executioners), may operate as ‘interpreters’ on the boundary of cultural and mythological space, while settled in the same territory (ibid: 211). Such a boundary is not physically perceivable, but exists as a border between the culturally organised world and the translated (e.g. supernatural) world. The genres marking borders of this type (for example burial laments) are usual research objects of folkloristics, where the question is how people behave in border situations, in order to arrange relationships with this world and the beyond. For example, Madis Arukask describes the meaning of lamentation based on fieldwork among the Fenno-Ugric Vepsian people who live in North Russia: ‘… the folkloric practice was represented here in its original function of restoring order, in communication with the otherworld, the border between the two realms were (re)established so as to avoid unforeseeable consequences and primarily guarantee the well-being of the living’ (Arukask 2011: 132). Being an idea that joins different border concepts, this means that beside the physical characteristics of the border, the features of the border as a place of negotiations are also important. Additionally, modern holistic border studies emphasise the role of historical factors in the formation of administratively established borderlands. For instance, Karri Kiiskinen compares two sections of the external border of the European Union: the Finnish-Russian and the Polish-Ukrainian border. He demonstrates how the borderland is not only a contact zone between the states, but also a place of recollections influenced by historical factors (Kiiskinen 2012: 30–32).

Alongside the territorial, political and narrative aspects, the linguistic aspects are also significant in border studies. Anssi Paasi refers to geography as a linguistic practice (Paasi 1996: 22). His observation concerns primarily the scientific terminology, but the same can be applied to the ordinary language level. This lat-
ter element is studied in linguistics by means of semantic fields, which are formed by the concentration of words around certain topics. Using the connection between the concentration of words and the resulting fields, it is possible to research the speakers’ understanding of phenomena and their mutual relationships which are marked by the words in the semantic field (Öim 1997: 256). In this context, for example, it is significant that in Estonian, the same word – ‘piir’ (border) – is used to mark the boundaries of a culture, a geographical territory and a country as a political entity. It is therefore predictable that the history of the evolution of words and concepts requires particular attention in international border studies (Cohen 1994; Klusáková & Ellis 2006).

In this article the territorial aspects and those concerned with the changing of state borders serve as a general background to this approach; with the focus on perceived (historically developed and culturally created) subjective borders of ‘own’ land. The narrative research perspective sets forth questions about the (inter)subjectivity of truth, text creation techniques and the impact of the narrating situation on text creation (Titon 1980: 288–291; Latvala 2005: 33–36; Klein 2006: 8–15). In the case of self-descriptive texts (such as the verbal descriptions of general culture), their ideological character, the interpretative nature of facts, and emotions and ways of expression, play ‘an important role in the social construction of selves and cultural worldviews’ (Matsumoto 2006: 48). Autobiographical narrating is understood as an intersubjective process, in the course of which the knowledge existing in the society is exchanged, evaluated and verified (Smith & Watson 2010: 16–18). These standpoints also serve as a basis for understanding the ‘truth’ of self-descriptive texts, and the contents of these texts cannot be handled as facts unambiguous from real life. Rather, it is a cognitive process, which involves the experiences and knowledge of living in a certain time period and space. In Estonia, the state borders were altered so often during the 20th century that Estonians, in referring to their country’s past, tend to refer to time periods (the tsarist time; the time of independence; the Russian time; the German time); and as an analogy the time of manors (for example, the time of kolkhozes). This is in opposition to a politically defined territory (Estonia as a province of the Russian Empire; Estonia as a republic of the Soviet Union, etc.). Foreign rulers have ‘come and gone’ but Estonia has stayed put within its territorial boundaries, and it is this ideology that reflects the bond Estonians have with their country. When talking about the Soviet Republic of Estonia, ‘border’ is a temporal notion, rather than a territorial one. In the analysis of the life narratives presented in this article, I shall point out these aspects more closely.

The approach in which the cultural borders of Estonia coincide with its territorial borders (irrespective of the state borders imposed by foreign invaders) is associated with the national awakening movement of the late 19th century and the establishment of a nation state in the early 20th century (see: Jansen 2000: 45; Kruus 2005: 122–133, 400–402; Köresaar 2005, 70; Nutt 2010). The interconnectedness
of the territory and cultural identity more generally characterises the development of national unity and the ideology of nation states. If the prerequisite of the state is ‘a political organization covering a particular territory’, and ‘a nation [...] is a community of people with a common identity, which is typically based on shared cultural values and attachment to a particular territory’, then ‘the nation-state is the most powerful combination of nation and state’ (Paasi 1996: 39). In Estonia however, this concept is based on historical experience that has been studied from an ethno-linguistic point of view: ‘Being indigenous is one of the key words used in describing relations between akin and alien because ‘we’ were here long before the ‘aliens’ started to arrive’ (Viikberg 2000: 187).

Such inconsistency between cultural and political borders in Estonia has given rise to the question of continuity and discontinuity: was the continuity of Estonia interrupted when Estonia was incorporated into the Soviet Union in 1940 or not? – in the latter case, Estonia would be one of the native regions of Russia, and the national independence of Estonia would be understood as a deviation from the normal situation; on a larger scale, this is a question of the existence and nature of the boundary between Estonia and Russia. Also, how has the influence of foreign reigns shaped Estonian culture, and with such a multitude of foreign contacts, can we talk about self-sufficiency and the consistent development of Estonian culture? These questions were raised once again in the public debates of the 1990s, which included the studies of memoirs and life histories.

Basis of the Article: ‘Continuity’ and ‘Discontinuity’ in Life Histories

On the one hand, the subject matter of the article was chosen based on the argument of researchers into life histories that the incorporation of Estonia into the Soviet Union in 1940 is described in life histories collected at the end of the last century as a ‘discontinuity’ (Kõresaar 2005). On the other hand, we can see that cultural continuity is also a leitmotif used in depicting pivotal events. For example, similar cultural leitmotifs have been used to control, understand and describe the same periods or temporal qualities (Kalmre 2007; 2012). As a reader of life histories, I agree with the above views on discontinuity and continuity, and as a researcher of folklore, I have analysed life histories from the point of view of cultural continuity.

Controversial opinions prompted me to ask what triggers the use of one or the other concept. From a theoretical point of view, I do not see a problem in the simultaneous application of both concepts. Based on Culture and Explosion by Juri Lotman, various simultaneous processes (including everyday life and politics) move at different speeds, and therefore discontinuity and continuity are synchronous. A period of rapid transformation may be retrospectively interpreted as a natural course of history, so creating a concept of continuity (Lotman
Therefore, life histories can be construed as cultural-ideological texts (see: Matsumoto 2006), and although these texts are based on real life, they constitute a self-description of culture, rather than an ‘accurate’ account of the past. Moreover, the ‘discontinuities’ of real life and those found in their descriptions do not necessarily overlap.

The fact that real life events may be described in multiple ways gave rise to a further question and prompted the author to analyse the subject in detail. References to studies raised a doubt that certain findings are accepted as ‘undisputable’. For example, the following statement: ‘The four and half decades under Soviet rule were viewed [in the 1990s] as a single and prevailing period of discontinuity during which normal everyday life and wellbeing, whether individual or collective (i.e. of the Estonian people), was considered impossible’ (Aarelaid-Tart 2012: 148–149). There is no reason to doubt the truthfulness of the above statement, however it does not leave any room for the parallel existence of alternative approaches or interpretations. Stories within a collection vary significantly (Matsumoto 2006: 34–35, 52). The variability becomes evident both in the diversity of methods used to construct a story and the interpretations of the past. In studying life histories and interpreting findings, it is important to differentiate between the actual events described and the way they are described. Otherwise, it would be difficult to understand why it was possible to talk in the 1990s about the pivotal events of the 1940s in different ways (both through discontinuity and continuity).

In the worst-case scenario, one description is extended to the general interpretation of the past, which casts doubt on the ‘accuracy of recollections of the Soviet time’ (Aarelaid-Tart 2012: 148). Therefore, the question of whether discontinuity or another discourse prevails in the life histories recounted in the 1990s, depends also on the background of the researcher and the context in which they place the stories. While Kõresaar’s study is often referenced when highlighting the prevalence of the discourse of discontinuity in Estonian life histories recounted in the 1990s, the type of texts studied by Kõresaar should be taken into account. These were the life histories of people born in the 1920s, drawn from the collection of life histories stored in the Cultural History Archives of the Estonian Literary Museum (Kõresaar 2005: 25). Besides defining the set of texts (and the group of interpreters of the past), it is important to define the aspects that create the context of the study. In the present case, it is the way the researcher correlates narratives with other cultural texts. Kõresaar used a dialogue in her study between life histories and the topics of public and political discussions. She emphasised that the texts were created in the late 1980s and early 1990s. It was a period when public discussions of history were characterised by the key-phrase ‘crisis of truth’ and the truth was sought from witnesses to history (Kõresaar 2005: 17).

The historian Toomas Hiio, for example, speaks about a tradition of political lectures delivered by historians in towns, villages and community centres (the so-
called ‘history road shows’), restored in 1988 and 1989: ‘When Sulev Vahtre [Professor of history at Tartu University] restored history road shows, the main topic of discussion was the epoch-making years in Estonian history. I also had to deliver a speech in Vara community centre in February 1989. It was about the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, its secret protocol and the consequences of both’. (Hiio 2010: 2.) Public discussions of Estonian political history held in the late 1980s and early 1990s were dominated by the idea of discontinuity (‘epoch-making years’). In her research, Kõresaar focusses on the axis of those debates where public discussions and approaches meet the accounts of narrators who had witnessed the events. At the same time, different discourses existed that were not in a dialogue with public life. Such stories have been analysed by researcher of folklore Eda Kalmre, concerning xenophobia in everyday life in post-war Estonia and rumours of human flesh being used in the food industry (2007). It explored the controversial feelings of Estonians about Baltic German culture during and after the war, when people hoped that the West would help to restore Estonian sovereignty (2012). In her research, Kalmre not only examines the historical context of the events recounted but, as a researcher of folklore, also looks at the international and historical spread of the motifs in the stories. She highlights the continuity of tradition: for example, the reasons for the motif of human flesh being used in the food industry becoming topical in a specific historical/political/social context (be it sausage factories in the context of food shortage, or organ donation in the context of medical progress).

The doubt that research findings are treated as undisputable arises when the researcher is referring to earlier findings, but does not show their context (which, in fact, defines the area of validity of the findings). When researching life histories, it may lead to a situation where the diversity of cultural self-description is overshadowed by the dominating discourse, without explaining under what conditions the given discourse may dominate other discourses. Whether the concept of ‘discontinuity’ or the concept of ‘continuity’ should be highlighted in the descriptions of real life and past events partially depends on the method of representation, partially on external factors existing at the time of recounting (such as different approaches to the past in society), and partially on the contexts created by the researcher and their field of research.

‘Discontinuity’ and ‘Continuity’ in the Self-description of Estonian Culture

Ene Kõresaar emphasises that the context of the discontinuity experience and its representation in the stories told in the 1990s, is a broader understanding of Estonian national history and culture – they are treated as a series of discontinuities (Kõresaar 2005: 70). In referring to the works of historians Ea Jansen and Anti Selart, she also says that ‘discontinuity and continuity are opposite poles that have
shaped the approach to Estonian national history’ (ibid.). The next section of this article is dedicated to the debates concerning both history and literary science, about the overlapping of the boundaries of Estonian culture and territory, and will show how these discussions are related to the rhetoric of discontinuity and continuity. In general, historians emphasise the continuity of settlement and political inconsistency, which means that Estonian national identity can be seen as a series of discontinuities. Literary scientists deal with external factors that influence culture and result in the discontinuity of Estonian culture.

Archaeologist Andres Tvauri is of the view that the development of a nation cannot be studied based on archaeological data. He argues however, that the settlement of Estonia is considered to be consistent: ‘[…] there is no doubt that the people who inhabited Estonia in the second half of the first millennium are the direct ancestors of modern-day Estonians’ (Tvauri 2012: 21). In popular scientific literature, Estonian culture and territory are similarly related. Indrek Rünkla for example, speaks about the inevitable connection between territory and culture. He argues that: ‘territory lives together with the culture developed within it,’ and continues: ‘Our space as a long-term permanent culture has been shaped and reshaped by acts and stories’ (Rünkla 2010: 774–775). In his essay, he highlights the connection of an individual with his culture and territory, and finds all three to be interrelated. Tiit Kärner also starts with a premise that Estonian territory and culture are interrelated, asking: ‘What will happen in a multicultural society?’ He explains (referring to Juri Lotman’s position that culture develops as a closed space), that with a multitude of cultures, territories (cultural spaces) can be separate. According to Kärner, Estonia, too, is characterised by a simultaneous, yet isolated existence of several cultures (Kärner 2010: 819).

Literary scientist Aare Pilv (2008) differentiates between three self-descriptions of Estonian culture: interruption (periods of independence alternating with periods of foreign cultural influence); existentiality (ethnic nationality or conservation of a nation – opposition to the fear of extinction); and self-colonialism (developing one’s own culture by modelling on ‘others’, e.g. Western Europe). All of these concepts are related to each other by the question of ‘self’ and ‘others’. The concept of discontinuity requires preserving the self – a situation in which culture is ‘interrupted’ with regard to the ‘other’ (Pilv 2008: 71). Pilv writes in his article Estonia of existence that these concepts were developed based on literature and the results were extended to culture as a whole (Pilv 2011: 851). His criticism refers to the fact that the role of literature in shaping the Estonian mentality is not as fundamental and exclusive as the authors he has analysed suggest. I agree with the argument that trends in literature do not explain all aspects of the self-description of Estonian culture, and believe that Aare Pilv has reached a conclusion that goes beyond literature:

We can ask what is the purpose of the existence of nations – what is the achievement or purpose that justifies their existence. […] If we ask that question about Estonians,
the first answer is: we have lived here for more than 5,000 years; we survived slavery and Soviet occupation; in a word, we survived, we persevered and our main achievement is that we exist (Pilv 2011: 855).

Time and again, researchers come to the conclusion that it is continuity that is most valued from the point of view of Estonian culture.

Beyond discussions about literature, Hasso Krull’s concept of a ‘culture of interruption’ is referred to mainly in order to emphasise the controversial nature of recollections gathered in Estonia in the 1990s (Kõresaar 2005: 64, 70–71; Aarelaid-Tart 2012: 147). The referred work by Hasso Krull includes his essays on literature in which he analyses the connection of Estonian-language printed works with world literature. He deals with inter-cultural dialogue rather than political changes (although they are of course related). In his collection of essays, he mentions the political aspect of the ‘culture of interruption’ of the 1990s. At the same time, he emphasises continuity: ‘We have to remember that the concept of interruption does not mean a single event. Interruption is always recurring, a series of countless repetitions that creates fluctuation. Therefore, interruption is actually a special case of continuity’ (Krull 1996: 7).

Self-description of culture is ideological, created by cultural and sociological means. Because of its ideological nature, it does not necessarily reflect the actual situation, as is also argued by Aare Pilv in his article. He says that literature often heroizes the nation because it is a more ‘constructive’ idea than the actual practices of survival (Pilv 2011: 855). It should be borne in mind however, that besides being ideological, the self-description of culture is not homogeneous: the same situations can be represented differently. The next question is: how the above self-descriptions that are prevalent among the Estonian general public are disclosed in the life histories of common people.

The 1940s and the Soviet Regime in the Context of ‘Discontinuity’ and ‘Continuity’: Based on Estonian Life Histories

To enable closer study I chose real life narratives from the Estonian Life Histories collection (EKLA f 350). Also, papers by other life history researchers (including those referred to herein), are based on the same collection. The research study by Ene Kõresaar was based on one hundred stories from the Estonian Life Histories collection. The criteria for selecting the stories was that the narrators went to school in the Republic of Estonia, i.e. before the 1940s coup; and that their stories reflected the conflict characteristic to the Estonian society of the end of the 1980s (Kõresaar 2005: 18, 25–29). Aili Aarelaid-Tart used both published memoirs and biographical interviews that she herself had conducted, and explored the role of official political discourses in the memoirs (Aarelaid-Tart 2012: 142). The research by Eda Kalmre relies on published memories and materials from the Estonian Folklore Archives, which beside the recordings of rumours and folktales,
include descriptions of the milieu of the period when the stories were in circulation (Kalmre 2007: 23–24). Narratives of the same topic can be found among the texts of the Estonian Life Histories collection (EKLA f 350v, 27; EKLA f 350, 1077). The texts that I observe are basically of the same kind. However, I do not proceed from the responses in life stories to topics that are in the public foreground (e.g. in the press, politicians’ speeches, or in schools), nor the milieu of descriptions accompanied by rumours. Rather I chose three stories to explore how the topical problems spontaneously emerge in them. This enabled me to follow how the topic of continuity and discontinuity is unconsciously revealed in the stories and to ask what causes the emergence of one method of description or the other. I limited the selection of texts firstly to the region, and then to the time and circumstances of narrating.

I have analysed the life histories of the residents of Kohtla-Järve, an industrial town in north-eastern Estonia. The collection of life histories (EKLA f 350) includes about 500 narratives related to Kohtla-Järve and the surrounding region, and I have chosen three of those narratives for more detailed analysis. Two related aspects are important in these narratives: firstly, each of the three narrators represents a different generation (the time frames of their life histories are also different); secondly, the times (and the motives) of telling the stories are also different.

One of the narrators was born in the early 20th century. He entered the political turmoil of the 1940s as a fully developed personality and was able to compare his experiences as an adult in both the pre-Soviet and Soviet time of Estonia. In 1993, he contributed four volumes of memoirs to the Estonian Cultural History Archives that he had written in the period between 1979 and 1980 (EKLA f 350, 289 I–IV). Because his memoirs were solely written for his own purpose, they do not constitute a systematic account of his life story. The memoirs consist of descriptions of selected events and situations, and the results of his research into local history. Unlike other narratives discussed here, his contribution was not influenced by post-Soviet public discourses or any questions asked by researchers.

The second narrator was born in 1926 on the island of Saaremaa, the largest island of Estonia. He got a job in the mines of Kohtla-Järve in 1948, after completing his vocational training. As a young person, he endured many hardships that were visited on him and his family by political events (for example, being arrested together with his family on the eve of WW2 and serving on the ‘wrong side’ during the war), but in the parts describing his adult life he focusses on adapting to life under Soviet rule. The narrative is dated 1997 and was contributed to the archives in response to a collection project My destiny and the destiny of those close to me in the labyrinths of history. The author has offered a story full of adventures to readers, titled: The life and adventures of a Saaremaa man (EKLA f 350, 643).

The third narrator is a woman who was born in 1965 in Kohtla-Järve. She started her independent life away from her town of birth but returned in the 1990s. Her story was contributed in response to a call for contributions published by the
archives in 2001 (EKLA f 350, 1080). The theme of the collection campaign of 2001 was *My life and the life of my family in the Estonian SSR and the Estonian Republic*, which brings to the fore the correlation between different ‘times’. Since the narrator has no first-hand experience of the changes of the 1940s, an important but different aspect is raised, in which she reflects on her childhood and youth but always within the framework of the Soviet regime.

While the first contribution represents recollections of selected moments in the life of the narrator and texts on local history and the second narrative is an autobiographic adventure story, the third is built on the question raised by researchers: how to compare everyday life during and after the Soviet time. I will discuss the narratives through the following key terms: monument, relations between people, state border and the definition of ‘times’. Such a representation is based on the episodes extracted from the analysed life histories. For each key word, I will also refer to the discontinuity and continuity that relates to these descriptions.

**Monument as a Symbol of Discontinuity and Continuity**

The narrative of the person who was born at the beginning of the 20th century includes an episode in which the narrator describes the erection of a monument in Jõhvi, a small mining town in north-eastern Estonia, which was dedicated to fighters in the Estonian War of Independence. The motif of the destruction of monuments symbolising Estonia’s independence is one of the markers in the study by Ene Kõresaar that refers to the rhetoric of discontinuity (Kõresaar 2005: 86–91). The narrative introduces the author of the monument – a local sculptor. Then the narrator describes the monument depicting the battle of Narva, which occurred on the Estonian-Russian border. The battle between Estonian troops and the Red Army took place in December 1919 and was one of the most important battles of the War of Independence. The plaque was designed to depict soldiers forcing their way towards the east, i.e. towards Russia. During the process of casting, the image on the plaque was reversed: the troops were facing west, which greatly annoyed the participants of the War of Independence. The narrator writes that he tried to cheer up the sculptor: ‘[...] ah, don’t worry, it means that they are attacking the Landeswehr’ (EKLA f 350, 289-I, p. 34). This illustrates Estonia’s position between east and west: on the one hand, a fight against the Soviets (in which the troops are facing east), and on the other hand, a centuries-old antagonism with the Baltic Germans who had a higher place in the social hierarchy (and where the rifles are pointing west).

The narrator goes on to describe at length the maintenance works that were done in the town in connection with the construction of the monument and reflects on the differences between a rural community and a modern urban environment.
The town of Jõhvi and Jõhvi Church in 1924. Photo: ERM Fk 461:86.

Monument to the War of Independence in Jõhvi in the 1930s. Photo: ERM Fk 2813:76.
Because the recollections not only include reflections on urban design (which is a politically neutral subject), but also the description of a symbol of independent Estonia – a monument dedicated to the War of Independence – it is quite logical that the subsequent description of the green area around the monument is presented in a political context:

Six years passed and when the Soviets came, the monument was demolished and the pieces taken away. When the Germans came, they gave permission to restore the monument. The stones were scratched and crumbling but the monument was in its place again. It remained in place for four years and then the Soviets returned and had the monument completely destroyed. (EKLA f 350, 289-I, p. 34).

The description of the monument’s ‘life’ in the 1940s is typical in the context of Estonian life histories and studies into local history: the demolishing of something that existed, restoration, demolition, etc. The rhetoric is also important: the (Russians, Germans, the Soviet regime, etc.) ‘came’ or ‘arrived’, meaning that the rulers ‘came’ and ‘left’ but the place remained. I concluded from such descriptions that discontinuity is perceived with regard to politics rather than one’s country/neighborhood: ‘[...] life histories describe political changes as interruptions; any changes in the environment or neighbourhood refer to continuity in which changes (positive or negative) form a part of natural progress. This indicates that the environment is perceived in recollections as more stable compared with experiences caused by political changes’ (Jaago 2011d: 108). The analysed text supports the hypothesis that Estonia is perceived as a whole in terms of both territory and mentality, irrespective of the instability of authorities and political situations.

What about ‘discontinuity’? On one hand, the episode describing the fate of the monument provides an opportunity to interpret it as a story of discontinuity: the Soviet regime resulted in the destruction of national symbols. On the other hand, the narrative is about recurring events, which obscures discontinuity (i.e. the destruction of the monument). The narrator describes the development of events or situations in different political contexts rather than contrasting situations or authorities. Therefore, it is more about continuity than discontinuity. How can this phenomenon be explained? According to Juri Lotman, any events that have created discontinuity can be retrospectively interpreted as natural progress (Lotman 1992/2009: 16–17). In the above-mentioned memoirs, the story of the monument is presented as a series of chronological events, which creates an impression of continuity. This explanation is inferred from psychological studies into relations between autobiographical narrating (memory) and self-continuity. The physical environment is perceived as the same, even when the mental environment changes. It is based on continuous contact with the same albeit changing place that creates continuous closeness. Continuous contact and closeness in turn create the accumulation of experiences that are represented in narratives as a continuous experience (Bluck & Alea 2008: 56–57). In the present example, it refers to recol-
lections related to the monument from both the 1930s and 1940s – a period during which the political regime changed four times.

**Change in Interpersonal Relationships as an Indicator of Political Changes**

Besides environmental and political changes, the story about the monument represents the fates of the relevant local people. The narrator informs the reader that both the designer of the monument and the person who organised the construction had passed away before the regime changed, and therefore they both escaped the psychological or real punishment that the change of the regime would have brought upon them (EKLA f 350, 289-I, p. 34).

The fates of the people who entered the period of regime change are, in my opinion, represented by the narrator in the context of continuity. In his recollections of his school years, he tells about the fate of his religious education teacher: he was executed in the first year of Soviet rule. The narrator explains this as ‘personal persecution at the beginning of Soviet rule’. In the second part of his memoirs, he describes the death of the same man as the settling of accounts between local people. He does not have any proof but he uses the phrase: ‘So they said’ (EKLA f 350, 289-II, p. 28). Because the person concerned is quite well known to the Estonian public, it is easy to conclude (based on the information from biographical lexicons and from interviews with local people) that the recollections are not a witness statement. The narrator’s admission ‘so they said’ means that the matter was discussed by people. The reason for this is probably that rather than recording a situation, he associated it with emotions and moral aspects (e.g. empathy, sense of justice), as well as with practical needs (how to behave when relations between people have changed). In his recollections, the discussion of a person’s fate is more important than the event itself.

Established relationships continue irrespective of a change of power, even if the roles of people in society change. Changes in role start to shape the fates of relevant people. Therefore, his narrative is carried by the idea that the regime changes the (power) relations between people rather than acting against them as an independent force.

A similar approach to the effect of changing regimes on people’s relationships is used in the second narrative. The author (a man born in 1926 on the island of Saaremaa) represents the course of events in two ways. On the one hand, he mentions that WW2 began on 1st September 1939. He adds, however, that most people were not conscious of the fact that a war had begun. On the other hand, he describes changes in everyday life as a series of separate events during a longer period. The signs of changes are either visual (red flags and banners) or changed relations between people (their roles in the community). This means that political changes were perceived at the level of everyday relations, not just by acknowledging overall historical events. Further information about this latter aspect is added.
in the course of narrating by connecting his story with historical events. However, the more often everyday life is depicted in the context of historical events (for example, when attention is focused on the establishment of Soviet rule in Estonia), the further away the author moves from everyday experiences.

When talking about a later period, during which the Soviet regime had already become commonplace, the narrator paints a different picture of relations between people. In a situation where everyday life was politicised, it was not clear what the real motives were of people who talked about life or listened to others. The narrator describes situations in which he felt he had to be cautious. For example, in a story about a Siberian Russian who had been a prisoner of war, and was subsequently imprisoned after the war by the Soviet authorities and sent to work in the mines of Kohtla-Järve:

I am guilty of surviving the [German] prison camp, [...] he swore using foul language as is common among the Russians. He said that there were many people like him working in the mines. It was dangerous to listen to his swearing. NKVD\textsuperscript{10} informers were everywhere and it was better to make a quick exit and not to listen to him. (EKLA f 350, 643, p. 68).

The narrator uses the expressions ‘informer’ whose stories were ‘dangerous to listen to’ and that ‘it was better to make a quick exit’ to escape those stories. At the same time, it is not clear what the real motive of telling those stories was. The narrator himself was also suspected of being an informer when he visited his brother abroad in 1966. His brother took him to the Estonian House in New York – a gathering place for the local Estonian community. The narrator’s brother warned him, and he noticed it himself, that he was suspected of being an agent of the Soviet authorities. For that reason, some people (including some of his childhood friends) were reluctant to talk to him (EKLA 350, 643, p. 75).

It appears that when describing the changes of political regime, the narrators focus on changes in human relations. The reason for the second narrator also using the theme of changing relationships when talking about a stable period is an extraordinary situation – a visit abroad during the Cold War. This means that the theme of relationships is shaped by the political framework.

It appears from the above that descriptions of human relations can be interpreted in the context of continuity. In the first story, established relationships continue after political changes, yet the actions arising from those relationships are coloured by the new political context (persecution that leads to killing). Again, the level of discontinuity or continuity is obvious in the representation and both aspects are closely intertwined in the narrated reality. According to Juri Lotman: ‘In reality, these represent two parts of a unified, integrated mechanism and its synchronic structure, and the aggression of one does not subdue but, rather, stimulates the development of the opposite tendency’ (Lotman 1992/2009: 12). The fact that the theme of human relations is brought to the fore in descriptions of general social life may, according to Lotman, refer to a situation of
discontinuity/continuity in real life. According to Lotman, a period of discontinuity is also characterised, besides a rapid development of events, by the role of an individual becoming more important (Lotman 1992/2009: 15). Therefore, in these stories continuity is achieved retrospectively by describing the past events as a continuous passing of time.

**The Soviet Border as a ‘Discontinuity’**

A separate theme in recollections of the Soviet time is that of ‘abroad’ (relatives living in the West, visits, tourism), where ‘abroad’ was behind the closely guarded state border. The border could only be crossed under the strict control of the authorities. This component was analysed in the third story told by a woman who was born in 1965. One of the advantages of the collapse of the Soviet Union was: ‘the borders are open now; I have seen most of Europe’ (EKLA f 350, 1080). As a remark, it should be mentioned that while 1991, for Estonians, was the year when the borders disappeared (as featured in the above narrative), in the life histories told by the Russians, the collapse of the Soviet Union is associated with the creation of borders (for example, ‘when we lived in the Soviet Union, we did not know what a ‘border’ or a ‘visa’ was’) (see Jaago 2011b: 100). Finding relatives and travelling abroad (as a tourist or by invitation) is one of the chapters in the stories about the Soviet time. People describe their anxiety (will I get permission to travel abroad?) and travel impressions. A separate theme is crossing the Soviet border and meeting Soviet border guards – stereotypical protectors of the regime. For example:

> It was clear without words where we had arrived – border guards [...] looked so grim-faced as if they were meeting a planeload of enemies. [...] My suitcases were searched thoroughly and when nothing was found they asked where I had hidden it. [When the narrator asked what they were looking for, he was told that he was suspected of bringing pornographic literature into the country.] (EKLA f 350, 643, p. 80).

The Soviet border represents discontinuity in these stories: it prevented people entering the territory that was perceived as a natural part of their space of movement. It is characteristic that people were treated in their ‘own’ country as enemies who posed a threat to the Soviet regime. The same story describes the consequences of travelling abroad. For example, those who had been abroad were required to share their impressions with their colleagues. It was not strictly compulsory, yet recommended and people were expected to do so. Potential contacts with authorities who checked the mentality and attitudes of those who had been abroad were more complicated, and whether or not one was allowed abroad again depended on how they described their travel experience.

The Soviet time had already stabilised during the period of the events described. There is, however, a clearly distinguishable emergency situation. On the one hand, there is confrontation between the authorities and the individual (actual
contacts with representatives of the state authority); on the other hand, there is uncertainty as to where and why ‘borders’ emerge (for example, the control of attitudes and mentality at the level of everyday life).

**Delineation of ‘Times’ as a Technique of Joining Discontinuities**

The contributor who was born in 1965 cannot have had any first-hand recollections about the changes of the 1940s. Since she contributed her story as a response to the archives’ call for contributions, her narrative is not based on the development of events over time. In her story, she correlates memories of everyday life with a political framework. She offers episodes from her childhood – playing hide-and-seek in a maize field, boiling heads of maize in salty water and eating them together with friends. At the same time, she is connecting those everyday episodes with more general episodes of history that were put later into words: ‘It was the Khrushchev time when maize was cultivated everywhere, even in Estonia.’ For a person familiar with the Estonian cultural context, these are concrete hints about people’s attitudes towards the Soviet Union and towards what was taught at school. When we join three aspects – the narrator’s age (she was born in 1965), her childhood games in a maize field, and associating maize with the ‘Khrushchev time’ –, we can see a discrepancy. Nikita Khrushchev came to power after Stalin’s death in 1953. Although maize had been grown in Estonia since the middle of the 19th century, the widespread planting of maize is associated with Khrushchev’s agricultural policy (Kalling 2009). After Khrushchev was ousted from power in 1964, the compulsory cultivation of maize was abolished. The narrator was born a year after the ‘Khrushchev time’ had ended, yet she associates a field of maize with that exact party leader and head of state.

The line between the Soviet period and the period of independence is marked in her story by another marker that is quite widespread in life histories – a shortage of goods (‘deficit’). The permanent shortage of goods was characteristic of the Soviet time but an unknown phenomenon before and after: ‘The elections and public holidays were the greatest. Then you could buy goods that were in short supply and see a film free of charge. In the evening, there was a dance party’ (EKLA f 350, 1028, p. 1).

Ene Kõresaar has analysed the theme of ‘deficit’ as one of the most characteristic features of the life histories that describe the Soviet time. She has defined shortage as ‘a lack of and restrictions on goods and services’ (Kõresaar 2003: 111). In everyday life, shortage was associated with a lack of choice and long queues. The goods in short supply were foodstuffs and industrial goods, including household electronics, clothes and goods that were needed on special occasions (e.g. weddings and funerals) – none of these was freely available. Besides referring to the period-specific shortage of goods, the above episode is characterised on the one hand by conventionality and commonness (people met and had a party), and on the other hand put into a political context (elections, public holidays).
A more indirect line between the Soviet time and the times before and after is
drawn by the descriptions of public urban space (maintenance, behaviour). The
recollections include descriptions of both how green areas and parks were created
in mining towns in the 1930s, and how they were destroyed in the 1940s and
1950s (Jaago 2004: 54–58; 2012: 27). The episode concerning a monument dis-
cussed a border between rural society and creating a modern urban space, includ-
ing a description of the maintenance works done in the town in the 1930s. To-
gether with the construction of the monument, the muddy and untidy square in
front of the church that had been used to tie horses was redesigned and tidied up
(EKLA f 350, 289–I, p. 34). The second story (narrated by a man born in 1926)
includes recollections from the early years of the Soviet rule in Kohtla-Järve:
‘When our lorry stopped in the muddy central square of the town, the first thing
we saw besides puddles was a man staggering out of a beer shop characteristic of
the time’ (EKLA f 350, 643, p. 67).

The author of the third story (a woman born in 1965 in the mining region of
Kohtla-Järve), also writes about alcohol problems, in both her own family and in
public places. She also mentions the shabby beer shops that were characteristic of
the time and stood out among other buildings (EKLA f 350: 1080, 3).

The analysis of the life stories reveals that the more unequivocally the narrator
has described the line between the Soviet time and the time of independence, the
more obvious the discontinuity is. Among the stories analysed above, this is most
clear in the narrative of the woman born in 1965. She not only describes past
events but also puts them in a political context (associating the game of hide-and-
seek with Khrushchev) or, vice versa, refers to the commonness of political events
(public holidays and elections as a pleasant opportunity to meet acquaintances and
neighbours). A different method of delineating ‘times’ requires a comparison of
contexts, where events and situations characterising a certain epoch in one story
are supplemented by the stories of other narrators. A comparison of life stories
also showed that discontinuity and continuity as methods of narrating are con-
ected with other methods of telling a story: for example, a comparison may show
discontinuity but when the events and situations are lined up, the result is contin-
uity.

Summary
The life stories reveal the multilevel nature of the border, where from the point of
the observer (or more precisely, the observer group), territorial aspects are
associated with those of culture. The border approach that is characteristic for the
group has evolved over a long period and covers both historical experiences and
cultural self-descriptions. The Estonian experience refers to the variability of the
state border (i.e. to the alternation of periods of national independence and foreign
power). Cultural self-description supports the idea of the stability of borders
Estonians experienced the Soviet Union however, without leaving Estonia. This historical situation gave rise to a question about the relation between the borders of Estonian territory, the borders of cultural space and state borders, concentrating on the key words of ‘discontinuity’ and ‘continuity’.

This article was triggered by an observation that the life histories contributed in the 1990s and 2000s represent controversial views: in some, memories about the 1940s are represented as discontinuity, and in others as continuity. Acknowledging that discontinuity is more associated with political situations, and continuity associated with aspects common to humanity and with descriptions of the home environment, I have analysed and compared three life histories from the same region. The narratives were selected from the collection of Estonian Life Histories (the Estonian Cultural History Archives of the Estonian Literary Museum, Tartu). The narrators belong to different generations and their stories were told at different times and under different circumstances. My objective was to examine which factors referred to discontinuity and which factors referred to continuity, while the general topic is the variability of state borders and the exchange of power in Estonia.

The analysis indicated that discontinuity and continuity can be seen initially at the level of events, periods and situations; then at the level of the method of narration (an adventure story, a study, a story built on comparison); and lastly from the perspective of the researcher (how does the researcher contextualise the analysed texts).

In real life, the interrupting aspects and the aspects creating consistency in life occur simultaneously, and narrators can highlight both aspects in their recollections. If a narrator creates a consistent picture of the past, continuity is brought to the fore. Such a description is supported by the integrity of the narrator’s image of self, and his/her self-continuity. If the narrator lived in the same physical environment and experienced changes in the same neighbourhood (place), these fuse into layers of experiences and memories. Such layers create a picture in the mind of a reader (listener) of a place that is constantly changing but yet still remains the same. If the narrator emphasises differences, by contrasting and comparing, he/she creates an impression of discontinuity. For example, those narrators who had first-hand experience of the events tended to describe more everyday life and human relations. However, the narrator who did not have first-hand experience of the events of the 1940s, uses the scheme proposed by researchers (putting her recollections into a political context).

Is it possible to draw conclusions about the continuity or discontinuity of a situation (period or series of events) from recollections of the past presented as continuity or discontinuity? An indicator could be the way that narrators have described rapid changes and the new (unfamiliar) development of events. We can assume that the period (or the part describing the period) was perceived as discon-
tinuity. The same happens when the narrator describes the increasing importance of human relations at a community level, especially when political changes gave certain members of the community the power to shape the fate of others.

Whether it is discontinuity or continuity that is brought to the fore depends on the researcher’s choice. What is important in the examples presented in this article is the connection between events described in life histories and the topics discussed at the same time in public (and especially in politics). Certain topics are not important for the public (such as gossip) and therefore the researcher is not able to connect the topics with each other in the process of recollection. When certain research findings are accepted as undisputable however, there is a risk that memories are schematised. For example, if an analysis is based on the interrelation between public discussions and the method of narrating, ignoring other methods that seem less important (for example, human relations compared to political opinions) or unreliable commentary (such as the rumours and urban legends about sausage factories using human flesh) in the context of public discourse. When studying memories and life histories, it is thus important to bear in mind that although the narrator’s approach to the border can be attributed to a general historical and ideological background, the representations of the past may vary significantly.

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Notes
1 The ways in which Estonian culture, territory and state borders are put on the subjective map of Estonian narrators and those who immigrated to Estonia during the Soviet time do not overlap. For example, autobiographical texts contributed by Russian-speaking narrators to the collection of Estonian Life Histories (EKLA f 350) indicate that the authors identify themselves with two places and the togetherness of the republics of the Soviet Union has an important role in their stories. One of the most extreme examples is the life history submitted by a woman who was born in 1935. She has titled her autobiography ‘We lived in the Soviet Un-
‘ion’ and her description of events and situations is based on Soviet identity (EKLA f 350v, 33). Even if the Russophone authors define Estonia in their narratives as an independent entity, it is seen as a country that ‘emerged’ in 1991 as a result of events that subjectively altered the world map (borders were drawn where they should not be) and led to problems related to citizenship. Estonian culture and territory are not associated with each other in those stories. Estonia is either a concrete place of residence in Valga, Kohtla-Järve or elsewhere (a level lower than the country) or one of the republics of the Soviet Union, a region in the European Union or in the historical ‘Baltics’ (a level higher than the country) (Jaago 2011a: 146–147).

In treatments of history, political relations between Estonia and the Soviet Union are described using precise timelines, e.g. ‘When Estonia was occupied by the Soviet Union on 17 June 1940 and incorporated in the Union on 6 August 1940, the border between Estonia and Russia was not altered.’ (Nutt 2010: 77). In memories and life histories, ‘the 1940s’ is a metaphorical expression and embraces several aspects of the relationship between Estonia and the Soviet Union (including war and the post-war period, repressions, the creation of kolhozes, etc.).

The texts from Kohtla-Järve, an industrial town in north-eastern Estonia, were selected in connection with my more extensive study of the narrative traditions of the region. This article forms a part of my study on Kohtla-Järve within the project ‘Writing Cultures and Traditions at Borders’: Kohtla-Järve as a multicultural environment in the context of place identity and interpreting the past (Jaago 2011b), and on multiculturalism at community and family levels (Jaago 2011c and Jaago 2012, respectively).

The neighbouring towns of Kohtla-Järve (granted town status in 1946) and Jõhvi (granted town status in 1938) are located in north-eastern Estonia, about 50 km from the border between Estonia and Russia (following the Narva River). Jõhvi was a district of Kohtla-Järve during the Soviet period. North-eastern settlements (including Kohtla, Järve, and Jõhvi) are first mentioned in written records (Liber Census Daniae) in the 1240s (Johansen 1933: 938–941). While Kohtla-Järve was created by merging surrounding villages into a single mining and industrial town, Jõhvi is a historical parish centre. Therefore, Kohtla-Järve is more controversial in people’s recollections: historically, it was a rural region with a lifestyle characteristic of a village society. Mining and industrial landscapes, together with town houses and a lifestyle characteristic of an industrial town began to emerge gradually in the 1920s. In the second part of the 20th century, Soviet architecture, multilingualism and a multicultural environment started to prevail. The historical parish centre of Jõhvi on the other hand, has been represented as an urban environment.

The Estonian War of Independence (28 November 1918 - 2 January 1920) was a defensive campaign of the Estonian Army and its allies against the Soviet Western Front offensive and the aggression of the Baltische Landeswehr (local Baltic German forces).

Baltische Landeswehr (in Estonian: Landesweer) – The Baltic land defence was established by the Baltic Germans in 1918 in Latvia with the approval of the German occupation forces in order to fight Russian Bolsheviks. The Estonians fought the Landeswehr on their southern border, not in Narva, which is located on the eastern border.

In the second half of the 20th century it was the Soviet regime and the Soviet Union (which imposed and represented it) – that were considered to be ‘alien’. In the 19th century and in the early 20th century however, the ‘aliens’ were our social neighbours, such as the Baltic Germans and clerics who were a power in the land (Kruus 2005: 67–87). This aspect comes forward in connection with another recollection by the same author – a conflict between a pro-German teacher and Estonian students in an upper secondary school in the late 1920s (EKLA f 350, 289-I, p. 6–9).
The monument was inaugurated on 10 July 1935; it was demolished by local communists and Red Army mine specialists on 25 October 1940; restored from fragments on 16 August 1942; completely destroyed in 1945; restored and re-inaugurated on 23 June 1993 (Lehtmets 2004: 68–69).

It is also important that at the level of everyday life, Soviet rule was not established in Estonia on a concrete date that can be found in the calendar. It is associated with a treaty of mutual assistance signed between Soviet Russia and Estonia in September 1939, and the establishment of Soviet military bases on the territory of the Republic of Estonia. Local people felt the presence of a foreign power and witnessed the Red Army’s attacks on Finland during the Winter War (e.g. EKLA f 350, 921). In larger towns, people witnessed the communist coup d’état on 21 June 1940 (e.g. EKLA f 350, 479). The arrests and mass deportations of people in June 1941 concerned close family and are, therefore, more closely associated with the establishment of Soviet rule.

The NKVD (acronym for the People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs) was the national and internal security authority of the Soviet Union (responsible for the maintenance of law and order, supervision of people’s political views, intelligence activities, prisons, and the running of forced labour camps).

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Non-Russian Language Space and Border in Russian Karelian Literature

By Tuulikki Kurki

Abstract
This article examines Finnish language literature in Russian Karelia on the Russian–Finnish national borderland from the 1940s until the 1970s. It focuses on the concepts of the non-Russian language space and border that are constructed and studied in the context of three novels: Iira (1947), Tiny White Bird (1961), and We Karelians (1971). The article claims that the non-Russian language space and the national border started to be understood differently from the official degrees dictated by Moscow, as found in literature already from the late 1950s and early 1960s. From the 1950s onwards, the historical, linguistic, and cultural roots across the national border and the Finnish population were allowed to be recognized in literature. Furthermore, this article claims that in the 1970s, literature was able to represent such regional history, and also the closeness and permeability of the national border that influenced the lives of the Soviet Karelian non-Russian speaking population and their identity formation. This led to different ideas of the national border, in which the border and its functions and meanings became gradually more multi-voiced, ambivalent and controversial, in comparison to the conceptualization of the border as presenting a strict, impermeable boundary.

Keywords: Finnish language literature, Soviet Karelia, Russian Karelia, border, space
Introduction
This article examines Finnish language literature in Russian Karelia (former Soviet Karelia) at the Russian Finnish national borderland (see map 1), and focuses on the concepts of non-Russian language space and border that are constructed in the studied literature.

Finnish language literature is one of the non-Russian language literatures established in the Soviet Union in the 1920s. At this time, the Finnish language, in addition to Russian, was made the language of local administration, education and culture for the non-Russian speaking population in Soviet Karelia (Kangaspuro 2000: 100–101). Although during the Soviet era, the Finnish language linguistically and socially dominated the other Finno-Ugric languages (such as Karelian and Vepsian), its position as an official language of Soviet Karelia was not stable and varied according to changes in the political atmosphere (Kangaspuro 2000: 11–12; Kangaspuro 2002: 31; Kruhse & Uitto 2008: 54–55). There were two reasons contributing to the dominant position of the Finnish language. First, the political immigrants who had moved from Finland to the Soviet Union held the important positions in the local administration in the Soviet Karelia from the 1920s until the mid-1930s. Second, the Bolshevik nationality policy favoured the use of local languages in local administration and education in the 1920s (Slezkine 1994: 419–420). The dominating position of the Finnish language among the non-Russian speaking population was maintained throughout the Soviet era, with the exception of the last few years of the 1930s when the use of the Finnish language was banned for political reasons. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, writing and publishing in Finnish have continued in post-Soviet Karelia, although in modest quantities.

The presence of the national border has influenced the development of Finnish language literature in Russian Karelia in many ways. Firstly, linguistic, cultural, and historical connections across the Finnish-Russian national border have existed...
for centuries, and the border has permitted Finnish political emigrants to join the Finnish language literature field in Soviet Karelia (Kokkonen 2002; Palmgren 1984; Ylikangas 2004). On the other hand, during the oppressive years of Soviet totalitarianism, the border functioned as an impermeable boundary which aimed at protecting the Soviet Union and its communist ideology from the slightest influences of bourgeois culture. The political leadership in the Soviet Union regarded the borderland population as unable to choose their own ideological side correctly, and therefore they had to be protected against foreign influence (Chandler 1998: 4–5). This background raises two questions which this article focuses on. First of all, how is the so-called non-Russian language space constructed in the Finnish language literature of the Finnish-Soviet Union national borderland? Second, how have the literary representations of the Finnish-Soviet Union national border as an element of the non-Russian language space changed in literature? In this article, the term “non-Russian” is preferred instead of “Finnish”, because in Soviet Karelia, several ethnic-national groups such as Finns, Karelians, and Veps used the Finnish language, and furthermore, Finnish language literature also applied elements of the Karelian language.

The article focuses on the time period from the late 1940s until the 1970s. During this period, the representations of the Finnish-Soviet national border changed from being an impermeable separating boundary between East and West, to becoming a more ambiguous and multivalent border which already reflected the changes that took place during Perestroika and the immediate post-Soviet years. Consequently, during this time, the non-Russian language space was constructed in close connection with Moscow. This article claims that the non-Russian language space and the national border started to be understood differently from the official degrees dictated by Moscow, as found in literature already from the late 1950s and early 1960s. From the 1950s onwards, the historical, linguistic, and cultural roots across the national border and the Finnish population were allowed to be recognized in literature. In spite of this however, the ideological and societal differences on each side of the border were still strongly contrasted and opposed to each other. This article further claims that in the 1970s, literature was able to represent such regional history, and also the closeness and permeability of the national border that influenced the lives of the Soviet Karelian non-Russian speaking population and their identity formation. This was followed by different ideas of the national border, in which the border, its functions and meanings became gradually more multi-voiced, ambivalent and controversial. During the post-Soviet era, the national border has become one of the central factors that influences the development of the non-Russian language space and identity in post-Soviet Karelia. Although the construction of the non-Russian language space and identity are closely linked with each other, the concept of identity construction is not discussed in this article.
The conceptual framework of this article is based on cultural anthropology and new spatial history research on place, space, and borders (Gupta & Ferguson 1992; Bassin et al. 2010; Lefebvre 2012). In cultural anthropology, “space” is often defined as “a place” which is made meaningful and significant for a group of people (Gupta & Ferguson 1992: 11). In new spatial history research, space is defined both as an arena for historical events and as a construct of historical events. In other words, in addition to its geographical dimension, space has a mentally and socially constructed dimension that is both subjective and debatable (Bassin et al. 2010: 6–8; Lefebvre 2012: 13–16). Therefore, space is understood as a more abstract entity than a place. Often such terms as “a literary space” or “linguistic space” are used (Hernández 2009: 4, 8), while the term “place” is often “involved with embodiment: it is occupied and experienced” (Bassin et al. 2010: 11).

The question about who can turn a place to a meaningful space includes a question of power, that in turn is established through verbal struggle. Words can be seen as the means of battle of representations of the space and of material control over the space (Hernández 2009: 8). When the Soviet Union was formed, the central political leadership constructed the Soviet space, its territorial unity, and established and enforced the official views of shared history and values among the hundreds of different linguistic, cultural, and ethnic groups in the Soviet Union (Hirsch 2005: 5–9). The ideas of territorial unity, shared history and common values were enforced through political iconography, grand narratives, and metaphors which were ritualistically repeated in literature, art, film, and mass media since the 1920s (Bonnell 1997; Brooks 2001; Dobrenko 2008). Although, the largest ethnic-national groups were recognized and acknowledged in the Soviet Union, they were merged into the Soviet space, and expected to join communism and the “universal” Soviet culture (Slezkine 1994: 419–420). In this context, the representations of the non-Russian language groups were guided and directed from above by the Communist Party and therefore became very unanimous (Dobrenko 2008; Baločkaitė 2013).

In this article, the non-Russian language space means a discursively constructed regional, temporal and social unity (such as the ideas of shared region, history and values) of a non-Russian language group in Soviet Karelia at the Finnish-Soviet national borderland. On one hand, this non-Russian language space was merged into the Soviet space. On the other hand, it included elements that transgressed the borders of the Soviet space. These transgressions become evident when examining the position of Soviet Karelia at the national borderland. Throughout its history, Soviet Karelia as a borderland has had many cultural, linguistic and administrative ties with its neighbouring country, Finland. The proximity of the national border has been influential either directly or through negation, for example in the development of the Finnish language literature and its representations of the borderland area in Soviet Karelia (Ylikangas 2004).
gionally at the micro-level, the border and border crossings were actively present in the lives of the borderland population. Therefore, it is justified to define the non-Russian language space at the Soviet borderland as being debatable and multi-voiced. It is a space where the varied and conflicting cultural, political and economic interests of the place confront each other, and the space is under constant re-negotiation.

The research material of this article includes one short story and two novels which address the questions of national border, border-crossing, and the non-Russian population (Karelian or Finnish) in Soviet Karelia. The selected works represent some of the most recognized Finnish language works of their own time. They also follow the canon of Socialist Realism, and therefore reflect the dominating literature trends and political opinions surrounding the national border, border crossing, and the non-Russian population. Furthermore, according to publication catalogues, the annual number of published prose fiction was rather low during the latter half of the 20th century: the average number of published prose was 1–2 novels per year (translations not included). Therefore, relatively few novels are available to adequately reflect the characteristics of the published literary works during each studied time period. In addition, the authors of the studied works, Karelian born Soviet writers Nikolai Jaakkola (1905–1967) and Antti Timonen (1915–1990) were two leading names in the Finnish language prose literature in Soviet Karelia during the latter half of the 20th century, and they offer a good representation of the Finnish language literature field in Soviet Karelia at this time. The first examined work is Nikolai Jaakkola’s short story Iira (Iira, 1947), which introduces a Karelian woman Iira, a Soviet patriot who becomes imprisoned in a Finnish prison camp during the Second World War. The second novel is Antti Timonen’s novel Tiny White Bird (Pieni valkosiipi, 1961). It is the story of a Karelian girl Mirja who is taken to Finland during the Second World War, but returns to Soviet Karelia as a young adult. The third novel is Antti Timonen’s We Karelians (Me karjalaiset 1971). The main protagonist is a Karelian man named Vasselei who is unsure of his identity and therefore does not have a sense of belonging. In the novel, Vasselei probes his position in relation to Bolshevism, socialism, capitalism, and moves across the border between the Soviet Union and Finland in the early 1920s. In these studied literary works, the non-Russian language space is constructed in relation to the national border, various symbolic borders, and also border-crossings.

In the analysis section, methods of narrative and metaphor analysis are applied. The narrative is understood here as a narrative structure, where events follow each other and form a story (Rimmon-Kenan 1983: 3). Additionally, the concept narrative is “restricted, referring to brief, topically specific stories organized around characters, setting, and plot” (Riessman 2003: 1). In narrative analysis, the non-Russian language space and ideas of the border are studied through the main protagonist’s development narrative: how he or she positions him/herself in relation
to the non-Russian language space, Soviet space, national border, border crossings and “the other” on the other side of the border, and also how these positions change in the narrative. Second, the analysis focuses on the central spatial and border related metaphors in each novel, and how they construct ideas of the non-Russian language space and border. Each novel is studied in the context formed by the dominating ideological and political discourses about Soviet space, Soviet identities, national border, Finland and the political West. Therefore the analysis of each novel begins with an introduction to the political and historical context applicable to where the novel was published.

**Extreme Border and a Non-Existent Non-Russian Language Space**

The Finnish and foreign ideological influences were removed from the Finnish language literature of Soviet Karelia during the ideologically restricted periods of the late 1930s, late 1940s and early 1950s. One politically tight period was the immediate post-war years of the late 1940s when concerted post-war reconstruction work started, and the need to strengthen the country’s ideological unity intensified. The first post-war five-year-plan, launched in 1946, became the most important guideline for reconstruction in all areas of life (Clark 2000: 189). In addition, in external politics the world fell into the so-called Cold War era and was divided into the political East and West, and the subsequent ideological juxtapositions between them became strong (Chandler 1998: 81–82; Gaddis 2007). During the post-war years, Russification tendencies and centralism strengthened (Clark 2000: 150; Clark & Dobrenko 2007: 401). This meant that the expressions of regional nationalism were suffocated and eliminated, and the public sphere in which writers could discuss topical and political concerns in literature became non-existent (d’Encausse 1992: 91–93; Loewenstein 2001; Taubman 2007). Instead, the five-year-plan which stressed Soviet patriotism, the victories of the Red Army during the Second World War, and the ideological divide between the political East and West, became the guide post of literary and cultural life (Ermolaev 1997: 99–102).

Nikolai Jaakkola’s short-story *Iira* (1947) was published within a strictly controlled and politically charged post-war atmosphere. It narrates the story of a young Karelian woman Iira during the Second World War, and the events of the short story are located in the villages and woods of Soviet Karelia. The enemy, Finland, had crossed the national border and had occupied areas in Soviet Karelia. Furthermore, they had established a prison camp. The short story reflects the typical themes of literature in the post-war years determined by the elements of the five-year-plan which have been previously described. The short-story *Iira* constructs Soviet Karelia as an integral part of the spatial, temporal, and social Soviet space. The connection between the main protagonist and the power centre (Mos-
cow) is strong, even though Iira is imprisoned in the enemy’s space. Therefore the novel creates interesting dynamics between the Soviet space and the non-Russian language space, and serves to show how this relationship was controlled in literature for political reasons.

The novel *Iira* has five parts: 1) Iira’s childhood and the pre-war years; 2) participation in the Second World War at the Karelian front; 3) imprisonment in a Finnish prison camp; 4) her return home; and 5) the beginning of a new life. Each part of the novel defines Iira’s position in relation to her homeland and home region, to the ideals and values of the Soviet ideology, to the border, and to the ideological enemy on the other side of the border. This article focuses on parts 3, 4, and 5 of the novel which construct the spatial, temporal, and social dimensions of the non-Russian language space. These dimensions can be identified in Iira’s personal development narrative and in the most important spatial metaphor in the novel – the birch tree.

The first turning point in Iira’s development narrative is the beginning of the so-called Continuation War between the Soviet Union and Finland in 1941. When Iira reads a newspaper article which encourages Soviet citizens to gather their strength and destroy the enemy, she becomes convinced of her Soviet identity and the coming requirements of the war. She transforms from a Karelian girl into a conscious, self-confident and patriotic Soviet hero, who is extremely determined to serve and defend her home country. Iira pushes her emotions and fears aside, and replaces them with efficient rationality in order to find the best strategies by which to defeat the enemy. Her determination is visible in her war declaration:

Not an inch of the homeland, not a single grain, not a fragment, not even the smallest piece of our people’s common wellbeing, not even one piece of the results of our people’s co-operation will be given to the enemy.⁴ (Jaakkola 1947 part 1: 93–94.)

In Iira’s words, there is only one homeland and that is the Soviet Union. Her loyalty belongs to the Soviet Union and its peoples that form one Soviet nation. Homeland is the result of the shared history through which the Soviet Union was built by its people, and no-one is willing to give the slightest piece of it to the enemy. The novel represents Iira as a patriotic Soviet woman who is willing to sacrifice her life and youth for her home country. The Soviet patriotism is linked to the communist ideology and the power centre of Moscow, and is further strengthened when Iira leaves for the front in Soviet Karelia. Physically she recedes from Moscow, but ideologically her connection with it intensifies. This is shown when at the front, Iira sings a patriotic song with her women comrades:

The morning sun lights  
the walls of the Kremlin and makes it beautiful  
so vibrant  
so great  
there is no-one who could beat you  
the country so wide
When the women are singing the song, the sun emerges from behind a cloud and shines on them. The song refers to the pervasive light and life giving power of the sun which was one of the most commonly used elements of the iconography built around Stalin. Stalin’s centrality and pervasive effect is represented in the nature metaphors relating to him, of which the most popular were the sun and light (Plamber 2003: 25–27). Furthermore, during Stalin’s era, the construction of the Soviet space included an idea that Stalin was the centre around which the Soviet space was organized. Centripetally, the ideologically most important areas were positioned at the center or as close to it as possible, and ideological importance of these areas lessened as the distance from the center grew (Plamber 2003: 20–21). The song also aims to show that there is no ideological distance between the power center and the periphery of the Soviet Union. Thus, the singing and the sun’s appearance express a symbolical unity between the Soviet periphery and the ideological power center, Moscow, and its ruler Stalin.

However, Iira’s unwavering identity as a Soviet patriot and her closely felt connection with the ideological power center is problematized in the third part of the short story. Finnish soldiers arrest her and take her to a Finnish prison camp – to the enemy’s space. Her identity as an ideal Soviet woman and patriot is questioned when the Finnish soldiers interrogate her. The soldiers ask her whether she is a Russian, Karelian, Finn, or whether she represents so-called kindred people to Finns, because Iira can speak Finnish. The idea of kindred people was strongly opposed in the Soviet Union. In the example below, Iira rejects the attempts to define her as a representative of the kindred people to Finns, but the Finnish soldier continues to pressurize her to cross to the “other side”; in other words to become an enemy to the Soviet Union:

Karelian? Yes, I am Karelian, but not your kindred people – she said with a calm and confident voice, stressing the word “your”.

[…] “You do not understand what is best for you. Come to your senses. Join us, our groups… we have a common language, common origin, common enemy…” (Jaakkola 1947 part 2: 46.)

Iira’s doubts are caused not because she feels that a common cultural heritage with Finland makes her a Finn, but rather she doubts her ability to fulfil the requirements of the ideal Soviet woman and patriot. Because the Finnish soldiers have arrested her, for a moment, Iira questions her identity, her sense of belonging in the Soviet space, her loyalty towards her home country, and her own strength. She even considers suicide as a solution to her misery and problematic position in the prison camp:

Fatherland! If you only knew how passionately I love you. Forgive me, if I have somehow, unintentionally offended you... The Red Army soldier never surrenders or
becomes a prisoner. Did I surrender or was I forced to? [...] Nevertheless, it is so painful to be absent from one’s army ranks when everyone should keep fighting. 8

(Jaakkola 1947, part 2: 44.)

Iira’s faith and connection to the power center of Moscow is re-established when she hears another prisoner singing in the Russian language. When listening to the song, Iira finds the defiant and patriotic pride in her again which helps restore her willingness to survive. Finally, when peace arrives, a Red-Army officer with shiny gold Soviet stars on his uniform arrives at the prison camp to release the prisoners, and with his arrival, the connection to her home land, its values and ideals are re-established in Iira’s consciousness.

In Iira, the war-time non-Russian language space is constructed spatially on the disputed national borderland, where ties with Finland and enemy become visible. However, at the end of the short story, the non-Russian language space re-establishes a strong link with the Soviet Union and returns to the Soviet space. Consequently, the ties across the border are cut off and become meaningless. The link between the power center and the Soviet Karelian periphery is reflected in Iira’s character, as well as in her home village to which she returns and subsequently is returned to the Soviet space. After the war, Iira and the villagers are representatives of one non-Russian speaking population of the Soviet fatherland, who together with all Soviet citizens look towards a promising future. The change from wartime hopelessness to post-war hopefulness is expressed in the way in which Iira voices the words “home village” when she arrives home. Iira first sighs “Home village” when she sees her village which has been mostly burned down and destroyed by the enemy. However, when Iira hears sounds of work, of constructing new houses and cutting wood, then the home village creates the sense of belonging and of hope for a better future. Then Iira cries “Home village!” cheerfully and runs towards the new constructions (Jaakkola 1947 part 2: 64). Iira’s self-confidence about the ability of the Soviet Union’s periphery to defeat all obstacles to gain a glorious future returns.

Metaphorically, the non-Russian language space and Soviet space as a future-oriented homeland are represented through the birch tree metaphor which both begins and ends the short story. At the beginning of the story, the birch is described as being older than any of the villagers and had witnessed all of the events in the village’s history. During the Second World War, the birch had been badly damaged and had almost died. The short story ends with a description of a new birch twig that grows from the side of the badly destroyed stump and reaches towards the sun. The birch metaphor, as well as those of trees and roots are fairly popular for regionalizing national and cultural identities (Malkki 1992: 31). In Iira, the birch stands for the homeland, life, and hope for a better future. In addition, the birch and the new twig serve as a metaphor for the non-Russian language space within the Soviet space. The destroyed birch and the new twig stand for the idea that the non-Russian language space cannot be destroyed. The stump and the
twig can be also be interpreted as metaphors for the older diminishing generation and the new rising generation, and for the time when new life returns to Soviet Karelia. The new generation looks towards the future and is guided by the sun’s light. Thus at the end of the novel, Jaakkola evokes the dominant rhetoric and political image of the unquestioned faith in Soviet ideology under Stalin’s guidance.

In *Iira*, the non-Russian language space is neither on its own, nor clearly distinguished from the Soviet space. It is visible only vaguely, and mostly by searching in-between the lines. On one hand, the birch metaphor can be interpreted as representing the development of the Karelian woman, Iira, and on the other hand, it can be seen as a metaphor for the regional history of Soviet Karelia and the collective memory of the non-Russian speaking population; both of which also return to life from the verge of destruction.

The literary critic Raisa Miroljubova (1950) strongly criticized *Iira*. She criticized the idea that Jaakkola had questioned Iira’s identity as a patriotic Soviet woman. In addition, she criticized the birch metaphor which she regarded as a completely failed metaphor for a future-oriented Soviet society. According to Miroljubova, Iira and some other characters in the novel follow their biological instincts and emotions, and are therefore not fit to represent the ideal of a rational, alert Soviet patriot. An example of this irrational and uncharacteristic behaviour is Iira’s prayer “in God’s name” that no-one suffers in a prison camp in the future. Another character in *Iira* prayed to water spirits to save her life, and Miroljubova claimed that these characters were irrational and thus “lowered the moral characteristics” of the Soviet man, which was therefore unacceptable.

Miroljubova’s criticism may have been an attempt to reject the expressions of regional nationalism that were politically explosive topics in the late 1940s. The purpose of her criticism may also have been to prevent a regional collective memory emerging from the short story. Strong criticism against prayer supported the idea that the religious ideas of traditional folk (especially if they were expressed in a non-Russian language) did not have any room in the Soviet space, and therefore were unable to be translated into the Soviet nationalist discourse. In addition, allowing positive representations of folk religious elements and collective memories of the non-Russian language people could strengthen the history and regional awareness of the non-Russian language population, which would have violated the ideological principles of the time. Miroljubova’s criticism supports the idea that a non-Russian language group could not separate itself from the Soviet space in its literary representations. Similarly, it was barely possible to create literary heroes who would differ from Soviet ideals or who would emphasize a non-Russian ethnic national background.
The Border Emerges in the Non-Russian Language Space

The political and cultural atmosphere changed radically after Stalin’s death and Khrushchev’s ascendance to power in 1954. First, the nationality policies in the Soviet Union returned to the utopia of one unified Soviet nation. Khrushchev’s aim was to solve the nationality questions by “new communism” and the creation of one unified Soviet people. The unity of the Soviet nation would be based on the Russian language spoken by all of its citizens, as the ethnic-national groups in the Soviet states would receive their education in Russian. Furthermore, the nationality policies program redistributed the work force in the Soviet Union, the aim of which was to fuse the different ethnic-national groups together. In this way, Khrushchev’s new communism would also erase the questions of inequality between the Soviet nationalities. (d’Encausse 1992: 97–98.)

However, the expressions of regional awareness were allowed more room in public discourse than previously during Stalin’s era. Right after Khrushchev’s ascendance to power, the new political trends allowed the non-Russian language groups in the Soviet states to express economic and cultural interests that were in conflict with the interests of other Soviet states and centralism (Simon 1991: 8). In addition, the ethnic-national groups were able to strengthen and advance their own national languages, values and life-style that also strengthened the ethnic-national consciousness. This in turn positively influenced the development of non-Russian language literatures (Simon 1991: 239–246). Another sign of the growing versatility of values in literature was the appearance of the so-called village prose which saw the depiction of regional, traditional village life as valuable (Parthé 1992: 107). Still, during the post-Stalin era, the literary criticism was ambivalent towards the representations of non-Russian language and ethnic-national features in literature: on one hand they were required, but on the other hand, they were seen as factors that threatened the unity of the Soviet identity (Miroljubova 1950: 112–122; Bassin & Kelly 2012: 1–6). However, the permissive atmosphere quickly tightened in the late 1950s, as expressions of regional nationalism had negative consequences to Khrushchev and his ideas of centralism. Therefore, the expressions of regional nationalism and patriotism again became criticized for demonstrating nationalistic chauvinism. Thus, to avoid further problems, the idea of fusing the Soviet peoples became once again voiced more loudly (Simon 1991: 239–246; d’Encausse 1992: 96–97).

The fluctuating and controversial political atmosphere in Khrushchev’s era also reflected in the Finnish language literature produced in Soviet Karelia. Soviet Karelia was represented as a quickly modernizing and urbanizing Soviet periphery (Kurki 2010), and trends that stressed regional, non-Russian language folklore as the source of artistic inspiration emerged. Furthermore, subtle contacts across the national border with Finland started to influence the themes of Finnish language literature. Contacts between the Soviet Union and the political West became sub-
tly evident in the late 1950s (Chandler 1998: 83), and at first the contacts with Finland were created through official literature and cultural organizations, exchange programs, and for example through the Finland-Soviet Union friendship association (Timonen 1963).

Since the late 1950s, the Finnish–Soviet Union national border and contacts across the border became a visible theme in the Finnish language literature of Soviet Karelia. This had also an influence on the construction of the non-Russian language space in literature. The first novels that noted the national border as a more multifaceted entity than just a strict separating division line and as a manifestation of the Cold War was Nikolai Jaakkola’s historical novel On the Shores of Lake Pirttijärvi and Elsewhere (Pirttijärven rantamilla ja muualla) in 1957. Some years later, Antti Timonen published his novel Tiny White Bird (1961) which is structured even more strongly around the border crossing theme. In the novel, a Karelian girl Mirja is taken from Soviet Karelia to Finland during the Second World War. In Finland, adoptive parents take care of her and she grows up under the influence of both capitalism and Finnish socialism, represented by the political Workers Movement. As a young woman she comes to support socialism and the peace movement, and feels suspicion towards the capitalist ideals that dominated Finnish society in the 1950s. At the end of the novel, Mirja finds her biological mother in Soviet Karelia and moves back to the Soviet Union where she once again feels at home.

The novel Tiny White Bird introduces two different ideas of the border: one which connects and one which separates. The novel shows the connections between the Finnish speaking populations across the Finnish-Soviet national border. At the same time, it stresses the ideological divide between the communist Soviet Union and capitalist Finland. Therefore, the non-Russian language space constructed in the novel is ambiguous. The novel begins and ends with a description of a tiny white bird which crosses the national border. The bird functions as a metaphor for Mirja who crosses the national border at both the beginning and end of the novel. From the bird’s viewpoint, the border is easy to cross, as it simply does not exist. Furthermore, the bird does not recognize “the line which had been axed under her nest in the woods and which is drawn with red ink on all the world maps” (Timonen 1961: 314). In a sense, the political definitions of the border, and the juxtapositions created by the border, border guards or regulations do not belong to the natural world but are more human constructs. Humans however have to follow strict regulations when crossing the guarded border:

Two border poles stood on each side of the border, next to the railway. One had the Soviet emblem, the other the Finnish emblem. The border guards from two different countries stood by the poles. Aino Andrejevna was amused when she looked at the tiny bird which jumped on the gritty soil next to the railway embankment. It found something on the ground and flew to Finland, and settled on a juniper tree, then it pecked something and flew back to the Soviet side of the border, and settled on a pine tree.9 (Timonen 1980: 130.)
The bird’s movement across the national border and its careless attitude towards it is comparable to Mirja who, at least at the beginning of the novel, is unaware of the human tragedies caused by its establishment. Furthermore, the white bird (and therefore Mirja) are associated with the well-known peace symbol, the white dove. This is also echoed by Mirja’s Finnish adoptive parents who see Mirja as “a tiny bird of peace” whom they return to the Soviet Union at the end of the novel (Timonen 1961: 311). The peace metaphor reflects changed attitudes towards the national border, the political West, and Finnish society and its people in comparison to the earlier post-War literature of Soviet Karelia. Since the 1950s, the peace movement which sought a peaceful co-existence between socialism and capitalism strengthened in the Soviet Union, and the symbol of the white dove spread widely despite the continuing Cold War and the tense relationship between the Soviet Union and the United States (Gaddis 2007: 68–72). The theme of peaceful coexistence also reflected in literature which stressed universal humanist values and peace ideology. However, according to historian Geoffrey Roberts (1999: 38), from a political point of view, the goal of the peace movement was also to hinder “the development of the western cold war bloc”.

The novel also represents the border as a brutal and violent dividing line when viewed from the human perspective. The border separates two different worlds from each other, and its establishment always causes blood shedding and tears. Timonen uses a metaphor of the Kemijoki-river when describing the consequences of establishing the Finnish-Soviet Union national border. The Kemijoki-river has one starting point in north but then divides into two branches which are separated from each other by the Finnish-Soviet Union national border: Whilst one branch flows to the east, the other flows to the west. The river is a metaphor for the Karelians and Finns who live in Finland and the Soviet Union as being a divided people. Even though they have a common origin and shared history, they are separated from each other by the national border and thence develop in opposite directions:

Through the wilderness, rocks, peat lands and lakes runs a line that is not always visible but it is marked with a wide red line on the world maps. It is the national border. There are numerous national borders on the world map. The borders go along seas, steppes and snow covered mountain peaks, they cut railways and are invisible barriers to gigantic ocean liners and airplanes. History knows numerous cases when those borders have been moved in one direction or the other, but all these occasions have been preceded by blood and tears, shed by nations. [- -] These borders separate two different worlds, two different life orders and ways of life, two different pasts and futures in the lives of individuals and nations. The divide between the two Kemijoki-rivers is a national border exactly like that.¹⁰ (Timonen 1980: 24–25.)

Despite that the novel recognizes the historical contacts, language and oral poetry as connecting factors across the Finnish-Soviet Union national border, the border appears ideologically as a strict dividing line. At the same time, the border renders the realities on each side as inverted pictures of each other – it contrasts and jux-
taposes. The border divides the world into good and evil, communist and capitalist, right and wrong. In Timonen’s novel, both the connecting and dividing functions of the national border became the elements which also created the non-Russian language space of the national borderland.

The national border and the historical connections between the Karelians and Finns became a topical and problematic theme for Soviet Karelian writers in the early 1960s. Then, for example, Antti Timonen discussed the theme and the politically heated subject of the kindred people with a Finnish writer Antti Seppä through correspondence. The ideas that Timonen wrote in his letters about this sensitive theme explicate further the ideas presented in his Tiny White Bird novel. In the letter below, Timonen stresses the differences between Karelians and Finns, despite existing historical connections. In between the lines, it is apparent that the Finnish writer Antti Seppä has previously stressed the idea of a kindred bond between the Karelians and Finns in their correspondence. Antti Timonen rejects the kindred people ideology in his letter:

The question of the kindred people. That is a long and complicated issue to discuss in a letter. We indeed have a lot in common – language, Kalevala [national epic], fairy tales, songs, riddles. We have a similar nature, equally rough and beautiful on both sides of the border. However, we differ from each other in many respects. We have a different societal system, a different understanding of the profound questions of the human condition, different ideas of history, and different goals regarding the future. By the way, for me as a Karelian, that question is very close. I think that the idea of a kindred people has been spoiled by the West. Already long ago, the Western leading names of “kindred people ideology” approached the Karelians with a whip in one hand, and sweets in the other. Dogs and circus animals are tamed in that way, but not a people.11 (Letter Antti Timonen to Antti Seppä, October 28, 1960.)

Timonen’s opinion clearly states that the ideology of the kindred people is “low”, meaning that the ideology itself had strong imperialistic, militarist connotations, and was used for nationalistic rather than humane goals. Furthermore, Timonen emphasizes that Karelians are not a small isolated group, but they are part of the Soviet nation which includes millions of people. In this way, he emphasizes that the non-Russian language space in Soviet Karelia is in close connection to the center of the ideological space, Moscow. Furthermore, he does not regard the connections across the national border as important or meaningful. Timonen sees the Karelians and the non-Russian language space as socially and temporarily belonging to the Soviet space:

[...] however, I cannot tolerate the claim that we would be a small, isolated group. The Karelians I mean. Our group is not that small – we are over two hundred million, including Karelians, Russians, Bashkirians, Ukrainians. If I remember correctly, about seventy languages are used in the Soviet Union. See – also in this case we think differently. Language and ethnic-national differences do not mean national isolation. [...] If we Karelians would be isolated, we would live on the level that we lived on before 1917: As far as I know, before we were the most backward people in the world, if we are excluding the savages. Now, we have gradually achieved the same technical and cultural level as all of the other Soviet peoples.12 (Letter Antti Timonen to Antti Seppä January 15, 1960.)
The turn of the 1960s was a period when the traumatic history of the Karelians and their division across the Finnish–Soviet Union national border could emerge in public discussion, albeit to a slight degree. In addition to literature, the newspaper *Soviet Karelia* (Neuvosto-Karjala) published some articles about families that had been split by the border (Räikkönen 1968). Nevertheless, the dominating literature strongly emphasized the construction of a unified Soviet people, Soviet space, history and future. It also emphasized the national border as a strong dividing boundary. The difference in comparison to the Stalinist era was that now the national border could be crossed peacefully. There were also some connecting factors across the national border, and so comrades could also be found among the “ideological enemy”.

Towards the Ambiguous Borderland Space

The Soviet peoples started to become more and more aware of their ethnic-national backgrounds and express their ethnic-national identities in the 1970s (Simon 1991: 7). One reason for this can be found in the Soviet nationality policies. During previous decades, the policies of nationality aimed at merging the different nationalities with each other, for example, by promoting internal migration within the Soviet Union. Because of this, the 1970s was the era when people became increasingly interested in their ethnic-national backgrounds which had previously been tried to be erased. In literature, the expressions of ethnic-national identities and the history of the non-Russian language groups gradually began to emerge. Thus, the non-Russian language groups were able to express their alternative history narratives, for example through the literary genre of magic realism that had arrived in the Soviet Union. Examples of the best known writers following this trend were Chingiz Aitmatov and Fazil Iskander (Haber 2003).

In the 1970s, the Soviet Karelian literature also expressed the idea that the previous historiography had not shed enough light on the history of the Soviet Karelian people (Summanen 1973: 118–119). Then, several historical novels such as Antti Timonen’s *We Karelians* (1971) and Nikolai Jaakkola’s four piece novel *On the Shores of Lake Pirttijärvi* (1977) were published, so as to improve the situation. These novels exposed the internal conflicts and confrontations existing among the Karelian population during the formational years of the Soviet Union however these conflicts which had previously been kept silent. These novels brought up the painful and tragic history of the Karelian people who on one hand were divided by the national border, but on the other had to move across this border for political reasons.

Antti Timonen’s novel *We Karelians* focuses on the violent Civil War years in Soviet Karelia, when the Soviet Union was established. In Soviet Karelia, the Civil War (1920–1922) was fought between those who supported Bolshevism and the establishment of Soviet power (Reds), and those who opposed it (Whites). The
third party in the war were those Karelians who formed a temporary Karelian Government, and who wanted to keep Karelia separated from both the Soviet Union and Finland. Somewhere between the Reds and Whites was also a group of people who did not want to choose sides, but were nevertheless drawn into the fighting. In the Civil War, some opponents of Bolshevism joined troops of the Finnish Army which had its own interests in Soviet Karelia. In 1918–1920, the Finnish Army troops (also called the Liberation Army in Soviet Karelia) tried to invade the western parts of Soviet Karelia where the Finnish speaking population lived. In this way, Finland would have been able to expand its territory. The Finnish troops based its military headquarters, the so-called Uhtua Government, in the administrative region of Uhta (contemp. Kalevala). However, the Tartu Peace Treaty of 1920 ended the action of Finnish troops in Soviet Karelia. During the same year, the Workers’ Commune of Karelia was also established. Despite these events however, conflicts continued in Soviet Karelia. Several hundred Finns participated in the fighting which aimed at annexing the Karelians to Finland. After the Soviet regime was established in 1923 and border guards were positioned on both sides of the Finland-Soviet Union border, movement across the border stopped (Baron 2007: 26–27). The Civil War years were tragic. People had to choose their ideological side and try to survive through the hostilities. In addition, in the borderland area, the establishment of the national border with Finland had radical consequences for the everyday life and identities of the borderland population. These themes were studied profoundly in the novel *We Karelians*.

The novel *We Karelians* begins with a murder. A murderer (Mikitän Miitrei) disguises himself as a Bolshevik, and shoots a Karelian man Oleksei. Oleksei’s brother Vasselei starts to look for an opportunity to exact revenge on the murderer. During the violent Civil War years in Soviet Karelia, Vasselei’s search for revenge and his own identity form the basic narrative of the novel. Whilst looking for the opportunity for revenge, Vasselei continuously moves across the Finnish–Soviet Union national border. Each time he crosses the border, he has to evaluate his motives and loyalties towards the different ideologies and value systems, lifestyles and people on either side. When crossing the border, Vasselei continuously changes his position: first he is a Bolshevik, then a White, then he allies with the Finnish White troops. Finally he recognizes that he cannot and will not ally with anyone. This revelation symbolizes the idea that some Karelians prefer to live separately from Finland and the Soviet Union and their associated political interests. The revelation comes too late however. Vasselei had destroyed his relationship with both the Whites and the Reds, and finds himself in an ideological vacuum. In the end, Vasselei is wandering in the borderland area and wishes that the Bolsheviks could find him so that he could surrender to them. However, his brother’s murderer (Mikitän Miitrei) who has become a Second Lieutenant on the White Army (the Liberation Army), finds him first and shots him dead.
Skies scratched on the road. Now they are coming. Vasselei did not want to hide. He lit a cigarette so that he would be seen easily.

- Hello, who sits there?

What? That voice belongs to Mikitän Miitrei!... Vasselei was ready for anything else but not being shot by Mikitän Miitrei, even though he would be a Red.

Vasselei stood up and asked:

- Who is it?

- Second Lieutenant of the Liberation Army. Come here. Do you want to be captured by the Reds? What... is it Vasselei?

- Damn! Vasselei became furious. Second Lieutenant of the Liberation Army? Too much anger and hatred filled Vasselei’s mind and blurred his thoughts. He grabbed a knife and ran in the deep snow towards the lieutenant, growling furiously. The lieutenant had raised his revolver. Three shots rang out in the gloomy forest, Miitrei shot his victim three times at least. Vasselei stood still, as if hesitated what to do: to die right here and now, and by the bullets shot by that man. He started to fall slowly, as if he looked for a place to die.

- Will you take me, Karelian land?

Dry snow puffed and hid Vasselei. The indifferent moon lit the snowy forest.¹³

(Timenen 1971: 442–443.)

Vasselei’s death symbolizes his position simultaneously as a Karelian man and a homeless man, both territorially and ideologically. The traumatic experiences of his homelessness and his inevitable death are created by the definition of the national border and by disputes between men, but nature remains indifferent to the war and violence that takes place.

Vasselei’s movement across the national border, and life and death in the borderland also become a symbol of Soviet Karelia and its position as a borderland. In the novel, the non-Russian language space in Soviet Karelia is constructed separately from Finland’s Finnish language space and the Soviet Union’s Russian language space. Furthermore, the novel creates an impression that sharing the same ideology can connect people on the different sides of the national border, but different ideologies can separate people on the same side. Thus, the borders and their meanings appear ambivalent at the micro-level and in the encounters between individuals. This becomes evident especially in Vasselei’s life-story which is full of contraction and ambiguity. In addition, the ambiguity of Vasselei’s ideological identity and his feeling of homelessness suggest that among the borderland population, making ideological and political choices and formulating ideas of belonging are not black-and-white. Therefore, Vasselei’s life-story at the national borderland can be interpreted as a symbol of the development of the non-Russian language space in Soviet Karelia. This space has belonged variably in the sphere of different ideologies and nations: Reds, Whites, the Soviet Union, and Finland. Vasselei was unsure of his own ideological belonging, and it is this which destroys him in the end. The only thing he was sure about was that he wants to live

¹³Vasselei's death symbolizes his position simultaneously as a Karelian man and a homeless man, both territorially and ideologically. The traumatic experiences of his homelessness and his inevitable death are created by the definition of the national border and by disputes between men, but nature remains indifferent to the war and violence that takes place.

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in peace and see Karelia separated from the Soviet Union and Finland. This idea is simultaneously raised and killed in the novel: Vasselei is shot as an ideological traitor.

Finland on the other side of the border is experienced as a threatening place where restlessness and violence come from. At one point in the novel, Vasselei has two options regarding his future: Finland or Siberia. However, they both mean death to him, because in his mind, Finland is equated to the grave and Siberia to Hell (Timonen 1971: 68). This idea follows one of the common metaphors of the border as a death zone, and the idea that crossing the border means inevitable death (see Ristolainen 2014 in this journal). Furthermore, the dangerous, threatening Finnish space by way of the Uhtua Government, invades the Soviet Karelian space, and the Uhtua Government is seen as a threat as it attacks the Karelians (Timonen 1971: 102–103, 115).

In addition to metaphors of death and threat, the “otherness” of the Finnish space is defined by observed differences. For example, when Vasselei visits the headquarters of the Uhtua Government formed by the Finnish White army troops, he observes the similarities and differences between Karelians and Finns, e.g. their customs, clothes, and furniture (Timonen 1971: 51–53). In the example below, Vasselei describes the strangeness of the Finnish space. On the wall, he notes a map of the local area, but a local Karelian home would not need to have one due to the familiarity and local knowledge of the place. In addition, he notices that the house of the Uhtua Government has furniture brought from Finland, and they appear strange against the context of the Karelian building. Otherness is also observable in the eyes of the Finnish man which are blue, and regarded especially as a Finnish facial feature.

Vasselei sat down on the chair and looked around. A topographic map of the region was placed on bleached wall papers. A cupboard, desk, and chairs, all brought from Finland stood on unpainted, wide floor beams. […] The host’s words were friendly but his voice was dry and lifeless, just like his wide, blue and expressionless eyes. Something similar exuded from the entire surroundings.14 (Timonen 1971: 51–53.)

The creation of the non-Russian language space continues in the novel through observations of similarities and differences. Vasselei observes that the Finns who tried to invade areas in Soviet Karelia attempted to speak the Karelian language among the Karelians, but they could not speak it correctly which both amused and irritated the Soviet Karelians (Timonen 1971: 86–88). Here again, some similarities are recognized between the Soviet Karelian non-Russian speaking population and Finns, but the differences are stressed to a greater degree.

In the novel, the non-Russian language space in Soviet Karelia also aimed at separating itself from the Soviet space. Some Karelians passively oppose the Soviet power and they form a “hidden” non-Russian language space within the Soviet space. The Karelians for example participate in required meetings organized by the Soviet authorities and accept those decisions that are profitable to them, but
they stall the enforcement of such decisions as long as possible (Timonen 1971: 113). Thus the non-Russian language space exists in social action, even though it is not otherwise observable.

At the end of the novel, the significance of the topographic border between Finland and the Soviet Union changes. The national border between Finland and the Soviet Union is established, and that changes the attitudes towards the border. However, the local borderland people are not aware of the establishment of the border and continue to move across it to meet their relatives and friends. According to Andrea Chandler (1998: 59), this was rather typical at the borderlands of the Soviet Union immediately after the national border was formally established. However, after establishing the border, the meaning of border crossing subsequently changed: it became forbidden and illegal. This was also a signal that the control maintained by the center had now been extended to the peripheries, and at the same time, the non-Russian language space had been placed more firmly in the Soviet space (Chandler 1998: 55–59). According to Chandler (ibid.), the center-periphery relationship that was created during the establishment of the Soviet Union, aimed at controlling the movements of the borderland population across the national border, and preventing the enemies ideology and criminal elements from entering the country. Furthermore, extending control and so-called micro-level politics to the borderland and the borderland population was very important, because the borderland population often represented ethnic-national groups other than Russians. Their connections with similar ethnic-national groups across the national border thus formed an internal security thread. The Karelian and Finnish populations were considered such a threat in the Soviet Union, because their connections enabled counter-Bolshevik groups to join forces.

The idea of the Soviet border as a protective boundary against enemy ideology is also repeated in the We Karelians novel, because Vasselei is shot in the national borderland. Vasselei did not fit into the black-and-white ideological world view, which divided people as either supporters or opponents of Bolshevism, and therefore he had to die. On the other hand, Timonen creates an idea that nature and the “innocent folk people” do not recognize political and brutal borders, similar to the allusions in his earlier novel Tiny White Bird. In the example below, an elderly woman who has lived at the borderland for her entire life, crosses the national border to meet her sister who lives on the Soviet side. However, she does not know that the national border has been established, and that she should not cross it:

It was past midnight when the guards from the watchtower called that noise had been heard coming from the northern ski patrol route. Soon, four figures, instead of the expected three, appeared from the snowfall. The fourth was a tall, elderly woman with a sack on her back.

- Comrade Chief, we captured a defector, the oldest in the group announced. She was coming from Finland. […]

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The elderly woman started to nag in the Karelian language:

- For the whole of my life I have visited my sister, and she has visited me. I have not asked where the border is and why it is. Oh, the times we live in!

[...]

- Don’t you know that the border has been closed? Lipkin asked. It has been notified in meetings.

- I don’t have time to sit in your meetings.

Lipkin wrote woman’s name down, gave her sack back and warned:

- Remember, this was the last time! If we ever catch you again, the worst will happen. And now, go home.\(^{16}\)

(Timonen 1971: 452–453.)

As a whole, the novel strengthens the idea that the Finnish and Karelian languages are just superficial connecting factors across the national border. The separating and most dividing borders between Finland and Soviet Union are ideological, cultural and social, however, the border appears more ambiguous than previously depicted in Soviet Karelian literature.

Timonen’s novel was well received. He received the Soviet Karelian state price for the novel (Neuvosto-Karjala June 9, 1971). This indicates that novels which problematized the significance of the national border from an individual point of view and discussed the historical and linguistic connections across the national border were accepted in the literary circles, as early as the beginning of the 1970s.

The literary and cultural life in the 1970s anticipated the changes that were to later emerge in the 1980s during Perestroika. The period from the 1980s onwards has been termed as a type of Cultural Revolution in the history of Russia. The political changes started in the 1980s ignited revolutionary changes also in literature and cultural life: the commanding presence of the Communist Party and the methods of Socialist Realism started to lose their dominance, and official censorship was abolished in 1986. By the turn of the 1990s, it was fashionable to talk about “the death of Soviet literature” (Brown 1993: 7; Marsh 1995: 3). In the late 1980s, questions regarding nationality also started to increase. The strengthening of regional national movements is not regarded as a reason for the disintegration of the Soviet Union, however due to this disintegration, national movements were able to ignite (Hirsch 2000: 225–226).

**Conclusions**

In literature published from the 1940s to the 1970s, the non-Russian language space at the Finnish-Russian national borderland develops from a non-existent space, to a unanimous Soviet periphery space, and finally to an ambiguous, border-crossing space. The development of this non-Russian language space reflects the general atmosphere and opinion towards the national border, as well as to-
wards the many ideological and political borders that exist between the political East and West, and the Soviet Union and Finland.

In the late 1940s, at the beginning of the Cold War era, the national border between Finland and the Soviet Union was a sharp, exclusive, and almost impenetrable Iron Curtain. In addition, it was a border which protected against “the enemy” from entering either country. In literature, through metaphors and linguistic allusions, Finns and Finland were represented as a source of evil. The non-Russian language space in Soviet Karelia could emerge only as an integral part of the Russian language Soviet space. In addition, the national border marked the external border of this non-Russian language space, even though historical, linguistic and cultural connections existed across the national border with Finland.

Since the late 1950s and early 1960s, the non-Russian language space as a border crossing entity, and the linguistic, cultural and historical connections across the border have received slightly more room in Soviet Karelian literature. At the same time, connections between the Soviet Union and Finland started to revive through cultural and scientific exchange programs, and an increase in tourism. In literature, the connections across the national border often emerged as peaceful, but the ideological border between “us” and “them” was still emphasised. Worlds that were separated from each other by the national border appeared as counter-images of each other.

Since the 1960s and the 1970s, the non-Russian language space in literature has become more multivoiced because the individual life-stories of the national borderland population have received public attention. During the formation of the Soviet Union and the Second World War, many people had to cross the national border because of the threat of violence and hostilities. In addition, during the chaotic war time years, the border divided many families. Therefore, the border also became a noted source of trauma, and this topic was able to achieve some public space in literature since the 1960s. In the studied novels, the tragic and traumatic life-stories of the borderland population are still strongly intertwined with the ideological discourse of the border. In addition, since the 1960s, the non-Russian language social and cultural space changed in literature representations. For example, Antti Timonen’s novel introduced individuals who were not sure about their ideological, cultural, or societal identities, and this was a significant change compared to the unanimous literature of the 1940s and 1950s.

The changed representations of the national border, border crossings, and their significance to individuals’ lives that took place in the Finnish language literature of the 1960s and 1970s anticipated the trends that became more visible in the post-Soviet literature of Russian Karelia. The importance of the border and border crossings have now become central elements in writing the non-Russian language space and identity at the Finnish-Russian national borderland in the post-Soviet era. For example, the novels introduce protagonists whose identities are strongly connected with the border and border crossings: they live on the Finnish-Russian
national borderland, on the symbolic borderlands of the Soviet and post-Soviet eras, and on the borderlands of different languages and cultures. They also cross these borders, and these crossings permanently influence the protagonists’ regional, temporal, and social space (Kurki 2013; Kurki 2015 forthcoming).

In this article, during the studied time period the role of the border has changed from being relatively insignificant, to becoming a rather prominent means of constructing the non-Russian language space in literature. This is in accordance where developing interaction and the historical connections between Finland and Russia have become increasingly visible factors in defining borderland identities on the both sides of the national border (Alasuutari P. & Alasuutari M. 2009; Hämynen 2012). This development follows the more general tendency where the identity formation of border crossing population has become a central element in borderland literatures and art, and can be seen at the edges of the post-Soviet space, globally in emigrant literature, and especially in the locale of the U.S.A.–Mexico national borderland (Sadowski-Smith 2008; Aldama et al. 2012.)

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Notes
1 The non-Russian speaking population as termed here means the Karelians, Finns, Veps and Ingrian Finns that had to use the Finnish language in matters of education, administration and culture in Soviet Karelia due to the Soviet language policies of the time.
2 Finnish political emigrants participated in the formation of the Finnish language literature in Soviet Karelia in the 1920s. Interaction across the Finnish-Russian national border was active in literary life from the 1920s until the mid-1930s (Palmgren 1984; Ylikangas 2004).
3 The Continuation War between the Soviet Union and Finland took place in 1941–1944. Finns defined the war as a continuation to the Winter War between Finland and the Soviet Union in 1939–1940. The Soviet Union defined the war as a part of the Second World War which they termed the Great Patriotic War against Germany.
4 “Ei vaaksan vertaakaan isänmaasta, ei jyvääkään, ei sirustakaan, ei pienintäkään palasta kansan yhteisestä hyvästä, kansan yhteistyön hedelmistä vihollisen käsiin, ei yhtään mitään!” (Jaakkola 1947 part 1: 93–94.)
The idea of kindred people can be dated back in the 19th century. During the 20th century, it became a politically explosive subject in Finland and the Soviet Union. According to the idea, Finns, Karelians, Estonians, and Hungarians form kindred peoples with each other because they have linguistic and cultural ties (Puolakka 2013). In the 1920s, the White Finns used the kindred people ideology as an argument for their penetration into Soviet Karelia and their attempt to annex borderland areas of Soviet Karelia to Finland (Niinistö 2001).


suudet meillä eivät merkitse kansallista eristyneisyyttä. [...] Jos me karjalaiset olisimme eristytyinä, niin eläisimme sillä tasolla, millä elimme vuoteen 1917 saakka: Tietääkseen me olimme maailman takapajuisinta kansaa, jos ei nyt verrata aivan villikansioihin. Nyt kun alamme olla sillä teknillisellä ja kulttuurisella tasolla kuin kaikki muutkin Neuvostoliiton kansat.” (Letter Antti Timonen to Antti Seppä January 15, 1960)


“Vasselei istahti tuolille ja katseli ympärilleen. Haalistuneiden seinäpapereiden päälle oli kiinnitetty paikkakunnan topografinen karta. Maalaamattomilla leveillä lattiapalkeilla seisoi Suomesta tuotu kaappi, kirjoituspöytä ja tuoleja. [...]

According to Chandler (1998: 57–58), micro-level politics meant that the population at the national borderland was harnessed to co-operate with border guards. Their task was to observe movement at the borderland, report illegal border crossings and smuggling attempts. Micro-level politics also included the ideological education of the borderland population.

“Oli jo yli puolen yön kun tähystysasemalta soitettiin, että pohjoiselta partioladulta päin kuului ääniä. Pian lumipystystä sukelsikin esille neljä lumen peittämä ihmistä ja ilmeet olivat vilkkaita. Jotain samantapaista huokui koko ympäröitä. – Toveri päällikkö, olemme saaneet kiinni rajalokkarin, ryhmän vanhin ilmoitti. – Suomesta oli tulossa. [...] Mummo alkoi paapattaa Lipkinille karjalaksi:

- Ilmasen ikäni olen käynyt sisarani luona ja hän miun luona. Emmä ole kysellyn, missä on raja ta mitä varoja. Ohhoh, aikoina olemme eläin! [...] – Etkö se tietä, jotta raja on pantu umpehe? Lipkin kysyi. – Siitä on sanottu kokouksissa. – Jouvan miä tiän kokouksissa istumah. Lipkin kirjoitti niin miustiin, työnsi mummalle kontin eväineen takaisin ja varoitte:

Tämä oli viimeinen kerta, muista! Jos vielä suamma kiinni, paha etehe tulou. A nyt mäne kotihis.” (Timonen 1971: 452–453.)

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Facing the Otherness: Crossing the Finnish-Soviet Estonian Border as Narrated by Finnish Tourists

By Kirsi Laurén

Abstract
This study examines Finnish travellers’ experiences of travelling across the sea frontier between Finland and Soviet Estonia during the period of 1965–1991. The article focuses on the narratives of Finnish tourists about border crossings and cultural encounters. The analysis concentrates on travellers’ relations and conceptions of the former Soviet Estonia and their descriptions of facing cultural otherness during their travels. The concept of otherness is used as an analytical tool to interpret the narratives.

Keywords: Finnish-Soviet Estonian border, Soviet Estonia, Finnish tourism, narrative, otherness
Introduction

Having lived in Estonia for a while now, it is especially funny to think about my first trips when many things behind the Gulf seemed to be strange and unusual, even inconceivable. In the last twenty years Finland and Estonia have become closer to each other, and those travellers who cross the Gulf today probably do not undergo the same kind of culture shock.¹ (148–152)

The quotation above was written by a Finnish man who lives in Estonia. In the narrative, he reflects on his relationship with former Soviet Estonia and the present-day independent Estonia. According to his narrative Finland and Soviet Estonia differed significantly, whereas the present day Estonia and Finland are culturally close. Despite the fact that Finns and Estonians were actively interacting with each other prior to WWII, the war and closing of the border of the Soviet Union changed their relationship so that familiar neighbours became strangers to each other. Relations gradually became closer when cross-border travelling between Finland and Soviet Estonia opened again in 1965. When travel across the Gulf of Finland started, it played an important role in the convergence of the countries and cultural encounters (Salokannel 1998a: 108–109; Zetterberg 2007: 713).

Helsinki and Tallinn, the capital cities of Finland and Estonia, are located on opposite sides of the Gulf of Finland. The sea frontier and travelling across it thus forms a bridge between two state administrative and cultural centers. Regular passenger traffic through this water route has been active since the early 19th century (Graf & Roiko-Jokela 2004: 90). The seaway has been an important unifying bridge between the countries, enabling their interaction especially after WWII when Estonia was part of the Soviet Union and isolated from the western world. Regardless of the short geographical distance between Finland and Estonia (only 85 kilometres), the mutual knowledge of Finns and Estonians of each other has varied during different periods. For example political situations, changes in travelling circumstances, education and living standards have influenced the transfer of information between the two countries (Alenius 2002: 61–66, 73). Nowadays, the fastest sea lane takes less than two hours and it is the most widely used way to travel between Finland and Estonia.²

This research focuses on the narratives of Finnish tourists that tell about travelling from Helsinki to Tallinn and encountering cultures in the time of Soviet Estonia, starting from 1965 when a direct shipping lane was established, until the independence of Estonia in 1991. The research questions are: How are cultural encounters represented in Finnish travellers’ narratives? What kind of conceptions and images did travellers have of Soviet-Estonia and its people? The research material consists of narratives that Finns have written and sent to a nationwide writing collection entitled: There was a time in Georg Ots (Silloin kerran Georg Otsilä, in Finnish)/Across the Gulf of Finland (Yli Suomenlahden, in Finnish), organized by the Folklore Archives of the Finnish Literature Society (SKS) and the
Tuglas Society in 2009−2010. In the writings, Finns remember their ferry trips to Soviet Estonia. Before 1965, Soviet Estonia was isolated over 20 years from western countries, and consequently the shipping lane was closed. Although Finns were able to travel by ferry to Soviet Estonia during the years 1965−1991, Soviet tourism to Finland was still strictly limited and difficult (Zetterberg 2007: 713). After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the independence of Estonia in 1991, the land, sea and air routes really began to open up. Border crossing further developed after Estonia joined the European Union (EU) in 2004, and the Schengen area in 2007 (Finland joined the EU in 1995 and the Schengen area in 1996).

Border, Otherness, We and the Other

In this research, the conceptions of otherness are actualized in the narratives of Finnish tourist’s border crossings from Finland to Soviet Estonia. National borders separate nations, countries and cultures from each other, so the role of the border is to make a difference between us and them. By crossing these borders, borders also become places of cultural encounters (Alvarez 1995: 462). When travelling to a foreign country, a typical way to conceptualize cultural encounters is to make comparisons and contrasts between the familiar and the unknown. This is because people understand themselves, their identity and nationality in relation to other people, groups, and societies. Establishing a difference between “we” and “the other” is mainly directed by culture. Different cultures make their own meaning systems which can be used to recognize members from the same culture and distinguish them from others. This meaning system also helps to act within a culture which makes it possible to manage and cope with it. Cultural meanings do not arise coincidentally, but are learned through social interactions and boundaries with other members and groups of a culture. Thus, we become aware of our own identity by clarifying who I am and where I belong. Cultures are seen as relatively permanent constructions of meanings and conventions which have their own temporal and spatial continuity (Barth 1969: 9; Bruner 1990: 33–34; Hall 2003: 85–86; Delanty 2011: 637). Consequently, cultures and traditions connect people to the previous generation’s way of life. Because of this fact, the understanding of being for example a Finn or an Estonian includes the idea of a historical continuum which the individual or group can see themselves to be part of.

Cultural and subjective identities develop in a process where we are being socialized in our inner group and also in our connections with external groups. In this process, different groups and their members are assigned stereotypical conceptions. Stereotypes typically reduce, simplify and exaggerate human features, and by doing so, the characteristics of people are easily solidified and consequently not given the opportunity to change. Stereotyping creates symbolic boundaries between us and them, which helps us to construct and systematize the world. At the same time, stereotypes also highlight the differences in connections alt-
hough they are actually less than the similarities. The essence of difference, otherness, as well as stereotype, is ambivalent which means that their character could be both positive and negative. When creating cultural, social and subjective identities, it is necessary to recognize differences between people and cultures. However, the making of difference and the emphasis on otherness include intonations of threatening danger, negative feelings and antagonism towards “the other” (Bhabha 1994: 66; Hall 1997: 234–238, 257–259; Raatila 2004: 17–18). In addition, the way we represent our thinking about “them” and others has an effect on how we understand “we” and ourselves. Our ideas of the other, we and them, are not stable categories. Instead, they are constructed and changed in different places and at different times. The issue in these constructs is about power and rhetoric, rather than about the essence of otherness (Hallam & Street 2000: 5–6).

Beside the concepts of otherness and difference comes the concept of similarity; in order to distinguish between otherness and the familiar, we also have to recognize what is similar. To recognize similarities and familiarities relates to the knowledge and understanding of unfamiliarity and “the other” (Izotov & Laine 2013: 99). However, in cultural encounters, similarities are not given the same (or any) degree of attention, when compared to differences and originality (Löytty 2005: 162). This can be seen in the empirical research material analysis of this article.

**Materials and Methods**

My research material consists of selected texts that have been sent to the writing collection entitled *There was a time in Georg Ots* (Silloin kerran Georg Otsilla, in Finnish)/*Across the Gulf of Finland* (Yli Suomenlahden, in Finnish). The open writing collection campaign was organized in Finland by the Folklore Archives of the Finnish Literature Society and the Tuglas Society in 2009–2010. The texts have been written by Finns who travelled in Soviet Estonia and independent Estonia, and thus take the form of travel writing (see Duncan & Gregory 2002). However, these unpublished and archived texts do not belong to the institutionalized literature of travel books and cannot be categorized to a certain genre. Single texts do not necessarily compose a coherent story. Instead they can be made up of short and episodic memories, and so do not commonly follow the conventional forms of e.g. short story writing. The writers are not professional authors but rather people who found the theme of the writing collection interesting and were willing to share their travel experiences. Nevertheless, in their texts the writers compare their travel experiences, various countries and people with their own homeland and its people, so in that sense, the topic comes close to that of travel writing (Pelvo 2007: 13).

In the call for contributions, the organizers asked Finnish tourists to write stories about travelling to Estonia, and to tell what had happened during their trips,
what has changed and what has remained the same. In addition, the following
prompts were given to help people recall their memories and to motivate them to
write: my first trip to Estonia; my most memorable visit to the southern neigh-
bour; the Estonian people; places and atmospheres; souvenirs from beyond the
Gulf; mishaps and incidents; work and free time during the travels; are there dif-
ferences between the former and the current Estonia? Altogether, 96 writers par-
ticipated in the collection and sent 580 pages of text. All the texts are archived in
the Finnish Literature Society’s Folklore Archives in Helsinki and are available
for research. In the archive, the text’s pages are marked with numbers. In this arti-
cle, the page numbers of the text references (archive sources) are given in paren-
thesis, e.g (508–510). Contributors names have been omitted to protect the ano-
nymity of the writers.

The remarkable social changes that happened in both Soviet Estonia and in Es-
tonia after its independence in 1991 have also been reflected in the travelling ex-
periences of Finnish tourists. A comparison between the previous and current Es-
tonia is part of the narratives’ construction. However, travelling to today’s Estonia
is given much less coverage than past memories of travelling to Soviet Estonia – a
time when travelling across the Gulf of Finland was full of excitement and sur-
prises. As such, the Soviet period in Estonia takes a central position in the re-
search. Thus, when I chose my research material from the writing collection cor-
pus, a criterion was that the text should include narratives about travelling to So-
viet Estonia. Guided by this, I chose 11 texts from the writing collection corpus,
four of them written by women and seven by men. The writers did not give their
ages, but on the basis of the texts I estimate them to be about 45–65 years of age,
so they still remember the period of Soviet Estonia. The female contributors oc-
cupations are a farmer, a librarian and a teacher (one of the women didn’t reveal
her occupation). The men’s occupations are a teacher (2), a headmaster, an engi-
neer, a nurse and an information technology specialist (one of the men didn’t re-
veal his occupation). Many of the writers were in the field of teaching which rein-
f强迫 the fact that teachers have played a central role in building the cultural
bridge between Finland and Estonia.

Judging from the texts of the research material, it seems that among the writers
are people who have been active in the Estonian language and culture, and have
increased their knowledge of Estonia by travelling and meeting friends and rela-
tives there. The writer’s texts reflect warm and close relations towards a southern
neighbouring country which is repeatedly called a kindred or brother nation. Ac-
cording to the texts, among the writers are also those who have had a relationship
with relatives in Estonia prior to WWII, so their picture of Estonia has been con-
structed over a long period of time. It is necessary to take into account that the
writers are by definition, a selected group of people. Many of them have long-
term relations with Estonia and Estonians and could therefore be characterized as
“Estonian friends” – those who have been interested in Estonia and its culture for a long time.

By reminiscing on travel from Finland to Soviet Estonia, Finnish travellers reflect on experiences such as what happened before and during their travels, and what kind of people and surroundings they met, both on-board and on-shore. The narrators examine their experiences and memories from the perspective of a Finnish cultural background. The emphasis on the narratives is on drawing a comparison between the Finnish, Soviet Estonian and Estonian people; how they look and act, and their way of life. Typically, the narratives concentrate more on differences and seldom on similarities and familiarities. The writers highlight this in their narratives and so it also becomes an analytical focus of this article. The temporal context of this research spans about 25 years, 1965–1991, including the time before Estonian independence. However, it is important to take into account that the memories have been written today. In this article, the concept of otherness (presented earlier) is used as a tool for textual analysis. In the analysis, I give sensitive consideration to the words and emotional expressions that the writers use in their narration. I also take into account the kind of interpretations the writers give to their experiences and emotions (Latvala & Laurén 2013).

To understand the narratives of Finnish travellers that are the focus of this research, I will next give a historical overview of the relationship between Finland and Estonia in the context of neighbourhood and travel.

**Relations Between Finland and Estonia and the Revival of Cross-border Travelling**

Finland and Estonia are kindred nations, both of whose languages, Finnish and Estonian, belong to the Finno-Ugric language group. Both countries are democratic republics and are part of the European Union (EU). Finland has about 5.5 million inhabitants and the amount of those whose native language is Estonian is about 40 000. The population of Estonia is about 1.3 million and the amount of Finnish citizens in the country numbers around 6000 (Embassy of Finland, Tallinn 2014; Estonian Embassy in Helsinki 2014; Statistics Finland 2013). The countries’ histories are connected to each other in many respects and they have various contacts, for example in the fields of culture, economics, tourism and education. In addition, Finns and Estonians have close family and kinship relations (Zetterberg 2007: 18–19, 582–583, 713).

Past and present Finland and Estonia are in many ways connected to their eastern neighbour Russia, by which they have both been ruled during periods of their history. The Autonomous Grand Duchy of Finland was part of the Russian Empire from 1809–1917, as was Estonia from 1721–1918 (Zetterberg 1995: 62). A national awakening strengthened in Finland at the beginning of the 19th century when Finns became aware of the fact that their language and cultural traditions
differ from other Europeans. In consequence, they started to actively create a nation of their own (Anttonen & Kuusi 1999: 307–319). Mainly inspired by the example of Finland, the awakening of Estonian nationalism also started and they began to create and form their own national culture and nation (Alenius 2002: 62–63). Strong feelings of brotherhood (heimoaate, in Finnish) between Finns and Estonians prevailed, and this encouraged Finns to assist the Estonians in the Estonian War of Independence in 1918–1920. In that war, Estonians fought for their sovereignty against the Russian Empire and Finnish soldiers fought side by side with their Estonian brothers. As a consequence of the Russian Revolution in February 1917, Finland managed to disengage itself from Soviet Russia and declare its independence. Soon after in 1918, Estonia managed to do the same (Lukkari 1996: 24–25; Zetterberg 2007: 504–508).

After they gained their independence, the interaction between Estonia and Finland became increasingly busy and diverse. Lots of contacts were created, especially between various occupational groups and in the fields of culture and sport. Finland also played an important role when Estonian universities began to develop and achieve western standards (Rui 1998). Especially, teachers were among the first who made contact with their colleagues across the sea and meetings and reciprocal visits between Finnish and Estonian teachers was common practice. Because of the co-operation of teachers, interaction between students was also vivid, especially among students of the Finnish-Estonian students’ unions which were established in Tartu and Helsinki. The brotherhood perceived between the nations was highly appreciated and permeated the whole political field, as well as worker’s associations and civil guards. Tourism also increased quickly and up to six ferries per day could cross the Gulf of Finland in summer, during the period following Estonian independence from 1918–1940 (Lukkari 1996: 38–39; Rausmaa 2007:16–17).

WWII 1939–1945 caused many changes and strangled the free interaction between Finland and Estonia. Finland went to war with the Soviet Union but managed to preserve its independence when the war ended. Estonia however, was occupied by the Soviet Red Army in 1940 and became part of Soviet Union, along with Latvia and Lithuania. This led to them becoming isolated from the western world, whereas the independent Finland continued its active cooperation with the west and other countries. The previously close connections between Finland and Estonia broke down but for Estonia, Finland still provided a potential link to the west. However, as a western country, Finland posed a threat to the Socialist Soviet Union and therefore relations between Finland and Soviet Estonia were kept as distant as possible. Even though the official relations of the Soviet Union with Finland were good, in the secret reports of their authorities, Finland represented a western enemy (Roiko-Jokela 1997; Made 2002:113–114; Graf & Roiko-Jokela 2004: 33–36; Zetterberg 2007: 713). From the perspective of the Soviet regime,
travel between Finland and Estonia was also seen as a threat and was therefore closed immediately after their occupation of Estonia.

After a long-term period of closure and the death of Stalin in 1953, the Soviet Union began to gradually open up to the outside world and foreigners were allowed to visit Moscow and Leningrad. Most of the travellers came from socialist countries, but the number of tourists coming from the West was relatively low. Soviets made their tourist trips mostly to other socialist countries, partly because in the eyes of the Soviet leadership, their citizens’ trips to western countries were seen as problematic; travel to the western capitalist world was thought to increase critical attitudes against the socialist and communist system. Therefore the travel of Soviets citizens to western countries was kept strictly controlled, difficult to arrange and subject to license (Syrjänmäki 1986: 56–68; Lukkari 1996: 72; Graf & Roiko-Jokela 2004: 39–40, 91). When the travelling between Finland and Soviet Estonia was suspended, a traveller who wanted to make the trip from Finland to Tallinn had to have a good reason for their journey. Firstly, the traveller had to get a visa which required complicated arrangements. The journey had to be made via Leningrad, and finally, the traveller had to face the distressing border crossing formalities (Nupponen 2007: 16).

Travelling between Helsinki and Tallinn was suspended since 1939, but was revived again in July 1965. The open sea route was important for the interaction between countries, but for Estonians it had a more important meaning: it opened and fortified a way to the West, and consequently helped Estonians to release themselves from the rule of Soviet Union (Savisaar 2005: 16–17; Graf & Roiko-Jokela 2004: 87). The Vanemuine ferry service started from Tallinn to Helsinki on 7th July 1965 carrying influential Soviet Estonian politicians. The following day it came back bringing Finnish politicians to Tallinn. After a couple of days, the Finnish s/s Wellamo started from Helsinki, bringing tourists to Tallinn (Graf & Roiko-Jokela 2004: 87). Also, the Finnish passenger ships s/s Ariadne and s/s Silja II began operating on the route. However, the route was unprofitable and the Finnish parties stopped their ship traffic after only a few years. The Estonian Vanemuine continued its traffic, and was later supplemented by the m/s Tallinn and m/s Georg Ots. The Finnish Finnlines company later arranged cruises to Tallinn in the 1970’s with their m/s Ilmatar and m/s Finnhansa vessels (Nupponen 2007: 16; Yle, Elävä arkisto 2011).

After WWII, Finland and other western countries had to accept the fact that Estonia as a nation was gone and had become a part of the Soviet Union (Made 2002: 122–123; Rausmaa 2013: 20). When the border between Finland and Soviet Estonia was closed, Finns got their information about Estonians mostly from the West, from old “Estonian friends” (estofiilit, in Finnish), Estonian refugees and expatriates. The countries maintained their relations but their interactions were conducted from above, and when the shipping lane was opened the meetings between Finns and Estonians were organized in the terms of goodwill visits (Salo-
The former president of the Republic of Estonia (from 1992 to 2001), Lennart Meri, has stated that the reopening of travel between Tallinn and Helsinki was a social phenomenon beyond comparison in European history, although the travel was parallel (Salokannel 1998a: 108–109). Finns were able to visit Soviet Estonia even though they were under the restrictions and control of the Soviet administration, but Estonians who wanted to visit Finland were still strictly controlled and only the chosen few were granted a license to travel (Graf & Roiko-Jokela 2004: 91). Even though Estonians were not able to visit Finland as much as Finns were able to visit Soviet Estonia, the cultural bridge between the countries strengthened because of the opened sea lane. The sea lane gave an opportunity to maintain personal relations between Finns and Estonians that had been created before it was opened. Gradually, along with the relations between private citizens, various organizations also began to create forms of cooperation. People who were active in cultural life on both sides of the Gulf of Finland played an important role, for example, by establishing various friendship organizations such as the Tuglas Society which was found in Helsinki 1982 (Ylönen 1998: 352–357; Rauhala 2002: 432; Rausmaa 2007: 40–55).

**Cultural Encounters on a Ship**

In the research material of this study, it is typical that the narratives of Finnish travellers start with the episodes of writers’ first trips to Soviet Estonia and their reflections about encounters between western and eastern cultures on board. During the Soviet period, the number of the passengers was limited and under the predetermined travel programs of the time, travel should happen in groups (Graf & Roiko-Jokela 2004: 91). The control of the Soviet authorities is reflected in memories where Finnish tourists remember their travels at the end of 1960’s when the shipping lane had just opened after a closure of 20 years. This control of travelling continued until the beginning 1990’s. Estonia was inaccessible and closed for a long time, and right after the shipping lane was opened, Finnish tourists found it as providing an exciting opportunity. According to the narratives, the Finnish passengers departed on the ship with a sense of excitement, but at the same time they were nervous about the Soviet authorities’ strict control. Already in Helsinki harbour, before going aboard, their attention was drawn to the symbols of the Soviet Union on the ship. For example, one writer states that “it was very strange to get on board when the chimney was bedecked with the hammer and sickle” (139–137).
Only a few decades earlier Finland had been at war with Soviet Union, and thus stepping aboard aroused mixed feelings: the journey was to Soviet Estonia which, however, was part of the Soviet Union – the former enemy of Finland. After WWII, the Soviet Union was closed and ordinary Finns knew hardly anything about it. Most Finnish tourists did not know much about travelling to the Soviet Union and had little idea of what to expect. As travel became more frequent, stories about circumstances in Soviet Estonia spread quickly, so travellers were then able to construct preconceptions about their travels. This made the travel preparation easier and lessened the surprise of cross-cultural encounters on both the border and in Soviet Estonia. However, these first trips were in most cases full of new and astonishing experiences, aroused by different cultural encounters. Before travel and on the ship, Finnish passengers had to adjust to Soviet conventions that they felt to be strange. They strived to follow the official rules related to travelling because if they didn’t, it was known to cause trouble. According to the narratives,
there were many strange rules. For example, at the time, travelling with the whole family was forbidden. It was rare to defy this rule and if someone did so, it attracted attention. This kind of bravado could have been questioned by others, as seen in the following text:

When the shipping lane then opened in 1965 we immediately ordered a trip to Tallinn. The Furniture Retailers organization of Kymenlaakso started an unforgettable journey in midsummer. There were my parents-in-law, me and my husband. That attracted the attention. We were cautiously asked, how it was possible that so many family members had got permission to travel – so typical of the Soviet time.

Everything was new and strange, already on the ship. The customs officers on the ship started checking immediately when the ship departed, then a four hour customs inspection in the harbour. I had Kotiliesi [a women’s magazine, KL] to read during the trip, and it was scrutinised for over an hour in the backroom; perhaps they were afraid porn and politics would be imported into the country. 10 (508–510)

The authorities’ control on board is depicted and criticized in the narratives of Finnish tourists, and by these descriptions the narrators are drawing a difference between Finns and Soviets. In the text example above, the “Soviet time” represents the stereotypical impressions of both the Soviet and the Soviet Union, where people were controlled from above. The writer describes the customs officers’ long-lasting checks on board and in the harbour as “new” and “strange”. The narrative reflects the censorship enforced in Soviet Estonia which fed on communist ideology where exposure to western, political, religious and pornographic influences across the border was controlled (Ermolaev 1997: 181–257; Graf & Roikojokela 2004: 40–47). The effects of censorship were realized in border practices where, for instance, passengers’ western magazines and books were confiscated. For the Finnish travellers, the prohibition to bring products and things that were considered ordinary in Finland was so incomprehensible that they could not necessarily take it seriously during their first trips. As such, they may have had newspapers and magazines with them which then became a problem on the border and further delayed the border crossing (136–137, 508–510, 549–551, 167–170).

In the texts of the research material, the authors tell of the checking on the ship and on the Soviet Estonian border. The descriptions of these actions mostly express surprise and are negative in tone. The authorities’ behaviour during customs inspections has also been unforeseeable for the Finnish travellers, because almost everything could be seen as suspicious, from a jumper to a rubber boot. The authors describe the customs inspections as irritating, oppressive and frightening. One passenger who was travelling to Tallinn in 1986 narrates his experiences like this:

At last, we came into the harbour. We went to the immigration control and customs. It took time. Passengers stood in a row like soldiers, waiting for their turn. When it was my turn to hand over my passport, the man in a glass cubicle stared chillingly at me and the passport, then again at the passport and me. In the end, however, he slapped a stamp in my blue covered passport. It seemed that the luggage of all travellers was rummaged through by the men and women customs officers. “Why do
you have two pairs of socks with you? For what reason do you need two sweaters?"
Stupid questions for which you need to either fabricate as wise an answer as possi-
ble, or fell silent submissively. Those authorities really knew how to humiliate pas-
sengers. The air in the harbour hall was heavy. I felt dizzy. The reception in our sis-
ter nation was not very warm.11 (143–146)

The text example above tells of the narrator’s indignation and reluctant resig-
nation to the authorities’ behaviour and “stupid questions”, which she felt to be
humiliating. In general, for most of the authors who tell about their border cross-
ings, the Soviet authorities’ behaviour left negative first impressions of Soviet
Estonia. They remember how the border crossing evoked unpleasant emotions, as
well as physical sickness.

**Wondering and Comparing**

Finnish travellers describe their arrival in Soviet Estonia, the harbour, and the
urban environment in their narratives. The descriptions also tell how they value
the environment, thus the aspects of beauty and ugliness form central roles in the
narratives. For most of the travellers, Tallinn was a new and unknown place, and
they tried to conceive it by comparing it with the Finnish urban environment,
which was familiar to them. So they made their observations about the city
through cultural lenses. Observations like these are selective and the aesthetic
interpretations that are based on these observations are also culturally bounded;
we have learned and got used to our experience and thus value some things as
beautiful and pleasant, and others as ugly and unpleasant (see Rolston 2007: 81–
82; Downton 2009: 176–177).

The narratives of Finnish tourists concentrate mainly on the strangeness of Tal-
linn and its people. The harbour area of Tallinn is typically described by using
negative characterizations, like “a terrible sight”, “a dump of various junk and
stuff”, “gloomy” (167–170). When arriving at the port, various symbols of the
Soviet Union drew the attention of travellers, like “the red and white stripes on the
chimneys, on which had been painted the occupiers’ visible signs of the sickle-
hammer” (167–170), “there was a smell of Mahorkan (Russian tobacco with a
distinctive smell) and some odd smell in the terminal” (136–137), “when we
walked out of the terminal, a huge picture of Lenin was greeting us on the wall of
the opposite building” (148–152), and “Volgas and Moskovits (types of Russian
car) were revolving around us” (188–191). The observations that the travellers
made describe Tallinn in a negative light and represent the dilapidation of the city:
“after arriving in Tallinn we were struck by inconceivable raggedness and rusty
cars” (1–2), “you heard mainly the Russian language on the streets of occupied
capital” (549–551) and “the houses were badly painted and the air wafted the
smell of brown coal, cabbage and Mahorkan” (136–137).
According to the narratives, the Soviet occupation was thought to worsen Estonia, but to the Finnish tourists, the Estonians were seen to be reluctant in addressing this situation. The inhabitants’ disinterest in taking care of their environment is seen in the narratives as implicitly attributed to the influence of the Soviet Union. This also comes out in the following narrative in which the author tells about her trip to Tallinn to visit her sister’s family. The writer describes the building where her sister’s family lived and compares it with Finnish houses and building techniques:

It was a new block of flats built by Russians, and Finnish builders [they were building a hotel in Tallinn, KL] lived there. ––The staircase was poorly finished, not even warehouses are in such a condition in Finland! There could be many different types of wallpaper in the rooms and on the ceilings as well. Moreover, it was so cold that electric heaters were needed, in spite of the fact that there was normal central heating.12 (125).

The narrative underlines that the Soviet represents undesirable otherness. The author criticizes the Russian/Soviet ability to construct proper buildings. Their buildings are in the author’s eyes totally different than Finnish ones; Finnish buildings are much better, because they are properly build and warm, whereas Soviet
buildings are of poor quality (“poorly finished”), tasteless (“different types of wallpaper”) and cold.

During their visits in Soviet Estonia, Finnish travellers watched and compared people on the streets of Tallinn. According to their narratives, it was possible to distinguish local people from Finns because of their shabby and modest clothes (136–137, 549–551). However, Estonians stand out from the Russians with their quiet, humble and kind behaviour (549–551). One writer tells, that “when wandering the streets you learned quickly to distinguish between the Estonian and Russian. The Estonian walked expressionlessly, looking down, while the Russian was walking briskly, speaking loudly, and relaxed and enjoying their existence.” (167–170). The Russians that the travellers met on the streets and shops are depicted negatively in the narratives; they were rude and arrogant: “Buxom Russian matrons who were standing behind their tables treated both foreigners and Estonian-speakers rudely” (508–510). In these narratives, the writers are contrasting Finns, other foreigners and Estonians (we), to Russians (them, the other).

Finnish travellers who visited Tallinn during the Soviet period have many memories of its hotel accommodation. Especially, the Viru hotel is remembered in many narratives. Built by Finns in 1972, the Viru was one of the Intourist hotels included in the State’s Tourist Office, and was numbered among the top five hotels in the Soviet Union. The USSR State Security Committee of the KGB recruited spies and informers to monitor different sectors of society, for instance administration, schools, and hotels. Their task was to control people (especially foreigners) who brought western influence to the Soviet Union. Since foreigners stayed in the Viru hotel, it also came under KGB control (Nupponen 2007: 9, 31, 50).

In the memories of the Viru, Finnish travellers tell of their suspicions about KGB’s infiltration among the foreign travellers, and how they feared to come under its observation. A writer who stayed in Viru in 1975 describes his suspicions:

Regardless of the things that we heard about microphones in the hotel rooms and that through them our conversations were recorded, we were not able to hide our impressions. Big Brother’s control, indeed, annoyed us in many ways. The microphones manifested themselves in other ways as well. [...] One day a man slipped in to my room behind the cleaner, and he did not say a word, but presented matters like currency change etc. by using written notes. (549–551).
From the perspective of the KGB, it was not appropriate that the Finns and Estonians met each other, because Finnish tourists were known to bring forbidden western products into the country and deal them to local people. Therefore Finnish ship travellers were controlled almost everywhere – in their hotels as well as on the streets (Graf & Roiko-Jokela 2004: 167–169). Regardless of the embargo on foreign products by the Soviet Union, some Finnish travellers brought for example coffee, groceries and western clothes, which they gave to their Estonian friends or relatives, or sold to other people in Soviet Estonia. According to the narratives, they found it both necessary and kind to bring different products to Estonians, especially when it emerged that the selection of food and other goods available in the shops of Tallinn was minimal. However, it was always a risk to bring forbidden goods across the border, and even if the products were successfully brought across, it was another matter to deal them without being caught. If the KGB got to know of these countertrades and western souvenirs, it would mean not only trouble to the dealer, but to the receiver as well. Thus, items were given to Estonian friends secretly and discreetly (e.g. 549–551).

Conclusion

Travelling motives undoubtedly influence how cultural encounters, other countries and their people are experienced and understood. As mentioned earlier, the writers and their narratives in this research are constructed for the most part from an exceptional group of people. They have long-term relations to Estonia, its culture and language, and some have relatives and friends there. For such travellers Estonia is not just a country through which to pass; instead, since their first visits to Soviet Estonia, it has since become an annual place to travel. The authors still remember the Soviet period when Estonia belonged to a country that represented otherness in a variety of ways. Their narratives show the remarkable role our memories and past experiences play in the process of making conceptions of different cultures and people.

The narratives of Finnish tourists about travelling from Finland across the Gulf of Finland to Soviet Estonia expose their experiences, but above all, their conceptions of Soviet Estonia and the Soviet Union, which they had adopted in both Finnish and western culture. The border between Finland and Soviet Estonia comes up very clearly in the narratives: it separates the eastern and western nations, which are seen as different in many ways. During the 50 years of the Soviet period, in Finland it was thought that Estonia was lost and it would be forever a part of the Soviet Union (Salokannel 1998b: 15). The generation that was born after WWII did not know Estonia as anything other than a part of the Soviet Union (see Onnela 1998: 69), and this can be seen in their narratives. According to these narratives, Soviet Estonia was almost unknown for those who travelled there.
for the first time. For them, it represented otherness and “eastern”, something that differed from Finnish and western.

In the narratives of Finnish tourists, the descriptions of border crossings and travelling to Soviet Estonia are ambivalent. Travellers knew that on the other side of the border the Soviet regime prevailed, but the populous were also Estonians, seen as a sister nation. Some of the passengers already had contacts in Estonia before the shipping lane was opened, but most of them knew very little about the Soviet regime’s concrete influence on Estonian society and culture. So, the first trips were anticipated with excitement and curiosity. The strictness of the border authorities’ checks on board and again on shore were a nasty surprise, especially for those Finns who had not travelled to the Soviet Union before. Unpleasant and humiliating checks were remembered well after decades had passed, and these memories describe the cultural encounters with an emphasis placed on the differences between us and them. Consequently, the narratives of border crossing during the Soviet period are mostly told in a negative tone, and the writers interpreted them to represent a typical “Soviet time” and “Soviet spirit”. The descriptions about border crossings and writers’ interpretations of their cultural encounters are quite similar in the various texts covered in this study – on the whole, they repeat mostly negative characterisations of the Soviet period and Soviet Estonia.

The research material texts concentrate mainly on the period of Soviet Estonia and the focus is for the most part on the speculation about otherness and the establishment or creation of difference. According to the narratives, Finnish travellers looked at Soviet Estonia through their own cultural lenses, and thus the Soviet way of life and people were interpreted as being culturally different (the other) than that of Finns (we): they looked different, they acted differently and they spoke a different language (Russian). In relation to Russians and the Soviet Union however, Estonians are identified with Finns (we). Additionally, the narrators make a difference between Estonians and Russians because of differences in their language, behaviour and external appearance. Estonians are seen as resigned victims who were forced to give up their western culture under the pressure of Soviet power.

The Soviet Union and all things “Soviet” represents otherness in the narratives of Finnish travellers, and invariably it means something negative: the disrepair of buildings and the whole cityscape of Tallinn, the lack of food supplies and commodities, the control of Big Brother, and the dominance of the Russian language and other cultural signs appear everywhere. Estonian culture and Estonians are represented as something that is hiding in silence and remains in the background. For example, elements of Estonian history such as their old buildings, songs and other oral history – actually, all considered as good and beautiful – are thought to be preserved from the corruption of the Soviet Union, and to represent the past Estonian (western) culture.
Tallinn is still in the midst of changes today, although the last of the signs and scars that the Soviet regime left behind have been repaired and removed from the urban landscape. Its new architecture represents completely different values: glassed-in office-blocks, shopping centers, hotels and stores (Virtasalo 2008: 38). Modern-day Tallinn is a western city, and Finnish travellers visiting there today mostly shop, enjoy the various cultural and health attractions, or simply relax in the urban atmosphere.

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Notes

1 "Jo jonkin aikaa Virossa asuneena on erityisen hauska muistella ensimmäisiä matkojani, jolloin lahden takana tuntui olevan paljon outoa ja erikoista, käsittämätöntäkin. Parinkymmenen vuoden takaa ovat Suomi ja Viro tulleet paljon lähemmäs toisiaan, eikä ensi kertaa lahden yli matkustava varmaankaan koe samanlaista kulttuurisokkia."(148–152).

2 Finns make about two million leisure trips to Estonia every year and along with Sweden, it is the most favorite destination. Many ferries operate daily between Helsinki and Tallinn (Statistic Finland 2014; Tourism Tallinn; Viro.fi).


4 Finland was part of the Kingdom of Sweden until the end of Finnish War in 1808–1809, when Finland was ceded to the Russian Empire as the autonomous Grand Duchy of Finland (Zetterberg 1995: 62).

5 Finland’s educated classes began to make determined efforts to promote Finnish national unity and the emergence of nationalism at the beginning of the 19th century. The Finnish national epic *Kalevala*, compiled by Elias Lönnrot, came out in 1835 and it has an important meaning for the creation of the Finnish nation (Anttonen & Kuusi 1999: 307–319).


8 From the time of opening up until August 1967, 15 000 Finns had already visited Tallinn which was a remarkable amount in those days (Nupponen 2007: 17). Travel across the Gulf.
of Finland was however asymmetric: 200 000 Finns visited Tallinn whilst only 20 000–30 000 Estonians visited Finland (Graf & Roiko-Jokela 2004: 91).

9 Tuglas Society (Tuglas-seura, in Finnish) is a friendship society that connects Finns and Estonians. Its main purposes are to support the interaction between Finland and Estonia, and to increase the mutual knowledge of each (Tuglas Society: 2014).


12 "Se oli uusi venäläisten rakentama kerrostalo, jossa suomalaiset rakentajat asuivat. – Rap-pukäytävä oli surkeasti viimeistely, ei Suomessa ole edes säilytystilat siinä kunnossa! Huoneissa saattoi olla monta eri tapettia ja katossa myös. Lisäksi siellä oli niin kylmiä, että piti olla sähkökatterit, vaikka oli normaali sähkölämmitys” (125).

13 The Viru hotel still operates in Tallinn but has become a part of the chain of Finnish Sokos hotels (Nupponen 2007: 9, 31).


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Literature


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Adventurers, Flâneurs, and Agitators: Travel Stories as Means for Marking and Transgressing Boundaries in 19th and Early 20th Century Finland

By Kirsti Salmi-Niklander

Abstract

The article focuses on border crossings in travel stories, which were published in hand-written newspapers in 19th- and early 20th-century Finland. These papers were a popular tradition in student organizations and popular movements. Border crossings appear in travel stories in three different representations. Firstly, border crossings are repeated motifs in travel stories, both as challenging events and as small gestures and encounters. Travel stories demarcate boundaries, but they also provide a means for transgressing them. Secondly, hand-written newspapers as a literary practice highlight borders between oral and written communication. They were produced as one single manuscript copy, and published by being read out aloud in social events. Thirdly, the authors of hand-written newspapers were placed on the border of different positions in society such as class, gender and age. My analysis is based on the methodological discussion of small stories and personal experience narratives; travel stories can be defined as “local event narratives”. I have outlined four basic models for travel stories which emerge from hand-written newspapers: the great mission story, the grand tour story, the flâneur story and the retreat story. The analysis of travel stories is presented through four different case studies with a time range from the 1850s to the 1920s: these materials have been produced in two provincial student fraternities (osakunta), in the temperance society “Star” in Helsinki in the 1890s, and in the Social Democratic Youth Club in the small industrial town of Karkkila in the 1910s and the 1920s. Many parallel features can be observed in travel stories, even though the social background and ideology of the authors are quite different. Time and space are important aspects in travel stories, and they often demarcate boundaries of class and gender.

Keywords: Travel stories, hand-written newspapers, border crossings, class, gender, oral-literary tradition, narration
Introduction

Travel stories are one of the main genres of “grand narratives”, ranging from Gilgamesh and Odyssey to contemporary road movies. Research on travel writing has become an established academic field during recent decades. Tim Youngs and Charles Forsdick summarize the essence of travel stories as a mixed literary genre, oscillating between autobiography and science: “The scientific writing gives to travel writing its objective quality of observation and reportage. The autobiographical draws also on the construction of the protagonist […], which helps introduce elements of the fictional” (Youngs & Forsdick 2012: 1).

Eric J. Leed (1991: 7) outlines the basic difference between ancient and modern conceptions of travel: “The ancients valued travel as an explication of human fate and necessity; for moderns, it is an expression of freedom and an escape from necessity and purpose”. The distribution of romantic ideas in the early 19th century changed the experiences and meaning of travel: getting to the destination was no more the most important rationale for travelling, but travelling rather served as a means for creating a “counter-reality” to a rational bourgeois life. Nature and scenery gained symbolic value and became means by which to reach other forms of reality (Varpio 1997: 26–27). Romantic imagination turned material journeys to mental journeys into the self. A good example of a romantic journey is Samuel Coleridge’s well-known poem “Kubla Khan” (1816), situated in the imaginary palace of Xanadu (Fulford & Lee 2012: 407–408).

Border-crossings are recurrent motifs both in ancient and modern travel stories, and the borders can be geographical, social, cultural or mental. For example, a shaman may travel in other mental states, an explorer may map unknown territories, and a flâneur may observe the different sceneries and subcultures in modern cities. Border-crossings between worlds, territories and cultures are liminal phases which contain elements of danger. Referring to Yuri Lotman, Hein Viljoen outlines a boundary as having a basic semiotic meaning which separates “us” from “them”, and the safe, cultured world from an unsafe and chaotic world (Viljoen 2013: xiii): “Boundaries divide and differentiate both conceptually and in social life, but are also sites where communication and exchange can take place” (Viljoen 2013: xiv).

Literary historian Yrjö Varpio (1997: 209–260) has analysed boundaries and border crossings in 19th-century Finnish travel stories published in books and periodicals. Boundaries were established between nature and culture, “us” and “the others”, center and periphery, freedom and captivity. Border crossings can be observed in the inter-textual links and citations, and symbolic expressions and small semiotic signs which demarcate class and ethnic boundaries (Varpio 1997: 238–240).

Published travel writing is often based on diaries and notebooks which have been edited by the writer or other editors (Bourguet 2012). Travel stories were
popular material in 19th-century private letters and diaries, written by both educated and self-educated people (Varpio 1997: 15; Ollila 2000: 58–61; Hassam 2012; Nordlund 2013). Unpublished archival materials also present access to the experiences of writers who could not get their stories published in print.1

This article focuses on travel stories in hand-written newspapers, which were a popular tradition in Finnish student organizations and popular movements during the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th century. They were in most cases produced as a single manuscript copy and published by being read aloud at meetings and social evenings. The editing process was often collective and several people participated in the creation of individual texts. Therefore, hand-written newspapers provide excellent material for studying narrative interaction in historical contexts (Salmi-Niklander 2013).

Border crossings appear in hand-written newspapers in three different representations. Firstly, border crossings are repeated motifs in travel stories, both as challenging events and as small gestures and encounters. Travel stories demarcate boundaries, but they also provide a means for transgressing them. Such border crossings will be interpreted as metaphoric and symbolic expressions, observing interpersonal encounters. According to my observations, travel stories build up a narrative “red thread” – a thematic continuity from the 19th-century student organizations to the communities of working-class young people in early 20th-century Finland. The tension between individuality and collectivity is one of the underlying themes in texts written by young adults in both the 19th and the early 20th centuries.

Secondly, hand-written newspapers as a literary practice highlight borders between oral and written communication. They provide an excellent example of an oral-literary tradition, which can be interpreted as including those expressive genres which involve both oral and written communication.2 Oral performance was an essential part of their publication and sometimes the writers would highlight their words for a listening audience, rather than leave it to the papers’ readers: these were texts aimed to be listened to in a social event, not to be read silently.

Thirdly, the authors of hand-written newspapers were placed on the border of different positions in society such as class, gender and age. Young people writing these papers were going through a liminal phase between childhood and adulthood, and many of them went through changes in class position through either education or professional training. Popular movements provided possibilities for young women to enter the public sphere. For university students, the phase between childhood and adulthood was extended, but by the end of the 19th century youth was also being recognized as a separate age among the rural population and the working classes. The establishment of agrarian youth societies and socialist youth clubs was one reaction to this development (Kemppainen, Salmi-Niklander & Tuomaala 2011).
The narrative interaction behind texts in hand-written newspapers can be reached through contextual close reading and other available sources such as minutes, memoirs, printed almanacs and other publications. While interpreting the gaps and silences in these texts, it is important to keep in mind the audience to which they were performed. In 19th-century student societies the audience was all-male, but in popular movements women had started to participate in meetings and other activities. Even though many young women did not openly reveal their opinions and experiences, they co-created the texts as part of the audiences.

Travel Stories as Local Event Narratives

Writers of hand-written newspapers utilized a great variety of genres and motifs adopted from literary culture (essays, poems, short stories) and oral tradition (proverbs, folk songs, folk legends). My special interest lies in local event narratives, which along with parodic news and advertisements are genres typical of hand-written newspapers. They depict recent events in local communities, such as meetings, trips, social evenings and informal gatherings. Fictionalization and localization may be outlined as two main narrative strategies in hand-written newspapers. Local events and personal experiences are fictionalized using various literary methods, for example narration, metaphors, literary citations, irony and parody. Localization on the other hand, includes different means of rewriting and re-interpreting printed texts in a local context, where ideas, motifs and whole stories from printed sources could be fitted to local communities (Salmi-Niklander 2004: 175–178; 2007, 192–193).

Travel stories are a hybrid narrative genre moving between big and small stories, personal experience and local event narratives. Local event narratives are in many ways different from personal experience narratives as depicted by Sandra Dolby Stahl (1989: 12–13): their plots are usually simple and undramatic, and instead of individual experiences they focus on collective action. The travels depicted in these stories are both long and short, and may include adventures across the country or abroad, or visits to neighbouring parishes or villages. Although many travel stories in hand-written newspapers depict “small” events, they have intertextual, and sometimes ironic or parodic links to the models of “big travel stories”.

In local event narratives, I have observed various complex narrative positions which writers utilize in order to fictionalize their own experiences (Salmi-Niklander 2004: 172–175; 2006: 206). The first person plural (“we”) is much more common in local event narratives than the first person singular (“I”). In this sense, travel stories in hand-written newspapers are different from those in printed literature, which often have an individual protagonist. Even in stories told in the first person, the narrator takes the position of a commentator or an observer, and seldom refers to his or her individual experiences (Salmi-Niklander 2004: 164–
The development of observational skills has been one of the educational uses of travel, and observation was one of the key methods used on scientific journeys (Leed 1991: 60–61).

**Four Models of Travel Stories**

I have outlined four basic models for travel stories which emerge from hand-written newspapers: the great mission story, the grand tour story, the flâneur story and the retreat story. The first three models are familiar from literature and mythology, and have been previously studied, e.g. by Joseph Campbell (the great mission story; 1956) and Walter Benjamin (the flâneur story; 1999).

Many researchers of travel writing have developed their own typologies for travel stories and their protagonists. Arne Melberg (2005: 27–29) outlines three positions of the modern travel-writer: a witness, a tourist, and a flâneur. A witness “sees what nobody else has seen”; a tourist “sees what everybody else has seen”; and a flâneur (or flâneuse) does not have any definite goals but remains open to all new impressions. MacLulich (1979) has delineated three different forms in Canadian exploration narratives, where the journey can be depicted as progress towards a definite goal (a quest), as a struggle against unbearable hardships (an ordeal), or as a more loose and disgressive exploration of unknown territories (an odyssey) (MacLulich 1979: 74–76). Some of the travel stories in hand-written newspapers fit into these models, but “small” travel stories narrated by young people in agrarian or working-class communities especially tend to follow different styles of emplotment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Narration</th>
<th>Characters</th>
<th>Sensory and emotional experiences</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Great Mission</strong></td>
<td>First person singular</td>
<td>Allies, enemies, assistants, informants</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Grand Tour</strong></td>
<td>First person singular</td>
<td>Companions, strangers, servants</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Flâneur Story</strong></td>
<td>First person plural/singular</td>
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<td><strong>Retreat Story</strong></td>
<td>First person plural/singular</td>
<td>Friends, hosts, companions</td>
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Table 1. Basic models of travel narratives in hand-written newspapers.
In the great mission-story, the narrator is working with a serious purpose and facing trials and hardships on his way. On his missionary journey, he meets both enemies and allies who help him to perform his great purpose. The grand tour has been a part of young gentlemen’s education since the seventeenth century, and proceeds through adventures and observations which provide new knowledge and life experience for the narrator (Leed 1991: 184–192; Buzard 2002: 38–47). The main character in the flâneur story is a modern traveller, depicted by Walter Benjamin as a wandering observer of modern city life, who absorbs scenic impressions and creates temporary relationships with passers-by (Benjamin 1999: 416–453). The retreat story may be placed in locations such as sanatoria or remote boarding houses (for example Thomas Mann’s 1924 work: Der Zauberberg), and provides the possibility for a refreshing withdrawal and distancing from the hectic routines of everyday life. The people on retreat create new companionships. Anne Ollila (2000: 86–88) provides some examples of retreat stories in her monograph, based on the archives of the Hällström family in late 19th-century Finland, and many family members spent time in sanatoria and reflected upon their experiences in correspondence.

Physical experiences, emotions and personal encounters are expressed differently in travel stories. In the great mission story, they are related to the trials and hardships which the main character faces on their way to some great purpose. In the grand tour story, emotions, experiences and encounters are a part of the learning process. In the flâneur story, they are related with momentary impressions and relationships, and in the retreat story, they are a means for emotional refreshment and renewal. In hand-written newspapers, all of these basic narrative models are combined and parodied.

“Entering the Field” Narrative

The oldest example of travel stories in this corpus of hand-written newspapers is Berndt August Paldani’s five-part report on his folklore collecting journeys in Kaukomielit – the hand-written newspaper of the Western Finnish Student Fraternity, in 1852. Hand-written newspapers were revitalized by Finnish students in the early 1850s, when student activities were strongly controlled by Czar Nicholas the First and his officialdom, following the revolutionary year of 1848 (Klinge 1967: 135–137).

Kaukomielit was one of the earliest hand-written student papers, with 28 issues from November 1851 until the end of the year in 1852, when the provincial student fraternities were prohibited. The paper included contributions both in Finnish and Swedish. Kaukomielit is a name for the Kalevala hero Lemminkäinen, and folklore collecting activities were quite strongly emphasized in the paper. Some poems by peasant writers were also published in the paper (Kuismin 2012: 11–12).
Paldani (1823–1860) was a student of theology and made two folklore collecting journeys to Ylöjärvi, Virrat, Ruovesi, Ikaalinen, Parkano and Kuru, the first during the Christmas vacation of 1851–1852 and the second in April 1852. The Western Finnish Fraternity had raised 76 rubles to support his journey, so he was obliged to provide a report in Kaukomieli. Paldani’s travel stories were later published in print in an anthology edited by A.R. Niemi in 1904. Therefore, his stories belong to the canon of published travel stories concerning folklore collecting journeys (Varpio 1997: 58–64), even though this occurred more than fifty years after he wrote the original stories. The existing travel stories by Elias Lönnrot and Antero Warelius probably inspired his writing.

The first part of Paldani’s travel story in which makes his journey to his collecting field is most interesting in its narrative complexity. The story begins as a flâneur story: Paldani depicts his travel with a couple of other male students, first by horse cart and then by sleigh from Helsinki towards Tampere, progressing from one inn to another. The narrator merges in the group of travelling students and does not identify his own emotions and experiences separately from the others. In this respect, the story resembles the published diary of Zacharias Topelius from 1840 (Varpio 1997: 15). The travellers joke on the tedious details of winter travel and observe the beauties of winter nature and of a strange light in the night sky. The narrator depicts this collective visual impression and its various interpretations:

I have to mention the glow, which we saw in the sky after going for a while. It looked very beautiful from further away; a red light flashed at times bursting into the sky, blurred at times like the Northern Lights. We looked at this wonderingly and asked our coachman to drive faster to get there, because when the road turned, this showed first in the North, then in the North-West, so that we thought it would be next to the road, but it did not come our way and was left on the side, and at last disappeared from our sight. Probably it was a fire, a pity for those who met this hard luck.4 (Transl. Kirsti Salmi-Niklander)

An important turning point of the story takes place in Tampere, when the narrator continues his travel alone towards his field and his great folklore-collecting mission. At this point, the travel narrative changes into a great mission story. From this point he has to proceed and make decisions on his own, which is not very easy in the middle of winter in the countryside.

Paldani depicts in great detail a breath-taking sleigh ride over a lake covered by ice which was still quite thin, by sleigh with a farm-hand who amuses him during the journey with “mostly very ugly and obscene” folktales and legends: “The ice was bad, the water gushed up from the cracks; I hesitated and wanted to turn back, but the man answered: ‘Let’s take the godly spirit on us and let’s drive in a godly manner’”.5 This expression could well be an ironic reference to the theological studies of the narrator, which the coachman had probably found out about at this stage. The journey serves as Paldani’s initiation for his field, and like all field-workers he faces other hardships and unexpected events. In the village of
Luhalhti (in part 2), he attends a New Year’s dance with other young people from the village. They are very curious about him and he is forced to sing himself before his audience is willing to perform folk songs and riddles for him.

Yrjö Varpio has observed the romantic imagery surrounding nature’s symbolic and mythic meanings in Elias Lönnrot’s travel stories: nature provides him with a pure experience, and some of his natural observations remind him of ancient myths (Varpio 1991: 215–216). Analogous romantic imagery also comes out in Paldani’s travel stories, but the story of the sleigh ride over thin ice reminds him of the dangers of nature. Berndt Paldani’s great idols Elias Lönnrot and Antero Warelius were from a quite modest artisan and peasant background, however Paldani himself was an officer’s son, which therefore made his role as a folklore collector more tension-filled. During his travels he faces suspicion and ridicule from the country people, and has to struggle to convince them of the sincerity of his purpose. Paldani depicts in detail many encounters with rural people. Apparently, he is relieved to spend a night at the house of a local priest in Karvia (part 3), depicting the priest as “a friendly and talkative man” with whom he “spent his evening in an amusing manner”6. However, he only mentions common people by their whole proper names: Kalle Sävijärvi (a crofter who after some hesitation performs many folk-songs for Paldani), and a self-educated writer, Joose Westerbacka who becomes Paldani’s key informant. Westerbacka is an excellent storyteller, but also literate and later he sends proverbs to Paldani in writing. Paldani faces suspicion from the local people who take him as “a government spy” looking for information on superstitions and witchcraft. Westerbacka reveals these rumours to Paldani, but also supports and defends him.

During Paldani’s second folklore collecting journey in April 1852, his experiences are much more positive: people are friendly and willing to share their songs and stories with him, and “even the girls have rosy cheeks”. Paldani reflects on the reasons for this in the fourth part of his travel stories: “But why has my collecting more success now than in winter? Is it that I am more used to do my work, and the common people no longer take this as a strange matter? On the contrary – in winter I said almost everywhere: I will come again, keep your stories in mind [...]”7 (Transl. K. Salmi-Niklander).

Paldani’s story is quite a typical example of a Great Mission story, during which the traveller faces hardships, learns to act in new ways and grows as a person. Personal growth is achieved through finding new allies. The narration varies between vivid stories of encounters and situations, and more “academic” depictions of local dialects and manners, provided with occasional footnotes. These narrative changes reflect the tension-filled relationship between Paldani and “the people” whose traditions he was collecting, and his fellow students to whom he performed his stories.

The comment on “girls with rosy cheeks” in the last part of Paldani’s travel story insinuates the possibility of romantic encounters with young country wom
en. All the women in Paldani’s travel stories are anonymous, be they country girls at local dances, old gossiping women, or farmers’ wives providing shelter and meals for the traveller.

### A Romance on Uuras Island

The hand-written newspaper *Savo-Karjalainen* was produced by the Savo-Karelian fraternity since 1864. Its heyday however was in the mid-1880s, when new liberal ideas on evolution and women’s liberation were debated in the fraternity, and the founders of Finnish realistic literature (Juhani Aho and Matti Kurikka) wrote their first stories and poems (Ruutu 1939: 324–329). There was high competition for editorial posts on the paper, and some individual articles raised fierce debates.

The travel story *A day on Uuras Island* was published in *Savo-Karjalainen* 16 October 1886 [the author has given his initials -e- -é-]. The story takes place on the island of Uuras in the eastern part of the Gulf of Finland, with a lively international harbour and a large Russian garrison. This story is obviously related to Grand Tour stories, and young students who had just passed matriculation exams and got their white student caps had a tradition of making a tour around the country to see different cities and provinces. Some Grand Tour stories like this were published in *Savo-Karjalainen*, and they also appear in the established literature of the late 19th century. One well-known example is the short novel *Helsinkiin* (“To Helsinki”, 1889) by Juhani Aho, in which two young men travel by boat and train to study in Helsinki. The novel has been linked to decadence-literature, since the other main character is a young student who makes his first experiments with alcohol and prostitutes, following the model of older students (Lappalainen 2000: 170–177). Some travel stories written by students were also published in small booklets (Varpio 1997: 113). Domestic Grand Tour stories preceded the youth travel-movement, which originated from the German *Vandervöge* movement and was propagated in Finland by August Ramsay in the 1890s (Varpio 1997: 190–195).

The first person narrator is a young student who makes his journey towards the city of Viipuri, by way of the island of Uuras. By accident (or with ill intent) the boatman the narrator has hired does not take him to the harbour, but instead to the Russian garrison. Here he meets very hostile and aggressive Russian soldiers, but has a very pleasant saviour in the form of the daughter of a Russian official, who speaks quite fluent Finnish and leads him safely to the harbour. The narrator depicts his mixed emotions after his adventure: although he should have no reason for sorrow, he still misses his pretty saviour:

> I remained sitting on the wharf in low spirits. I don’t understand what reason I had for sorrow any more, since I had got where I wanted – to the harbour; but I would have hoped myself a thousand times in such a similar trouble, if I could have been
The story is very coherent and appears to be a personal experience narrative. However, I have strong suspicions that this story is fictional, although the writer probably has some first-hand experience of the island. The narrator is depicted in quite an ironic manner, for example in another section, he tries to use his knowledge of Old Greek with Russian soldiers. The story also has parallel motifs with ancient travel stories: for example, the young woman who saves the narrator from a dangerous situation but is then parted from him has some resemblance with the women in Homer’s Odyssey. However, the narrator does not have any great mission or task to achieve, beyond making observations and having adventures.

19th-century published travel stories provide plentiful examples of colourful depictions of other nationalities, emphasizing their inferiority and strange habits. *A Day on Uuras Island* followed the stereotypical models of depicting Russians, that are often seen in Finnish travel stories (Varpio 1991: 227–233). The Russian soldiers’ behaviour is depicted as aggressive and frightening:

Some other soldiers glanced at me looking very cruel, and shook their dirty fists in front of me, so that I started thinking that this might concern a lese-majesty. The others seemed merely to be amused by my trouble, they made faces and laughed holding their bellies.

However, the romantic encounter with the young Russian woman suggests fictional possibilities for transgressing such ethnic boundaries.

**By Train, by Foot and by Bike**

During the last decades of the 19th century, hand-written newspapers were adopted by both temperance and agrarian youth movements (Numminen 1961: 459–471; Karpio 1938: 449–450). Late 19th-century travel stories reflect technological and social changes. The introduction of trains and bicycles changed the technology of travelling, and along with it, the sense of space and time. My third case study is a temperance society known as *The Star* in Helsinki, and the weekly hand-written newspapers which were edited by the members of its speakers’ club, *Kehitys* (“Progress”). A volume of approximately 500 pages was written during the years 1891–1893, and it has been preserved in the manuscript department of the National Library. The society belonged to a nation-wide organization, Friends of Temperance, which was established in 1883. The membership of *The Star* varied between 100 and 200 members during the 1890s, the beginning of which saw an increased number of members drawn from the artisan and working classes. At the same time, the amount of students and civil servants diminished. About one third
of the members of the society were women, both unmarried and married and from different social backgrounds.\textsuperscript{12}

Some travel stories were published in \textit{Kehitys}, which followed the Grand Tour model in a more proletarian context of young artisans. For example, in October 1894 a writer under the pseudonym “Eemu” depicted a boat trip from Helsinki to Stockholm with his friend. In November 1894, another travel story was published, depicting a narrator’s experience of boat travel back to his home region of Karelia, after working for ten years in Helsinki and other cities in Finland.

There are also several stories centring on the summer retreats of young artisans and working class people, which follow the Retreat Story model. One of these is a two-part story, written by a young woman under the pseudonym “Enne”. She was one of the few female writers in \textit{Kehitys}, and published a few reports and poems in 1893. Based on small idiosyncrasies in her texts it appears that “Enne” had probably only undergone elementary schooling, and she may have been one of the four seamstresses or three female servants who belonged to the society in 1890 (Salmi-Niklander 2005:84–85).

The picnic report is a simple story: a group of young men and women makes a short trip by train and continues on foot for 13 kilometres to the seaside. The narrator proceeds in the collective first person plural, merging first into the group of four young women, who get up early on Sunday morning to be in time for their departure. They are worried since the rest of the group (young men) are late:

\begin{quote}
The whole trip started to look suspicious [for us], one thing and another was said about people who break their word. Only five minutes were left before the departure of the train, when at last four more people arrived – this was still not everyone but we could not wait any longer, we rushed to the train which soon blew the signal for departure. \textsuperscript{13} (Transl. K. Salmi-Niklander)
\end{quote}

The concerns about the exact time and being late were related to new experiences of railway travel (Ollila 2000: 53–55). “Enne” received a critical response from the male members of the group for her apparently innocent picnic report. The reasons for this (which was published in the next issue of \textit{Kehitys}), were some quite mild critical remarks she had offered about the young men’s behaviour during the picnic: she remarked on their almost missing the train and not carrying the coats and lunch bags of the girls right from the beginning. A close reading of the picnic report suggests a collective jealousy as being a possible reason for this aggressive response: after the young men courteously carried the luggage of the young women during the hike, the girls then neither see nor hear of them again, other than their host, a young Mikael Nyberg, who is courteously referred to as “Our Director”.

The picnic provides a possibility for collective intimacy between Mikael Nyberg and the picnickers: he shows them scenes from his childhood and also the cottage where he lives during the summer. Members of the Nyberg family invite the group to drink coffee and eat strawberries on their porch, which was a unique

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moment of intimacy for young working-class people. This was a well-known intellectual family, since Mikael Nyberg’s mother was daughter of the famous writer Zacharias Topelius, and the villa was next to his home, Koivuniemi manor. However, the family members are only referred to by their first names, which outlines the intimate spirit of the visit.

“Enne” never refers to herself as an individual actor, nor to her own emotions or experiences. However her emotions are reflected in the romantic tone of the depiction of the scenery, in which the narrator refers to herself and her friends using the collective third person:

The inlet was tranquil, the ancient birches offered cool in the shadow of their thick-growing branches, the aspen leaves quivered, and the birds sang songs of praise of their Creator, everything, everything was full of serene peace, which created new emotions in the heart of a traveller from Helsinki.14

Romantic and modern ideas and images are mixed in Enne’s travel story. The beginning of the journey is recounted using the tensions related to railway travel, but her depiction of the scenes at Koivuniemi manor relates more to romantic travel stories, in which scenes are presented as symbols of mental states.

Two months later in September 1893, two stories were published in Kehitys, which depicted a summer retreat which happened in the previous July: a group of six young men take the train to Kerava and continue by horse cart to a farmhouse, where they spend their summer vacation fishing, enjoying nature, and making friends with local “men of temperance”. The narration proceeds in the first person plural, with the members of the group referred to as “persons”.

It felt so sweet to travel on a beautiful summer evening surrounded by the singing birds, and in the good smell of all the fruits of the earth. When we got to our destination we could enjoy the hospitality of the people of the house. Later in the evening we were accommodated in two buildings close to each other, where we got comfortable dwellings. On the first morning we woke up early to the lovely singing of the birds and the gentle smile of the morning sun. After eating our breakfast we went to see the village scenery and in the afternoon we went fishing.15 (Transl. K. Salmi-Niklander)

I have determined by way of the indirect references to the other “men of temperance”, that the travellers were actually all men, but this fact is never openly stated. The writer behind the initials J.S. was probably Jaakko Saha, a construction worker and later an engine driver. His wife had joined the society before him, and it is quite probable that there were other wives and fiancées of the travellers among the listeners of this story. Compared to Enne’s story, the conventional nature observations give this story a feminine tone. It was important to convince the female spouses that their husbands had actually spent their holidays properly. As such, the collective narrator demarcates the boundary between the men of temperance, and “drunkards” who can be observed in the countryside. This especially comes out in the scene when travellers visit a local reformatory and some boys who they
had known in Helsinki: “It was nice to see the well-organized institute and those tidy boys, who earlier were great scoundrels”.

The other story coming from this same summer retreat rather follows the Grand Tour model. One of the travellers (probably a young pressman Karl Skogster) is a passionate cyclist and takes his bicycle (which is ironically referred to as his “horse”) to the retreat. He gets the mail and newspapers to his friends using his “horse”, and in the middle of their vacation he starts his own individual journey. Unlike the narrator of the retreat story, this narrator uses the narrative “I” the whole the time. He depicts in great detail his day’s journey, which is quite an achievement considering the road condition of the time:

On 22 July started my proper journey. I left from Tuusula at 6 in the morning and rode without resting about 35 km. Then I made a stop at a small tenant farm in Nurmiärvä. After having some breakfast I continued to Wihti, making a few stops at some houses to drink milk or water – whatever was available, until about noon. After riding 80 km made a stop at the Pakasela inn to have dinner and to dry my clothes since it rained several times. After having a rest for an hour I continued almost without a stop through Puusa and Somerniemi to the Söderkulla manor in Somero, where my brother was staying. There I rested for 3 days after riding 120 km in one single day. [...] Travelling in general felt very joyful although I was alone without a companion, but the new scenery attracted me so much that having a companion did not even come to my mind [...].

The individuality of the narrator’s experiences and emotions makes this story a counter-narrative to the retreat story, in which all the emotions and experiences are strictly collective. The bicycle revolutionized travel in a different manner than trains: it provided a means for long, solitary and independent journeys, and also the possibility to experience new scenery. The joy of solitary travel is often reflected in the detailed depictions of bike travels.

**Working-class Dandies on an Agitation Tour**

My last case study takes us to the 1920s, to the small industrial community of Högfors in Southern Finland. Young people in the community edited a handwritten newspaper *Valistaja* from 1914 to 1925. The paper was confiscated by the police in 1926 and later found in the attic of the local police station in the 1980s. The writers of *Valistaja* were young unmarried men and women in their late teens and early twenties, and formed the first fully literate generation in their families and community. The young men worked in the ironworks and the young women were either servants or worked on the farm owned by the ironworks (Salmi-Niklander 2004). *Valistaja* is an example of the heyday of handwritten newspapers during the first decades of the 20th century. Their great popularity during this period is largely due to the strict censorship of the times, the birth of the labor movement and the political uprising which occurred during the periods of Russification (Ehrnrooth 1992).
Young women had an active role in the youth club, and in editing *Valistaja*. However, during the last three years when *Valistaja* was published (1922–1925), the factory boys “took over” the paper with their travel stories, but only fragments of these stories have been preserved. In the travel stories, the writers depict the journey itself in great detail, including the relationship between travellers, their quarrels and discussions, and eating and drinking. The travel stories construct a complex narrative network. The same characters appear in several stories and the same events are depicted in many stories by different writers.

Two stories depict the same journey, an agitation tour to Oinasjärvi. Comprising loose sheets, it has only been possible to estimate a very approximate date of these stories, and based on their content it is likely they were both written during the years 1922–1923. One story however ends quite abruptly, since the writer runs out of paper. The stories are written in a spontaneous style, and were probably composed very soon after the tour had taken place.

The topic is an trip to Oinasjärvi, a village in the parish of Somero, around 40 km to the west of Karkkila. This is not a long journey in the context of today’s modern roads and vehicles, but at the time, with horse-drawn carriages on small and meandering roads it took a whole day. In the story, the young men were going to perform at a social evening in the local worker’s hall, which was an important activity for the young people in Karkkila. They divided into two groups, one of which has some difficulties in getting a horse and a carriage. Finally, they manage to get a local farmer to drive them to their destination with his horse and carriage, albeit with some skulduggery: they lie to him about the destination and then rely on his ignorance of the local geography.

The two stories provide good examples of the complex narrative positions in hand-written newspapers: in the first story, the narrator proceeds in the first person from the beginning to the end of the story, depicting his own observations and emotions. The narrator of the other story belongs to the less fortunate group of the travellers: his story proceeds in the first person plural, until he depicts the dialogue between himself and the farmer who has been fooled into driving them to their destination. When they get there, the young man and the farmer finally fall into conversation, and the narrator reveals that he has also served as a farmhand:

We arrived at the house – everyone’s mind seemed bright, coffee was on everybody’s lips. The men took their horses to the stables, except for the Bearded Lout [Partamoukka, the farmer]. The chap smoked and swore, so I soothed him and asked if he had been here before, and sure enough he knew all the places. I said I had been a farmhand in Hattula – what is the bigger house there, Passari? The man listed [the houses] – it was Passari. Yeah it was Passari I agreed.18 (Transl. K. Salmi-Niklander)

The two stories are good examples of collective “streams of consciousness” with expressions in the local dialect, jokes and incorrect orthography, which was typical of young men’s travel stories. The stories bring up the tensions between factory workers and local farmers, and a class border is indicated between them: the
young men act in quite an arrogant manner towards the farmer, even though they actually are dependent on him. Young factory boys are called by their first names, but the farmer is called the Bearded Lout (“Partamoukka”). The young women who form the audience of this story are also indirectly present: at the social evening and dance at the Oinasjärvi society hall, the narrator insinuates that the young men had (or at least tried to have) sexual relationships with the village girls. The girls are referred as a collective subject “Maanvahva” (“Heavy Earth”). However, sexuality was a delicate topic in the community of the young working-class men and women of Högfors, and young women opposed the rough behaviour of the boys, which they experienced as harassment. In villages, the factory boys were treated as dandies with amusing talk and fashionable outfits, whereas in Högfors they were controlled by their bosses, their fathers and the area officials.

Boundaries, Breaks and Continuities

Hand-written newspapers provided possibilities for presenting texts that could not have been published in print. Berndt August Paldani’s travel stories were written in a period when Russian officials strictly controlled and censored student activities, especially those with a nationalistic agenda. However, his stories were printed five decades later, after their value for folkloristic research had been recognized. In the 1880s students had more freedom, but the critique of Russian soldiers in Savo Karjalainen would still have been quite a sensitive theme to discuss in print. Hand-written newspapers in temperance societies and socialist organizations provided the first possibilities for publishing for writers from lower classes. The travel stories from Kehitys and Valistaja presented in this article, would hardly have passed the editorial evaluation of the printed papers of the time, because of their simple topics and use of nonstandard language.

Related with the great historical trends of travel writing, travel stories in hand-written newspapers have complex autobiographical elements. Paldani’s travel stories have a first-person-singular protagonist and quite strong scientific elements when detailed information on place-names and local traditions is provided. A day on Uuras Island also has a first-person-singular protagonist, but the fictionality of the story is underlined by parodic elements in his narration. Applying MacLu-lich’s terminology, Paldani’s travel stories follow the quest-model, leading towards a definite goal, whereas A day on Uuras Island follows the odyssey-model (MacLulich 1979).

The travel stories written by the members of the temperance society “Star” and by the young men in Högfors have first-person-plural protagonists, which makes them quite different from the stories written by university students. Small semiotic signs in encounters between classes (Varpio 1997: 238–240) are depicted “from below” in these stories. “Enne” depicts an intimate meeting with an upper-class family, which was a unique experience for a young working-class woman. The
male writers construct borders within the lower classes: for young workers and artisans in late 19th-century Helsinki, this boundary lay between decent men of temperance and drunkards; for the young factory boys in Högfors, the boundary lay between socialist factory workers and simple rural people in neighbouring villages.

Paldani’s folklore collecting travel stories and those of the Högfors factory boys have some parallel features, even though the social background and ideology of the travellers are quite different. One of these parallel features is the wavering masculine subject, a group of young men wandering from one place to another. Another common feature is the dependency and dialogue between the traveller and the coachman. Both Paldani and the factory boys are on a great mission, be it collecting folklore or agitating socialist ideology, however in their travel stories this great mission is rather presented as a spontaneous drifting from one place to another. Common to both sets of stories though, is the treatment of women as anonymous, mostly collective subjects.

Rita Felski (1995: 16–17) and Janet Wolff (1990: 35–50) have observed the masculinity of the figure of “the flâneur” – an idle observer of urban life. Young women in 19th and early 20th century Finland adopted, parodied and ironized travel stories as a masculine genre in their own writing (Salmi-Niklander 2007: 204–205). Hidden or neutralized gender was a new narrative convention in the conversational communities of young men and women, which started to be established in late 19th century: in many local event narratives and also in some travel stories, it is quite difficult to determine the gender of the narrator.

Time and space are important aspects in travel stories and in local event narratives in general, and they often demarcate boundaries of class and gender. Anne Ollila (2000) has observed the experience of time in the personal writings of young middle class women in late 19th century Finland. One of the key experiences brought by the new technical development, especially the trains, was the importance of exact time (Ollila 2000: 53–55). Berndt Paldani and the bicyclist of Kehitys carefully document the times, spaces and place names of their travels. In contrast, travel stories often include sequences where “the time vanishes” in the collective experience of the beauty of nature, or in breath-taking experiences such as a sleigh ride over weak ice. Anne Ollila’s research material also includes letters written by a young woman in a sanatorium, which reflect a parallel experience of “vanishing time” (Ollila 2000: 87–92).

Digital information has revolutionized media culture in early twenty-first century, but many apparently new phenomena have old roots. Travelogues are a very popular genre in blogs, and many parallel narrative practices can be observed between travel blogs and hand-written newspapers. Another common feature is the possibility for immediate feedback, either in oral performance situations or with written comments or signals. Travel is today associated with the transition period between childhood and adulthood, and global Grand Tours are still an important
part of upper and middle class education. Studying the history of young people’s alternative forms of publishing provides insight for the new media with old and new border crossings.

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**Notes**
1 One example of popular travelogues is the sequence in the autobiographical diary of a crofter’s son Kalle Eskola, in which he depicts in detail the training in Krasnoje Selo near St. Petersburg in 1889, during his military service in a sharpshooter battalion near St. Petersburg (Kauranen 2009: 149–156).
2 My formulation of the term is related to the ethnographic-ideological orientation in the research of orality and literacy, which focuses on hybrid oral-literate practices (“literacies”) as challenging the “great-divide” model of orality and literacy (See for example: Street 1993).
4 "Mainitsemata en kuitenkaan voi olla, kun vähän aikaa olimme kulkeneet, sitä loistoa, joka näkyy taivahalla. Kauniilta näkyy tämä kaumemaksi; kun punainen valo välistävuoneesta välistähuimen niin kuin rutjat (norrsken) syökseiset tielle, niin kuin maantie mutkisteleeksen, niin näkyy tämä miloin pohjoisella miloin luoteella, niin että tien vieressä olevat junat, muttei sattunutkaan tiehemme, vaan jää sivullisen ja viimein katoseli pois näkökahteltansa (synkrets). Kaiketikki oli tämä valkean vaara, ja raukat ne, joita kova onko hinnateltava."  
5 "Huonoa oli jää, niin että vesi pulppahti halkomaisen, jolloin minä epäin ja tahdon takaisin pyöritteen, mutta siihen vastasi mies: ’otetaan hurskas luonto päällemme ja ajetaan hurskaasti’."  
6 "Hän on ystävällinen ja puhelias mies ja kulkin itteenkin hyvin hupasesi hänen työnnänä [...])"  
7 "Mutta mintähden menestypyy verähtäminen paremmin nyt, kun talvella? Sentähden, että minä olen tottonut asiain toimittamaan paremmin, ja rahvas ei tätä enää pidä ihmeenä. Mitä vielä – talvella sanoin mennessänä melkein joka paikassa: vielä tullen, laittakaa juttuneen muistoon, kun valittivat muistosta pois menneen [...]."


“Plölässä lepäsi merenlahti, ikivanhat koivut tarjosivat viileyttä tuuheiden oksiensa siimekessä, haavan lehdet leikkivät ja linnut lauloivat kiitoslauluja luojallensa, kaikki kaikki oli tyyntä rauhaa, joka loi Helsingistä tuleen matkailian sydämmeen uutisia tunteita.”

Tuntui niin suloiselta matkustaa kauniina kesäehtoina lintujen sävelten ympäröimänä, ja maan kaikenlaisten hedelmien hyvää tuokyntöä. Matkataid alkaa viihtyä tuhamaan, mutta niin sanoista kyllä on kaikki saa. Matkalla saa viihtyä lintujen sävelten ympäröimänä, ja maan kaikenlaisten hedelmien hyvää tuokyntöä.
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Rattling Sabres and Evil Intruders: 
The Border, Heroes and Border-crossers in Panfennist and Soviet Socialist Realist Literature

By Thekla Musäus

Abstract

In this article I analyse Russian and Soviet Karelian literary texts written in Finnish at the time and in the style of socialist realism, and Finnish poems, songs and novels of the same era, proposing the idea of a ‘Greater-Finland’. I turned my attention to the question of how the depiction, construction and use of borders is handled in the respective texts, and look to determine whether the opposed ideologies of Soviet Communism and Panfennism led to similar or different artificial results. This analysis proves that the texts of the two ideologies generally draw strict distinctions between the ‘heroes’ of their own side and the bad ‘Others’. Only the heroes of the plot are able to either cross borders or to establish new ones. While in the Soviet texts opponents of Soviet society inside the Soviet Union are depicted as foreign and separated through ideological, symbolic and topographical borders, the Karelians in the Finnish texts are suspected as a hybrid people, spoiled by their contact with the evil Russians.

Keywords: Topographical and symbolic borders, literary rhetorics, socialist realism, panfennist ideology, Stalinism, Karelia
Introduction

At the beginning of a Finnish book about Eastern Karelia published in 1934, there is a photograph: an aisle between dark fir and birch trees, subtitled ‘Raja’ – ‘The border’ (Akateeminen Karjala-Seura 1934: 7). On the other side of the Finnish-Russian border, in a Pravda article of 1932, a lengthy caption about the achievements of socialism reads: ‘Each new factory and sovchoz (farm state) stabilises socialism in the USSR and strengthens the power of the world’s proletariat in its struggle for communism, and for a worldwide Soviet Republic.’

The dreams and ideals of the small western country of Finland about security and a greater fatherland called ‘Suur-Suomi’ (‘Greater Finland’), and the Soviet Russian utopia of worldwide communist upheavals: both for distinct ideologies, but can these two ideologies in any way be compared?

In this text I shall discuss whether and to what extent there were similarities between Panfennism,2 and the Russian Communist ideology of the 1920s and the times of Stalinism.3 As sources to analyse I have not chosen seemingly ‘objective’ or ‘scientific’ official statements such as geographical textbooks and dogmatic newspaper articles, but rather fictional texts. The reason for this is the assumption that the rhetorics of the two ideologies may find a more diversified and subtle ground for expression, in the especially rhetorical argumentation typical of fictional genres such as novels and poems. By analysing fictional and lyrical texts I want to identify the ideology in the argumentation techniques of fictional narration, plot and lyrically coded emotions. I also wish to detect how those elements of literary discourse in their own way contribute to the underlying ideology (cf. Plett 2001: IV, 1). The motif of the ‘border’ and connected literary motifs of bordering and liminality such as ‘the others’, ‘the enemies’, even possible ‘friends abroad’ hereby prove to be a central element in the structure of the chosen texts (Schimanski & Wolfe 2007: 14). Taken together, these elements constitute an important part of the ideologies in question.

In the first part of this text, after considering the general question of comparing different ideologies, I shall briefly outline the important traits concerning the ‘border’ in the ideologies of Soviet Communism and Panfennism. In the rhetorical analysis of selected literary works, in the second part I shall concentrate on the motif of the ‘border’ as it emerges in the texts (cf. Keränen 1996). In the texts, I shall show how the concept and literary motif of the ‘border’ fits into the literary discourse of both ideologies from the 1920s until the beginning of World War II in 1939. In my analysis, I shall take into account episodes which deal with topographical and physical borders, and their transgression and confirmation, as well as episodes dealing with inner and symbolic borders. Some general information about Finland and its history in the first half of the 20th century, as well as some details about the cultural impacts of Stalinism will be necessary at the beginning of my reflections.
Comparing Ideologies

Comparing different ideologies such as Stalinism and Fascism has become a frequent subject of studies: Hitler and Stalin, the ‘minor’ dictators of the 20th century (e.g. Mussolini, Franco, Salazar), together with their associated mechanisms, culture and history have been investigated from many different points of view (cf. for example Luks 2007; Fitzpatrick & Geyer 2009; Jessen 2011). These subject studies are all gathered under the general heading of ‘totalitarian regimes’ (cf. Arendt 1962; Pohlmann 1995).

Can these studies set an example for comparing Finnish and Soviet/Russian ideologies in the first half of the 20th century? Since the era of Stalin, the Bolshevik regime in the Soviet Union may without doubt be termed as totalitarian, but Finland was a democratic country at this time. Having become independent in 1917, it had a functioning parliament with bourgeois, democratic, socialist and even communist parties, and also a free press. Nevertheless, after the civil war in 1918 which ended in favour of the ‘Whites’, reactionary forces were predominant. Communist viewpoints and ideals were suppressed, and for a long time, the victims of the civil war on the ‘red’ side were either criminalised or just not talked about (Ylikangas 2002: 408).

At this time, hegemonic ideas were gaining in repute in Finnish society. During the Romantic period of the middle of the 19th century, Elias Lönnrot (1802–1884) created the national epic Kalevala (Lönnrot 1849/1982), mostly from poems he had collected from the Karelian inhabitants of the Eastern ‘Russian’ part of Karelia. Since this time, the ideal of a great past (and future) of Finland had become part of the cultural movement of ‘Karelianism’ in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Sihvo 2003). Among artists and the socially active, there arose a sense of unity and closeness, together with a feeling of obligation by the Finns to help and free the Finnic people on the other side of the Finnish-Russian border (Niinistö 2005: 16–21). The main enemy in this struggle appeared to be the Russians. So, Panfennist ideas already had some tradition before the time of Finnish independence from Russia. Different to the ideal of ‘Karelianism’ in the arts, Panfennism had a decidedly political (if not polemic) impact and also had political actors behind it, for example the members of the ‘Akateeminen Karjala-seura’ (‘Academic Society of Karelia’, AKS) – a student and academic association which was very popular and influential in Finland in the 1920s and 1930s (Eskelinen 2004). Panfennism propagated the idea of a Greater Finland, which was considered to comprise of Finland as well as the surrounding territories of the White Sea/or Vienan Karelia and Ladoga Karelia, Ingria, Votia and also Estonia (Paasi 1996: 101); areas which have traditionally been inhabited by Finnic people. Panfennism idealises a hereditary, historically founded unity of different Finnic people under the guidance of Finland, subtly defining Finland and ‘Finnishness’ as somehow superior to others. After becoming independent in 1917, in Finland there were
both political and military attempts to unite the Karelian areas east of the Finnish border with Finland (Kauppala 2013: 160–162). In the Continuation War of 1941–1944, Finnish troops set foot in Eastern Karelian areas which had never previously belonged to Finland. The Panfennist groups openly welcomed this chance to create a ‘Greater Finland’ consisting of the whole of Eastern Karelia and Finland (Pimiä 2012).

What of the development of Finland’s big neighbour, the Soviet Union in the meantime? Founded as a federation of equal socialist countries, the officials of the Soviet Union initially spoke of an expected world revolution. At the beginning of the 1920s, the Karelian Soviet Republic was designed as a model republic, in the hope to lure Finland and other Scandinavian countries to change their political systems and become Socialist (Baron 2007: 20–51). In the 1930s however, when the world revolution seemed to be delayed, the Soviet Union concentrated more intensely on its internal problems – it was the time of Stalinist purges and repression. Even in these times of Stalinist repression, the Soviet Union still presented the ideal of being different people united under the leadership of the Russian Soviets; an ideal opposed to that of backward ‘bourgeois nationalism’ (cf. Slezkine 1994: 414–415). When talking about the imperialist Western countries, it was stressed that any hostility was mainly directed at the ruling classes and not to the working people of these countries. So the ideological framework of the Soviet Union propagated the picture of the Soviet Union as being the defender of every nation and their people’s rights. Under the unifying ideology of free and equal people under the flag of communism, borders were long perceived to be of only minor interest. However, historians and sociologists studying the Soviet era are beginning to realize that the official ideology of a borderless unity and solidarity among all people in the Soviet Union was accompanied from the very beginning by a decided segregation of nationalist ideas and politics (cf. Slezkine 1994: 415). The results of the present literary analysis correlate with this apprehension.

**Texts**

From the middle of the 1920s, and especially after the First Congress of the Soviet Writers Association in 1934, the fictional texts of Soviet writers of the time under consideration were expected to be a voice of Communist ideology. However, the question is more complicated if one considers those texts written in a Panfennist key. As there was no official obligation or aesthetic prescription of how to express pro-Finnic ideas or ideals in fictional literature, the detection of the traits of Panfennism may prove more difficult. The long tradition of the ‘Karelianist’ idealisation of an ancient Finnish culture in literature, painting, sculpture and architecture can serve as an aesthetic background for a more aggressive ideology of Panfennist superiority. A thorough rhetorical analysis of the topos of the border within each ideology gives a possibility for comparing the two ideals against a
neutral background (Plett 2001:15–16). Not in spite of the fictional character of the texts chosen, but especially because of their fictionality, these texts make it possible to discover the elements of ideological rhetorics subtly intertwined with and part of their literary devices of plot, structure and style.

**Panfennism**

As mentioned above, Panfennist ideas had a tradition which stemmed from at least the turn of the 19th century – the time of cultural ‘Karelianism’. ‘Karelianism’ then dominated all spheres of the arts, literature, architecture, music – and thus the whole society. Already in descriptions of his journey to Eastern Karelia, in 1880 the journalist Vilhelm August Ervasti (1845–1900) points out, that ‘behind the border, the Finnish land still continues with another third of its parts’ (Ervasti 2005: 239). His observation ends with the wish that:

[...] the time shall come again, when the Finnish fatherland will have the same wide borders, as it had had in olden times [...]. The voice of the blood would not talk in an incomprehensible language anymore [...]. We would not be Swedes in the eyes of the Karelian anymore, nor would they be Russians in our eyes. The same Finnish land would embrace both.5

(Ervasti 2005: 242.)

The olden times he refers to are the prehistoric past, which was generally thought to be depicted in the *Kalevala* as an era of some kind of prefinnic kingdom.

During the Finnish Civil War, Ilmari Kianto (1874–1970) compiled a booklet of Anti-Russian poems under the title *Hakkaa päälle* (Hit them on the head, 1918). Kianto was a Finnish writer, who at the end of the 19th century had studied in Russia and lived most of his life in the Finnish part of Karelia. He supported pro-finnic ideals but also wrote socially critical novels and was in conflict with the Lutheran church because of his liberal ideas. ‘For a Greater Finland – a free Vienan [i.e. White Sea] Karelia!’6 (Kianto 1918: 58) is the title of one of his poems from 1918. To achieve a Greater Finland, he calls for the ‘the payment, which the fatherland demands from its infallible blood […] the spiritual crown of pearls, which was achieved by martyrs!’7 (Kianto 1918: 62). In his novel *The Virgin of Viena* (*Vienan neitsyt*) Kianto draws the picture of a heroic Karelian girl, ‘Taria of the shore of Tshirkka’8 (Kianto 1920: 17), being killed by brutal Russians while fighting for the purity and independence of her homeland of Karelia. The novel is based on the history of the so-called ‘Kinship-Wars’, when in the time after Finnish independence from Russia from 1917–1922, Finnish army divisions and individual volunteers went over the border into Russian territory in order to fight for the independence of these areas from the young Soviet Union and to unite the respective regions with Finland (cf. Niinistö 2005). In the novel, Finnish volunteers come over the border between Finland and White Sea Karelia to a little Karelian village on lake Tshirkka. One of the protagonists (a Finnish soldier) explicitly states that the border they have crossed ‘should not exist anymore’9
The Finnish volunteers plan to unite Karelia with Finland. Flowery, lofty comparisons are given, in which their military expedition is compared to ‘the Finnish war-bridegroom, the one who was sent to wed Viena-Karelia.’

(Taria, falls in love with one of the Finnish soldiers. He doesn’t have a name, but she only calls him ‘hero’ (‘sankari’: Kianto 1918: 60 onwards), although he protests: ‘A hero one becomes, only when one ceases to be touchable by the hand.’ Heroes are the soldiers in the other world’s army.’

(Kianto 1918: 48). To leave for the ‘other world’ will be his fate too, as is that of all the heroes in the story, be they Finnish or Karelian. The Karelians, ‘this slaves’ people of ancient poems’, in the eyes of the Finnish saver ‘shall not melt together with the Slavic ill, deceitful blood, but from the very beginning of their existence are presupposed to unite with that dawning land [i.e. Finland]’ (Kianto 1918: 48).

Nevertheless the attempt to unite Viena-Karelia to Finland fails. In Kianto’s story, this is explained by the ‘double-dealing character of Karelia’

(Kianto 1918: 168): The deceitfulness was the sin of your people’s bosom – the slave’s mark was branded on your forehead, as the curses of your thousands of years’ old history were tormenting you [...].

(Kianto 1918: 168)

In his 1931 poem ‘Rajalla’ (‘At the border’, Kailas 1939: 247–249), the young poet of Finnish modernism, Uuno Kailas (1901–1933) doesn’t offer a word about the ‘hybrid’ Karelians (cf. Young 1995: 4, 18–19). He only talks of the Russians as inhuman, Asian forces of the steppes, and foretells ‘a morning of blood is to be seen’ (Kailas 1939: 248). The speaker of the poem, the ‘guardsman’ swears to defend his homeland against the ‘icy breath of the east’ at the border, which he calls the ‘chasm in the ice’ at the border, which he calls the ‘chasm in the ice’

(Kianto 1920: 48). In one of the most popular Panfennist poems, the March of the AKS (1926, text by a popular songwriter of the time Reino Hirvisappä, 1906–1992), this ideal is made even clearer: ‘[...] we draw the border with a sword. / This is our obligation as brothers / [...]’ A new morning of Greater Finland is to break / [...]’

(Hirvisappä 1942; cf. Sulamaa 2011: 25) Last but not least, there is the famous ‘Scabbard Order’ (‘Miekantuppipäiväkäsky’) of General Mannerheim, head of the Finnish army at the time of both the Winter War (1939–1940) and the Continuation War (1941–1944) (cf. Fingerroos 2010: 121; Meinander 2012: 72). At the beginning of the Continuation War, Mannerheim rather bluntly talked of new borders between Finland and Russia and of ‘freeing’
Karelia, referring thereby to an order he had given already in 1918 (Niinistö 2005: 24):

[...] I said to the Finnish and the White Sea Karelia ns, that I’m not going to put my sword into its scabbard, before Finland and Eastern Karelia are free. I swore this in the name of the Finnish people’s army, trusting in its heroic men, in Finland’s self-sacrificing women.23

(Mannerheim 1941).

If one keeps in mind that Panfennist thought in the time after Finnish independence up to the 1940s was not an official ideology in Finland, but just one among other ideas in a basically democratic country, it is surprising how open, if not to say aggressively the idea of a Finnish superiority is expressed in the analysed texts. The chauvinist and racist metaphors about spoiled blood, deceitful character and a slave’s precondition in Kianto’s texts make it clear that the Russians and the Karelians are in every respect inferior to the Finns. The ‘Pocahontas-myth’ evoked in the character of the Karelian heroine Taria and the comparison of Karelia with a pure princess, adds to this stereotypic structure (cf. Theweleit 1999). Kailas’ equations of the Russians with uncivilised forces of ‘Asian’ origin, point in the same direction. This popular symbolic border confrontation of Russia as representing barbarism, and of Finland as western, representing civilisation, is one of the core elements of the Panfennist border rhetoric (cf. Paasi 1996: 170–172). The motifs of border-shifting, expressed by Kianto’s Finnish protagonists as the intention to incorporate Eastern Karelia into Finland are therefore not real border crossings over to the ‘other side’ of the border. Instead, in the terms of the Panfennists, a ‘real’ or ‘correct border’ has to be drawn further east. The metaphor of slashing a wound into the morphology of the Karelian landscape used in Hirvisseppä’s, Kianto’s and Mannerheim’s texts makes the aggressive character of Panfennism quite clear. The corporeality of the Finnish state and its border also suggests the ‘naturalness’ of the aspired borders between the Finnish Self and the Russian Other (cf. Paasi 1996: 195). The Karelian virgin of Kianto’s story truly belongs to the concept of the Finnish hero (Kianto 1920: 60). In her purity, the union with the Finnish soldier is symbolised by an innocent ride on a reindeer (Kianto 1920: 62–63), whereas the Russian invaders of course try to rape her. Their illegal penetration into the Karelian lands and their attempted crime against the innocent girl, lead the girl to murder her captors before dying. The seemingly simple plot of the story is complicated by the fact that Taria’s brother Arhippa, who had become a soldier in the Soviet army, comes back to his home village and emerges as the one who has killed Taria’s beloved Finnish hero. This dramatic revelation fits perfectly with the thesis of the ‘hybridity’ of the Karelian people, mentioned above.

The seriousness of the Panfennist ideological conflict between the good Finns and the bad Russians as a matter of life and death is stressed by the religious and ethical connotations in the texts – the ‘obligation as brothers’, and the ‘martyr-
dom’ of the defenders of Finland and its kin. So it is no surprise, that the male ‘hero’ of the story as well as the girl herself, her parents, and the loyal younger brother and sister cross the final metaphysical border into death, supposedly all landing on the better side of it, in the realm of heroes. Christian faith is dominant in the story and the girl Taria for example, gives the Finnish hero a silver cross as a token of her fidelity before parting with him (cf. Paasi 1996: 193–199).

Hirviseppä makes use of the symbolic borders of time in another way, in order to stress the truthfulness of Panfennic ideals: ‘a new morning’ is going to break, when the goal of a Greater Finland will be achieved. Kailas also talks of a border in time, although in a much more pessimistic tone, foretelling ‘a morning of blood’ – the confrontation between the eastern enemy and the western Finnish border guard.

Socialist Realism

This is the frontier – two posts facing one another in silent hostility, each standing for a world of its own. […] The two poles stand on level ground, yet there is a deep gulf between them and the two worlds they stand for. You cannot cross the intervening six paces except at the risk of your life.

This is the frontier. (Ostrovsky 1952/2002: 114) 24

This epigraph is taken from the novel How the Steel was Tempered (Kak zakashalasl’ stal’, 1932) by Nikolai Ostrovsky (1904–1936), one of the canonised and most popular authors of socialist realism. The border mentioned here is that between Poland and the Soviet Union, but it could just as well be anywhere else on the border of the Soviet Union:

From the Black Sea over thousands of kilometres to the Arctic Ocean in the Far North stands the motionless file of these silent sentinels of the Soviet Socialist Republics bearing the great emblem of labour on their iron shields.

(Ostrovsky 1952/2002: 114) 25

The main character of the novel, Pavel Korchagin, is also a guardsman (at least for some time of his life). He is the son of a poor worker, a worker himself, hero of the civil war, guardsman and member of the Cheka, the special military force created to fight any enemies inside the Soviet Union (later to become the KGB). In the course of the 1930s, the border guard is to become one of the ideal heroes of the Socialist Realist novel (cf. Herold 1999: 110), and vigilance against internal and external enemies was to become one of the most idealised qualities of that time (cf. Günther 1994: 89). The frontier guard and Chekist embodies these traits of character in an ideal way.

Since the foundation of the Soviet Writers’ union in 1932, the latest Soviet literature was bound to the dogma of socialist realism (cf. Clark 2000: 3–4; Lorenz 1994: 81). Soviet novels had to fulfil strict demands to depict Socialist reality in a positive, heroic light, to create positive heroes with no doubts or hesitations, and
to have a relatively simple plot. The creativity of the authors was harshly reduced; facts and a documentary style as used in the newspapers were to be the guideline. Also to provide a template were some exemplary canonical works, for example *How the Steel was Tempered* by Ostrovsky, or *Cement* (1925), a novel about the reconstruction of a factory after the civil war, sabotage and the socialists’ struggle with backward engineers and bureaucrat, written by Fedor Gladkov (1883–1958) (cf. Clark 2000: 4–5). In contrast to the flowery language used in the Finnish texts analysed above, the style of the Soviet stories is rather laconic and matter-of-fact, although the special metaphors and symbols of Socialism are of course present. Dialogues and descriptive passages dominate, whereas parables and the comparison of digressions are rarely to be found.

In the Soviet Union, the Finns did not play such big a role as a neighbour as is seen in the Finnish context. Finland fitted into the general picture of capitalist neighbours on the other side of the Soviet border, and even worse, during the Second World War, Finland was perceived as part of Hitler’s fascist system and his plan to take over Russia (cf. Meinander 2012).

While the general attitude of socialist ideology can be found in any of the novels published from the 1930s until the 1950s, the Soviet Karelian fiction, written in Finnish and published in the Karelian Soviet Republic can shed additional light on the special relationship between the Soviet Union and Finland. I have decided to analyse both Soviet Karelian and contemporary Russian fiction, in order to grasp as much as possible of the Soviet ideas about borders as represented in fictional texts of that time.

In the Karelian Soviet narratives, the general patterns of socialist realism prevail. The Soviet Karelian Finns are united with the Russians in the struggle against evil capitalists and ‘butchers’ (Heimovaara 1934: 128), creeping from the other side of the Finnish-Soviet border into Karelia at the time of the civil war, in order to cruelly murder innocent Bolshevik cadres. Nationality is not usually mentioned. Only the fact that a certain work is written in Finnish, with use of Finnish names of localities and story characters, suggests that it is about Karelian Finns and not about Russians. This uniformity applies also to Ostrovsky’s novel. The main part of its action takes place in the Ukraine, but the story is written in Russian and its characters usually speak Russian; any differences between Ukrainian and Russian nationality seem irrelevant. The fact that a person belongs to another nation or is in any other way different or foreign is mentioned only in respect of the enemies – be they Finns from the other side of the Finnish-Soviet border or enemies within the Soviet Union. The saboteur in Oskari Johannssons (1892–1938) short story ‘To the last log’ (‘Viimeiseen parteen’ 1935) is, although not from capitalist Finland, a foreign Karelian from the area of Tver. When he is trying to provoke the honourable Bolshevik Karelian lumberjacks, one of them bursts out: ‘Why have you come here then, heretic?’ (Johansson 1935b: 75) and continues ‘Wrap soft cotton bandages around your hands and go back to where
you have come from!’" (Johansson 1935b: 75). Of course the evil foreign intruder and saboteur is in the end punished and marked as a ‘foreign element’ – ‘a kulak’ – an outsider of Soviet society: ‘[…] the kulak had to take the responsibility for his deeds before the people’s court’ (Johansson 1935b: 84). Enemies on the other side of either inner or outer ideological, or real borders are usually not characterised individually, but mostly through their negative deeds or simply through their being on the other side of the (ideological) border. So, an almost anonymous enemy is placed in opposition to the good, individualised Soviet citizens (cf. Günther 1994: 100; Herold 1999: 114).

In the Russian Soviet novels, the enemies of the new era are seen as ‘foreign elements’. In Gladkov’s novel Cement these are also seen as Kalmyk Tatars and uncivilised Cossacks, behaving ‘like gypsies’ (Gladkov 1951: 113), the typical outcasts of society. They live in an isolated mountain area, difficult to reach. In How the Steel was Tempered, bandits and smugglers are in close contact with foreign elements, the ‘colony of rich German farmers’ (Ostrovsky 2002: 138). The latter do not integrate into the Bolshevik society but their ‘kulak farms’ stand apart ‘within half a kilometre of each other’, their houses are ‘as sturdily built as miniature fortresses’ (Ostrovsky 2002: 138).

In this novel dealing with the time of revolution and the civil war, the outer borders of the Soviet Union play an important role, as they are shaping the new, united Union of Socialist Soviet Republics, and also as a place for heroes to prove their superiority. In Cement, which takes place after the victory of the Bolsheviks in the Civil War, only the internal borders are relevant – there is no longer a need to stress the Soviet Union’s general unity. Additional to the heroic borders of the Soviet Union in Ostrovsky’s novel, internal borders of society such as those between the expatriate German farmers and the Soviet citizens proper are mentioned. These internal borders, in a way, repeat and reaffirm the external border, serving as a kind of duplication of the latter (cf. Schimanski 2006: 49–50).

In the stories analysed, the Soviet hero is the one who is able to cross those internal borders which are often immaterial or symbolic, and thus demonstrates his power and qualities as a superior being, not being bound by any limits (cf. Görner and Kirkbright 1999: 9). The special role of the Soviet hero concerning those internal borders becomes clear in an episode of How the Steel was Tempered in a scene which takes place in a train compartment. In order to repair some electrical defect, Korchagin, who is serving as a technician for the Soviet railway administration, enters the wagon of Polish (i.e. capitalist enemy) diplomats waiting at a Soviet railway station for further transport. He recognises the lady in the compartment as a former neighbour from his home village, Nelly Leshchinskaia. Again it is the Soviet hero, who is able to cross an important (immaterial) border, the border of languages (cf. Schimanski 2006: 42): Switching to Polish, Korchagin reminds the noblewoman of their former acquaintance. Korchagin’s border-crossing and the conversation which follows makes the border between the...
bourgeois woman and the working hero even more real: instead of seeking friendly words for her former childhood playmate, the lady insultingly calls him ‘the servant, just as you always were’ (Ostrovsky 2002: 103). The Soviet hero retains his innocence and integrity, reminds her of her bad behaviour and stays polite: ‘[…] in fact we’re even polite to them [i.e. the bourgeois diplomats], which is more than can be said of yourself.’ (Ostrovsky 2002: 103). While trying to re-establish the former social border between the laundress’ son and herself, the lawyer’s daughter, Nelly in fact establishes another one, the (seemingly paradoxical) one between civilized Soviet working men and uncivilized bourgeois Polish diplomats. Her moral inferiority is further stressed by the fact that she is addicted to cocaine (Ostrovsky 2002: 104).

In their heroic lives, the main characters of the Soviet novels often cross more than one spiritual border, those of ideology and faith, when they overcome the mistrust of the old society while serving the party (cf. Schimanski 2006: 55–56). They also have to undergo a transitional situation (usually in war), where they almost die but miraculously survive. Endorsed with superhuman abilities, the Soviet hero ‘cross[es] […] the borderline of death’ (Ostrovsky 2002: 68), sometimes even more than once. ‘A jump over death’ (Gladkov 1951: 101) is the title of a chapter in Cement. In this chapter the female hero is captured by Kalmyk rebels who threaten her and even feign her assassination, after which she again gets free. Describing Pavel’s recovery after being wounded in the civil war, Ostrovsky writes: ‘This was a second birth […]’ (Ostrovsky 1954: 147). When defeating death, the hero as a sacrifice, often loses some precious part of his integrity, for example his eyesight (Korchagin in How the Steel was Tempered), or his legs like Pesa in From Beneath the Branch Harrow (Risukarhin alta, 1934) by the Finnish-writing author Torsten Heimovaara (?–1938). Despite such suffering however, the hero continues with superhuman strength to serve the party. This loss of corporal abilities or parts of the body can be interpreted as a special and very personal kind of gift the hero has to make, in order to cross the border to perfection (cf. Schimanski 2006: 43). For the ‘newborn’ main character, in his feelings and actions, the usual limits and constraints of society no longer seem to be important. He becomes an omnipotent and sometimes rebellious, fairy tale-like hero (Clark 2000: 138–141). When emotions are characterised as absolutely right and ideal in Ostrovsky’s novel, they are called ‘borderless’ – for example there is ‘borderless fury’ (Ostrovsky 1954: 99), ‘borderless patience’ (Ostrovsky 1954: 149), ‘borderless joy’ (Ostrovsky 1954: 156) and so on.

In the scene at the Polish-Soviet border mentioned above, of course it is the Soviet border guard who is, if only symbolically, able to cross the insurmountable border. Being properly and warmly dressed in his Soviet uniform, he is asked by the Polish border guard to lend him some matches: ‘[T]he frontier service regulations forbid one from entering into any conversation across the border’ (Ostrovsky 2002: 116), but he feels pity for the freezing Polish border guard:
'The poor beggar may be a bourgeois soldier but he’s got a hell of a life. Imagine being chased out into this cold in that miserable outfit, no wonder he jumps about like a rabbit, and with nothing to smoke either. ' Without turning around, the Red Army man threw a box of matches across to the other. (Ostrovsky 2002: 116) 42

This kind of border crossing is in no contradiction to Herold’s observation that in the stories she analysed, the Soviet frontier guards explicitly do not cross the physical border. They stay portrayed as the good and righteous ones on their own side, only defending Soviet territory against intruders from outside.43 As Ostrovsky’s border guard does not physically cross the border himself but only makes a thing cross the border, he in fact makes the border more concrete (cf. Herold 1999: 112). The small box of matches however, which symbolises the superiority and freedom of the Soviet guardsman is not allowed to stay on the other side of the border: the Polish soldier notices some propagandistic Soviet text on it and quickly throws it back.

In the Karelo-Finnish novel, the real border can sometimes be transgressed in another way: The actions of some of the novels of Johansson, situated in former, feudalist times take place in a removed place: ‘[f]ar away behind the hills […]’ (Johansson 1935a: 15). Also in his monumental novel Jymyvaaralaiset, published in Karelia in 1932, the exiled Finnish communist writer Eemeli Parras (1884–1939) doesn’t make it absolutely clear whether the story of a farmer’s family from before the time of the revolution is taking place either in Finland or in Eastern Karelia. When talking about former feudal times, it sometimes seems to be easier or maybe even desirable to situate the plot ‘abroad’, not explicitly in Karelia or Russia. Thus the border between ‘them’ and ‘us’ is blurred and the situation depicted seems even more remote. The border of time ‘before the revolution’ and the topographical border between ‘here’ and ‘somewhere far away’ unite to stress the total difference of the depicted situations, with the glorious socialist reality that exists in the Karelian republic of the storyteller’s presence (cf. Schimanski 2006: 55–57).

Conclusion

Both Panfennists and Stalinists want to cross borders: the Panfennists want to get over the Finno-(Russian-)Karelian border in order to unite the Eastern Karelian area with Finland, and the Soviets want to cross the borders in order to achieve communism for the whole world, although in fictional literature this aim is only of minor importance. In Soviet literature of the 1920s and 1930s, ‘internal borders’ in society play a much more important role and sometimes act as a mirror for the external borders. Panfennists consider the existing border between Finland and Russia as wrong, and see it as their right and obligation to correct it in order to draw a ‘right’ border between their kin and the ‘others’. The brutal metaphors of slashing the borderline into the ground as a wound, in an interesting way corre-
spond to the body rhetorics that Herold has observed in the Soviet border novels of the second half of the 1930s: there the Soviet state which has to be defended is also associated with a body. The transgression of borders associated to the body’s skin automatically becomes an illegal intrusion into the body of Soviet society (Herold 1999: 118–119).

The ‘correct’ border, (be it new or existing), is depicted as an absolute, insurmountable line, a chasm as represented in Kailas’ poem, or an unbreakable chain of border posts as featured in Ostrovsky’s novel. All the good is on this side, and the bad on the other. In both Soviet and panfennist literature, the enemy stays as the enemy, and fraternity is restricted to one’s own kind. The moral borders correspond to both social and real ones. The moral superiority of the heroes does however make some symbolic temporary border crossing possible, and the defenders of their own borders are portrayed as the idealised heroes of the society which they represent.

Panfennist heroes have to cross the visible, existing border of Finland and by force draw an ideal, ‘right’ border (or at least try to do so), to achieve real heroic qualities. By being called ‘martyrs’, their mission acquires an additional religious character, but it also openly declares their fate – they have to die for their great deeds. Soviet heroes on the other hand only have to nearly cross the border between life and death in order to become perfect. In their actions they are the only ones who are able and allowed to cross borders.

Spies or saboteurs in the Soviet novels are marked as foreign, not really belonging to the homogeneous Soviet Society: they are Kalmyk, expatriate German farmers or Karelians from another region. The question of enemies within their own area (be they spies or saboteurs), did not concern the Panfennists to the same extent as the Soviets. The concept of being ‘truly Finnish’ in some way seems to have been easier to preserve than being ‘truly Soviet’. The Finnic neighbours, the Karelians, are seen as a hybrid, spoiled people and play the role of enemies within the Finnish sphere. Logically in Kianto’s novel, the bad ones have to finally stay outside the Finnish borders, or the good ones have to perish.

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**Notes**

1. “Каждый новый завод и совхоз [...] укрепляют социализм в СССР и увеличивают силы мирового пролетариата в его борьбе за коммунизм, за мировую советскую республику.” Pravda 1932: 3, italics are mine. With the exception of the citations from part II of Ostrovsky’s *How the Steel was Tempered* (Ostrovsky 1952/2002), all translations from Finnish and Russian given in the text are by the author, T.M.

2. The term ‘Panfennism’ was coined on the model of the popular romantic movement of ‘Pan-slavism’ in the 19th century in the Slavic area. Philosophers, authors, politicians and historians at that time spoke in support of the mental, linguistic and even political unification of the Slavic people, especially in contrast to western European influences. They were convinced of a special superior mission of the Slavs to save the world (Ivanšević 2004: 513–515). In Finnish ‘Panfennism’ is often called the ‘idea of a Greater Finland’ (‘Suur-Suomi aate’, cf. e.g. Niinistö 2005: 16). The term ‘Panfennism’ was not used by Panfennists themselves, but can be found in Russian documents (20). It proves to be a fitting locution by which to gather different pro-Finnic ideological viewpoints and ideals of the analysed period.

3. ‘Stalinism’ usually is used to characterise the time of the leadership of Joseph V. Stalin as general secretary of the Communist Party’s Central Committee from 1924 until his death in 1953. At the end of the 1920s Stalin succeeded in bringing the party system under his control, which was further centralised under his dictatorship in the 1930s, throughout World War II, until the beginning of the 1950s. The main characters of this time are a centralised totalitarian regime under the leadership of the Communist party, covering all areas of political, economic, social and cultural life of the Soviet Union. (cf. Afanas’ev 1994; Hoffmann 2003: 2)

4. For a more detailed discussion about the political situation in Finland especially in the 1930s cf. for example Siltala (1985).

5. “[…] taas koittaisi aika jolloin suomalaisella isänmaalla olisi samat laajat rajat kuin sillä mui- noon oli […]. Veren ääni ei silloin enää puhuisi käsittämätöntä kieltä […]. Me emme enää kar- jalaisten silmissä olisi ruotsalaisia eivätkä he meidän silmissämme venäläisiä. Sama Suo- menmaa sulkisi sylinsä molemmat.’

6. ‘Suomi suureksi – Viena vapaaksi!’

7. ‘[…] palkka, jota Isänmaa viattomasta verestänsä vaatii […] henkinen helmikruunu, joka – marttyyreilla saatiin!’

8. ‘Tshirkkarannan Tarja’

9. ‘[…] rajaa ei enää olla saa […]’, italics in the original text.

10. ‘[…] Suomen sotasulhu, hän, joka lähetetty oli Wieniä kihlaamaan.’

11. ‘Suomen kruununpää nähdään syleilemässä Wienen prinssitarttä.’

12. ‘Sankariksi tullaan vasta kun lataataan olemasta käsinkoeteltava. Sankarit ovat – sotilaita Tuonen armeijassa.,’ italics in the original text.

13. ‘[…] muinaisrunollil[en orjarahva[s] […]’

14. ‘[…] se ei ollut suvattu sulamaan slavien sairaaseen, viekkaaseen vereen, vaan se oli oman olemuksensa alusta säädetty liittymään siihen valkenevaan maahan […]’

15. ‘Kaksinaamainen Karjala’

16. ‘Kaksinaamaisuus oli sinun kansallishelmasynsity – orjanmerkki oli sinun otsasi poltetu, sillä tuhatvuotisen historiasi kirot sinua kirvelivät […]’. 

17. ‘[..] verta on näkevä aamu […]’

18. ‘vartija’

19. ‘[…] hyisenä henki Itä […]’

20. ‘[…] raja railona aukeaa [..]’

21. ‘Neuvi siitä raivaamaan valtavälää halki Wieniä ja ravahuttamaan totuuden pitkällä ratsusapelilla ennenkuulumattoman syvän haavan hamaan Walkean meren rintaan.’

22. ‘[..] me piirrämme miekalla rajan. / Se meidän on veljänä velvollisuus / […]: Suur-Suomelle aamu on koittava uus / [..]’
23 ‘[…lausun Suomen ja Vienan karjalaisille, etten tulisi panemaan miekkaani tuppeen ennen
kuin Suomi ja Itä-Karjala olisivat vapaat. Vannoin tämän suomalaisen talonpoikaisarmeijan
nimessä luottaen sen urhollisiin miehiin ja Suomen uhrautuviisiin naisiin.’

24 ‘Рубеж – это два столба. Они стоят друг против друга, молчаливые и враждебные,
олицетворяя собой два мира. […] Меж двумя мирами пролегла пропасть, хотя столбы
вырыты на ровной земле. Перейти эти шесть шагов нельзя человеку, не рискуя жизнью.
Здесь граница.’ (Ostrovsky 1954: 235)

25 ‘От Черного моря на тысячи километров, до Крайнего Севера к Ледовитому океану
выстроилась неподвижная цепь этих молчаливых часовых советских социалистических
республик с великой эмблемой труда на железных щитах.’ (Ostrovsky 1954: 235)

26 ‘лаhtar’

27 ‘Mitä jeretnikkaa sinä olet tullut tänne?’

28 ‘Kääri käteesi pumpulikääreet ja painu takaisin sinne, mistä olet tullutkin.’

29 ‘[…] kulakki sai kansanoikeudessa vastata teoistaan.’


31 ‘[…] крепкие кулацкие дворы; дома с пристройками как маленькие крепости.’ (Ostrov-
sky 1954: 251)

32 ‘[…] рабом […] так и остались’ (Ostrovsky 1954: 226). The direct translation of ‘раб’ is
‘slave’.

33 ‘[…] даже грубостей не говорим, не в пример вам.’ (Ostrovsky 1954: 226)

34 ‘[…] перевали[вает] […] смертный рубеж.’ (Ostrovsky 1954: 201)

35 ‘Прижок через смерть’

36 ‘Это было второе рождение […]’

37 ‘[…] его ярости не было границ […]’

38 ‘безграничное терпение’

39 ‘радость […] безгранична’

40 As a literary translation of part I of the Ostrovsky’s novel was not available, these citations
are given in my translation – a freer translation would probably prefer ‘unbounded’ to ‘bor-
derless’.

41 ‘[…] Половой устав пограничной службы запрещает бойцу вступать в переговоры с
кем-нибудь из зарубежников […]’. (Ostrovsky 1954: 236)

42 ‘Хоть и буржуийский солдат из, а жизня у его дырявая. Выгнали на такой мороз в
одной шинелишке, вот и прыгает как заяц, а без курева так совсем никуды». И
красноармеец, не оборачивая, бросает спичечную коробку.’ (Ostrovsky 1954: 236)

43 Unfortunately these stories were not available for me to consider them more thoroughly for
this text.

44 ‘Kaukana tuntureiten takana […]’

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If the Borders Could Tell:
The Hybrid Identity of the Border
in the Karelian Borderland

By Saija Kaskinen

Abstract
This paper analyses the nature of the border. The paper poses the question of whether a border, in this case the national border between Finland and Russia in the Finnish Karelian border region, can have its own distinctive identity[ies], and if so, could the border itself be or become a hybrid – a border subject. To examine the hybridization process of the border, this paper draws on individual experiences of the border that are illustrated using interview material. In addition, by analysing historical documents, literature and historiography, the paper shows how the border has affected people’s relationship with the border itself and also their perception of regional landscapes, regional memories and identity. On the other hand, this process can be reversed by exploring how people have changed and embodied the border. The paper utilises the framework of John Perry’s theory of “reflective knowledge”, where both conscious experience and the knowledge it yields differ from physical knowledge that is explicitly characterized in terms of empirical facts. Exploring these relationships enhances our understanding of the role of “private knowledge” and its contribution to the understanding of borders.

Keywords: Border, identity, hybrid, reflective knowledge, private knowledge
Introduction

Interviewer: “Do you agree with those people who claim that national borders will eventually disappear because they will simply lose their significance in the globalized world?”

Interviewee 1: “Hmp … This idea seems just like those people who want to stay as unmarried partners, you know. Like cohabiting, not willing to commit but unwilling to live alone. People like that will learn that the world can suddenly become a void that exhausts you to death, simply because you don’t know who you are or where you belong. But if you have a home country …, not everybody has, mind you, … and if it is not in the middle of a civil war or somehow made totally incapable of sustaining life, then no matter how down trodden you are, your home country takes you in. Ask any of the Karelian evacuees.” [A seventy-nine year old farmer currently living in the Karelian borderlands in Parikkala, Finland.]

Interviewer: “How did it feel when the national border was established almost in your backyard?”

Interviewee 2: “Well, I must say like Abraham Lincoln has once said that … ‘You can fool some of the people all the time, and all the people some of the time, but you cannot fool all the people all the time.’ Regardless of all the nonsense in the name of diplomacy, that border doesn’t fool me or anybody else, ever. It’s a lie” [An eighty year old male from the Karelian borderlands who has lived in Canada since 1954].

Interviewer: “So, what comes to your mind when you think of the Border [the national border between Finland and Russia]?”

Interviewee 3: “Tragedy, Power, but mostly … well, at least recently, mostly Compassion.” [A forty year old female, Finnish-American citizen originally from Turku, who lived in the USA for twenty-four years.]

In two groups of Finns living in North America and one in the borderlands of Finnish Karelia, their experiences of the national border between Finland and Russia evoke hair raising, maddening, and saddening stories, which can at the same time be found to be heart-warming, inspirational and uplifting. It seems that the perception and meaning of the national state border between Russia and Finland can be talked about and referred to with contradictory definitions and explanations. The national border invokes painful memories of war, loss, and death, consequently, generating strong feelings of hate and fear. On the other hand, the border can inspire wisdom, forgiveness, and optimism, gained through diversified experiences of life away from the border as well as from life on the border. Even an initial indifference toward the border or a sense of its declining relevance and significance as a generalizing organizer in political and social life (see: Ohmae 1995: 5; Guehenno 1995: 1–19), turned to avid interest or even concern, when questions started to revolve around the Finnish-Russian state border’s role in the whole system of world borders. Issues such as how a global rather than national approach to the Finnish-Russian state border impacts one’s own national and individual identity formation arose amongst many of the interviewees. Does the Finnish-Russian state border (also the most eastern border
of the EU), function as a dividing line between Finland and Russia or between the EU and Russia – and what is Finland’s position in this formation? Also, the common sense national identity (Billig 1995; Anderson 2003) is problematized when debating the questions of the eastern national state border’s role and place in global trade, immigration, food and energy systems. Furthermore, notions of Finland’s sovereignty are challenged when its political engagement and responsibilities in international economic and military co-operation, and its involvement in international humane organizations are determined. It therefore asks the question as to whether issues such as these that have traditionally been represented by the empirical realities of the state border, can be transcended into a phenomenalistic human consideration? The sheer diversity of the national borders might also provide a reason why the identity and nature of borders has not attracted much scholarly attention (Zimmerbauer 2011).

Due to the diversity of attitudes, opinions, and approaches towards the Finnish-Russian national border, as well as the incongruity and inner conflict that it reveals, this paper raises great confusion: What is a national state border in its essence? Are national state borders, such as the Finnish-Russian national border merely artificial, administrative socio-political constructions that once established become “uncontroversial and clearly defined in law” or are they a human matter, realized and manifested in a direct relationship with people who either live or have lived within the spaces marked by them? Is the Border real, personally true?

These initial questions led to the general undertaking of this paper, so as to examine the nature of the Finnish-Russian national border from an ontological point of view. The organizing argument of this article states that due to the varied and often controversial nature of the national state border between Finland and Russia (from now on, the Border), the Border can be represented as a character with multiple personalities, each of which has its own distinctive identity. The purpose of this paper is to explore how the Border has given birth to its multiple personalities through its interaction with people, and these people’s ways to conceptualize, imagine and create expectations for it, therefore, giving the Border its own identity. However, the Border’s identity formation is not a one-way process. While such identities are being formed, the Border simultaneously moulds its creators’ identity by structuring new realities. In other words, the Border’s characteristic of “being many” and also its continuous identity formation amidst the lived and on-going heterogeneous experiences of its creators, suggests a process of hybridization. Therefore, the paper poses the question whether the Border itself can be understood as a hybrid, in the same way as other traditionally defined hybrid entities in Border Studies such as borderlands and border-landers. When applying the concept of hybrid to the investigation of the identity of the Finnish national border, the complex relationship of power and hegemony that underlie both the ideology of hybridization and border identity formation is revealed.
The philosophical framework for the ontological inquiry in this study is based on John Perry’s argumentation of “reflexive knowledge”. Perry’s ontological inquiry is based on Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger’s phenomenological reasoning that starts from the premise that knowledge is not just accumulated information, but is gained through experience. Border researchers in various academic fields – history, political science, geography, sociology, and anthropology – have gathered vast amounts of knowledge about different borders. Their research has been mainly concerned with analyses of the constitutional, legal, social, and economic realities of borders. However, this type of knowledge, as valuable as it is for understanding such a complex phenomenon as “border”, is, to use John Perry’s term “subject level knowledge”. According to Perry, the accumulated subject level knowledge is “physical” knowledge that has not been consciously experienced (Perry 2001: 15–19). Physical knowledge, even though efficiently applied to real life, with its emphasis on empirical predicates alone, is not able to entirely reveal the complex relation between knowledge and reality. What Perry is suggesting is that physical knowledge, through its scientific analysis, distances itself from the phenomenon it is investigating. Therefore, the acquired physical knowledge is not consciously aware of the ontological system or nature of the phenomenon, and consequently, is not able to provide a conscious experience of the reality that it represents.

Perry calls this knowledge of a conscious experience of reality “reflective knowledge”: “Reflexive content places conditions not just on the objects and properties a thought or utterance is about, but also ‘on the utterances or thoughts themselves’” (Perry 2001: 21). In other words, when a person consciously experiences for example, the border, something new is learnt, namely what it is like to know the border or have conscious experience of the Border. Perry continues his argument by stating that an ontological approach does not necessarily establish any new scientific fact, but rather deepens the understanding of the phenomenon: “The mistake is to think that when we learn something new about the world, we learn a new fact that we didn’t know before, rather than knowing the same thing but in a different way” (Perry 2001: 16).

Examining the results that reflective knowledge can yield about the characteristics of the Border as a “being” or as “an experience” in ontological inquiry might open up different knowledge about the nature of the Finnish-Russian national border, thus challenging habitual ways of thinking of the Border and its relation to reality.

Accessing conscious experience of the Border and ontologically identifying its multiple personalities is accomplished by utilizing postcolonial investigations into the hybrid subjectivity. As well as scholarly work, identity narratives have strongly focused on the historical and contemporary hybrid identity of geographical and cultural borderlands and their inhabitants, but not on the border itself (see: Anzaldúa 1987; Bhabha 1994; Eker & van Houtum 2008). In these
studies, the metaphor of hybrid has been employed when people, cultures, languages and traditions are understood as being heterogeneous or “a composite” (see: e.g. Kapchan & Strong 1999: 240). Understanding the Border as a hybrid allows mixing of its political, cultural, ethnic, and geographical definitions, thus creating the Border as an offspring of diverse individual experiences (mental and physical) that resist any strict empirical explanation or description. The question is whether an inanimate object such as a border can live a life from birth to death, or otherwise undergo a development from beginning to end. Perhaps a more important and more difficult question remains whether the Border has its own distinctive identity in its own right, especially now when the significance of the existence of state borders is under dispute. The answer to this question is best found in personal testimonies – each telling in its own unique voice about distinctive personal experiences of the Border – witnessing the Border’s continuous and tangible presence in their lives. Therefore, the data collection for this study was primarily carried out through open-ended interviews with the exception of one question that was posed to everyone: "If you had to give the Finnish-Russian national border a descriptive name, what would it be?" Interviews were conducted in Finnish and English.1 Additional research that paralleled the observations of the interviewees concerning the nature of the border and their border experiences was conducted by researching pertinent literature, biographies and newspaper texts. The objective was to identify border related patterns of feelings, thoughts, motivations and activities from various periods in history. These patterns were derived from 32 random interviews, conducted in the North and South Karelian provinces of Finland and in Seattle USA and Vancouver Canada. These patterns were then analysed and organized into six ontological levels. These levels were named according to the most commonly used nouns that expressed interviewees’ views of the Border. This analysis was used to gain an insight into the “psyche” of the Border, which has in turn unconsciously or consciously directed people’s reactions to their own social and physical environment and their behavior towards otherness. William Zartman’s eloquent comment that “[b]orders ran across land but through people” (Zartman 2010), or Schack’s (2000: 203) argument that “borders do not come and go, but they persist in people’s mind even if the political agenda changes”, both support the idea of considering the border as an ontological phenomenon. Furthermore, the mental process evolving from this ontological experience arises not only from arbitrary political contracts, but from the lived experiences of many.

Border as a Seeping War Wound

The evolution of the national state border between Finland and the Soviet Union was long, complicated, and violent. The first national border between Finland and the Soviet Union was established when both countries were in the middle of civil
The second national border was established in the chaotic conditions of the Second World War, the Winter War, and the Continuation War. A new border was drawn in 1944, which once again divided Finland from the Soviet Union but this time with the distinction that Finland had to cede 3.3 million hectares of its territory in Karelia and the Arctic to the Soviet Union. In consequence, a region that was home to over 400,000 Finns in the Karelian territory was incorporated into the Soviet Union, resulting in the Karelian Diaspora (Singelton 1981). This border, unlike the previous state border established in 1918, was a concession, established under duress, costing the lives of over 25,000 people (2% of the total Finnish population), and leaving 10,000 permanently injured. Yet, like the state border in 1918, the current state border signifies Finland’s independence, and with the distinction that only by paying US$300,000,000 to the Soviet Union for war reparations would the border finally be redeemed (Singelton & Upton 1998: 130–133). However, these clinical numbers represent the situation only on the Finnish side of the border. The trauma and the terrible cost that the Soviets had to pay for their war is not addressed in this paper, but what existed on both sides of the border was a reciprocal tragedy which has subsequently been separated by the drawing of the new state border.

It is well established that during the immediate post-war period, the Border was passionately hated. Although the terrible experience of the war was over, transforming the official statistics (i.e. physical knowledge) of massive casualties, land losses, split families, the permanently injured, orphans, evacuees, the tremendous shortage of daily necessities, and the overall uncertainty about the future into everyday life, meant a painful encounter with a new reality that the war, and consequently, the new border had created. On the first ontological level, the Border is named, imagined, and identified as a Seeping War Wound. The word "seeping" demonstrates the war’s continuous presence that is not manifest in battles, bombings or death, but in the new everyday reality that still penetrates through every level of Finnish daily life.

One of the seeping wounds that infected the minds of Finns was the massive level of reparations paid to the Soviet Union. For years, the borderlanders who lived through these times first-hand (e.g. in the Parikkala Municipality) had to witness how the Finnish trains “loaded with riches just vanished beyond the Border and returned clunking and empty” (Eeva 2013, pers.comm., 6 August). Eeva continues: “There was something unnatural and eerie about how they just disappeared. I mean, of course the trains disappeared from one’s line of sight, but disappearing behind the Border, it was almost like crossing the line between life and death and disappearing into never ending, fathomless darkness.” Enni, a seventy-nine year old woman from Parikkala, attested to the tone and atmosphere created by the Border: “We used to invent all kinds of stories about the Border. In the evenings we scared each other by speculating what would happen if we crossed the Border. We, as children, did not know the meaning of the Border, but
we sensed from our parents’ talk that it was something terrible, something that kills you if you get too close to it.” (Enni 2013, pers.comm., 6 August). Pirkko, an eighty-year old woman remembers how she as a child knew that it was the “Ryssä” (a derogatory name for a Russian) who lived on the other side of the Border and killed everybody who came too close to it (Pirkko 2013, pers.comm., 6 August). These dialogues offer valuable insight into the struggle to understand the nature and identity of the Border, its power and its ruthlessness, and how it is still “porous”, allowing the horrors of the war to seep through, reminding people how hard they still have to work before the Border is secured.

The Border was to be demarcated on the ground and physically reconstructed. Border demarcation pillars were erected and fences were built to make the Border a visible authority that defines and enforces the political territorial legitimacy of the nation state. When the national border shifts, the land changes, and therefore a new geographical reality sets in. This new geographical reality in turn requires a new cartographic reality to show where the new Finland begins and ends in the east. The new geographical reality and the consequent factual cartographic representation of Finland demanded that Finns gained a new psychological and social self-understanding - a sense of belonging and a sense of distinctiveness – of their new nation-space and of their home region. The new geographical reality was especially hard to conceive for the evacuees, but also for over one thousand Finnish farmers whose land had been split by the Border. Rebordering and remapping resulted in these farmers becoming the landowners of a land mutilated by the physical, politically-imposed Border, whose static, unyielding personality was reflected in a new map.

How were the Finns able to grasp the meaning of this new geography? Heikki, an eighty-two year old borderland farmer from South-Karelia, told about an incident from his childhood that illustrates the difficulty to conceptualize the effects of the geographical displacement of land cessions, and the Border moving to his backyard and splitting his land in two. In addition, Heikki’s story adds local perception to the understanding of space, and more particularly, to the understanding of land and its relationship to the international border (e.g., Flynn 1997; Lenz 2003). Heikki’s family, and especially his father, can be defined as deeply indigenous to the region, meaning that the family defines themselves by their home region, their land, and the length of their residency in the area for many generations. Heikki describes his father as a man to whom the land had inherent power. His father knew each section of his land by its own name, characteristics, vulnerabilities, and strengths. The land was an essential part of him. Losing his land when the new Border was established was the same as losing part of himself: “He never talked about it, but he was never the same. It was as if he was sleepwalking, just repeating that ‘we have to get by with less’” (Heikki 2013, pers.comm., 23 August). Heikki continues that it was only when his father had gone to the village to see the vicar that he literally came face to face with the
new geographical reality. In the rectory he saw the new government map of Finland hanging on the wall. Heikki, who had accompanied his father to the rectory, describes the moment:

Father greeted the Vicar first, but then forgot him when he saw the map on the wall. He just stared at it, and then walked to it, and with his finger he started to follow the newly inscribed eastern borderline all the way from the south end to the northern tip. He continued doing this for quite a while and then suddenly said: ‘Hard to believe how much weight the Maiden Finland has lost’. (Heikki 2013, pers.comm., 23 August)

Although cartographic knowledge of space is allegedly objective and based on the empirical science of cartography, a map, as John B. Harley has argued, “delimits the totality of experience” (Harley 1988: 59). Maps produce physical knowledge, and what they create is map space that is “a socially empty commodity, a geometrical landscape of cold, non-human facts” (Harley 1988: 66). The way Heikki’s father conceived Finland in the new state map was by visualizing the Border through “the wounded cartography”, through the metaphorical image of the Maiden Finland embedded in the collective imagination of the Finns during the oppressive years of the Russian colonisation of Finland. The new geographical interpretation represented by the new government map was confronted by the indigenous and familiar definition of land and the nation state. Simultaneously, the nation’s symbol of a Maiden Finland and Heikki’s father’s farm shared the same geographical fate: Land contraction equated to amputation on both national and private levels. Heikki’s father’s interpretation of the new geographical reality reinforces Harley’s argument that it is more fruitful to consider maps as “socially constructed perspectives on the world, rather than as neutral and value-free representations” (Harley 1988: 58). Heikki’s Father’s story can be understood not only as a timely historical record of the experience of border demarcation, but also as an emotionally sincere attempt to gain an understanding and establish order on an unreal and confusing situation that the Border had created. Heikki continues: “It was hard for my dad to believe that he was forbidden to go to his own fields or walk in his own forest. You can see them, but you are forbidden to go there or work the land. Dad left his best axe on the other side. That really stank” (Heikki 2013, pers.comm., 23 August). To Heikki’s father, the Border had created a land that was absent in hard political reality, but present in his loss.

**The Border as a Police Presence**

Borderlands are generally thought to be challenging areas to live in. As Gloria Anzaldúa has observed, the borderlands are the “places of contradictions, […] a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary” (Anzaldúa 1987: 19, 25). William Zartman argues that “the nature and conditions of the borderland is affected by the nature of the border itself (Zartman
2010: 5), and thus offers a justification as to why the Border can hybridize its residents. Anzaldúa’s description of the difficulties of living in borderlands can directly be applied to the context of the Finnish Karelian borderland after the war. The Border had transformed from a Seeping War Wound into a relative Police Presence that through its aggravating presence, radically reconstructed the lives of the Finns and especially the lives of the borderlanders. Parikkala Municipality had lost 35% of its land and shared 30 km of the eastern border with the Soviet Union that had now become the new eastern borderland of Finland – thus its inhabitants became new border subjects. The newborn borderlanders, like any new species, were forced to evolve and adapt to the particularities of the new environment. Although the citizens of Finland were free to exercise their civil rights, the proximity of the Border posed challenges to these rights in everyday life. The borderland as a repressive environment was a reality that was further enhanced with rules and regulations strictly defined by the Finnish-Soviet treaty. In addition to the Border, the new borderlanders had to recognize a new frontier zone and frontier zone restrictions. The zone – three kilometres wide – was a highly restricted area which civilians were not allowed to enter without a special permit. In their daily lives, people were recommended to live quietly and carefully. It was illegal to drive with lights on after dark and taking photographs was strictly forbidden (Juvenen 1996: 622). Even the local Saturday evening dances were discontinued (Pekka 2013, pers.comm., 20 August).

Aili, an eighty-two year old woman from Parikkala remembers how she and her siblings, “almost whispered when we talked. We just waited for something terrible to happen … like the Border not holding, and it [the War] starts all over again (Aili 2013, pers.comm., 20 August). The uncertainty in securing Finland’s sovereignty was foregrounded by President Paasikivi who stated in 1949 that: “It is not impossible that the Kremlin, if the opportunity introduces itself, wouldn’t finish off Finland, and invade Finland by making use of our own Communists, as it did in the Baltic states. Our war against the Soviet Union has not secured our position” (cited Talvi 1959: 129). The Border, drawn by the “winners” of the war, loomed as a defining presence over Finland’s independence.

While the Border was being physically constructed, the Border became Finland’s prime foreign policy concern. Borderlanders, Finns, and even some foreign citizens visiting the borderlands often indulged in transgressive behavior or enacted other forms of resistant agency. Illegal border-crossings (although not surprising because the Border was not yet completely built), damaging and even stealing the boundary markers, illegal photography, and shooting across the Border (Juvenen 1996: 656) contested the existence of the Border and its legitimacy as a means for the Soviets to exercise, control and reaffirm their power over Finland. Tauno, a ninety-two year old borderlander from the Parikkala Municipality looks back on those times a mischievous grin on his face: “Well, one had to needle the situation little, just to let the steam out. I don’t remember any
serious conflicts. It was those ‘desantti’\(^2\) that we feared the most as children (Tauno 2013, pers.comm., 22 August). Clearly these acts had potential to provoke further hostility, and therefore expedited the construction of the Border.

An uncomfortable silence shrouded the new borderland. The borderlanders in Parikkala Municipality did not fit into the traditional definition of borderlanders as have previously been described by Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) and Emily Hicks, as people who are “informed by two codes of reference” (Hicks 1991: 226) such as biculturalism, bilingualism, or who have a bi-conception of reality. On the physical level, the Border gradually manifested itself in a two-meter high barbed wire fence, watchtowers, warning signs, and the desolate buffer zone which followed the ragged contours of the Border. The Border became one of the most strictly controlled and monitored borders in the world. For over seventy years it was closed and silent. “It felt like the world is really flat and the end of the world is the Border. Sometimes it was easy to pretend that there was nothing beyond the Border. It was the Border who was our neighbour, not the Soviet Union.” On the ontological level of the Border as a Police Presence, the Border had created a controlled space where, in the controlled reality, people had to learn to accept the distinctive, institutionalized reality of the Border which was embedded in international law.

The Border as a Protector

It is notable that when asked “What does the Border mean to you?”, Uuno Kailas’s poem “Raja” (Trans. The Border, Kailas 1932) was recited from beginning to end by eight different interviewees. The first and the last stanza of the poem are the same, and they were strongly emphasized and recited by the interviewees:

Raja railona aukeaa (Like a chasm runs the border)
Edessä Aasial, Itä. (In front, Asia, the East)
Takana Läntä ja Eurooppaa; (Behind, Europe, the West)
varjelen, vartija, sitä. (Like a sentry, I stand guard) (Kailas 1932: 247.)

The Border referred to in this poem is the original state border between the Soviet Union and Finland established in 1918. The Border of 1918 provides a distinctive social and cultural construction for Finland as a nation, and as a political entity whose self-definition is constructed against Russia. Kailas’s poem shows a strong antagonism between East and West, portraying Finland as the guardian of Western culture against an invasion from the East on the Finnish-Soviet border. In the 1930s, “Raja” illustrated commonly held discursive constructions of the East and the West, peculiar to European imaginations of Russia and the Soviet Union. In Kailas’s poem, the Border is understood to hedge against the Soviets who, at the time, were seen as a diabolic entity, irremediably outside the western civilized world. Although the state border between Finland and the Soviet Union shifted in
1944 due to the treaty of settlement, the Raja (the Border) in Kailas’s poem also created the ontological reality of the current Border with its confrontational stance and self-aware defiance. The interviewees reminisced how they had heard this poem recited repeatedly during and after the war by their parents and grandparents. At the end of World War II and at the beginning of the Cold War, they learnt to recite it themselves. The Border had thus shifted from its position as a Police Presence to an understanding of the Border as a sovereign line, the Protector. In so doing, the Border continued to confirm the status of Finland as an internationally recognized independent nation-state.

During the Cold War, once again, “Raja” (the Border) manifested itself as a dividing line in a drastically polarized world that was divided between East and West politically, culturally, militarily and economically. This new geopolitical border, both physical and mental, was personified by the metaphor of the Iron Curtain, and on the eastern front of the West, it descended on the Finnish-Soviet national border. However, for small countries such as Finland, this new geopolitical binarism was not a simple black and white issue. Finland had to re-invent itself in a way that was non-threatening to both the East or the West. While the Soviet Union was moving halfway across Europe executing its imperialist and ideological aspirations, and the West was doing the same on the other side of Europe, Finland started to promote its new foreign policy that was later known as Paasikivi-Kekkonen line. The name refers to Finland’s two successive presidents, Juho Kusti Paasikivi (1945–1956) and Urho Kekkonen (1956–1981), who both saw neutrality as the only way for Finland to survive as a sovereign nation in a divided world.

After the war, Finland found itself geopolitically in an in-between position, balanced between the Eastern and Western blocks, not wanting to belong to either one but acknowledging that diplomatically sound relations with the Soviet Union must form its political basis for both international and domestic politics. As early as in 1944, President Paasikivi comprehended that Finland’s most difficult and challenging task was to invent a new form of interaction with the superpowers but, especially, with the Soviet Union. Paasikivi described Finland’s predicament as follows: “Finland’s problem, relating to its foreign policy is our relations with the Soviet Union. Everything else is politically secondary to this. [...] Finland must avoid anti-Soviet and hostile politics toward the Soviet Union. [...] We must strive for this regardless of all the disappointments we have already and will have to endure still” (Paasikivi 1985). Paasikivi created a framework for a comprehensive philosophy and strategy for a national effort to retain independence – the problem was, how to achieve these ends?

The new, but precarious establishment of the political, military, and ideological order in Europe and the rest of the world resulted in Finland finding a way to politically assure that it wanted to be a neutrally sovereign nation state. However, Finland’s neutrality as well as its sovereignty was questioned by both the
international and domestic community. One reason for this was perhaps the treaty of the Agreement of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance between Finland and the Soviet Union in 1948 – also known as the YYA Treaty – that simply made Finland appear as an ally to the Soviet Union. There were many political scientists and international politicians in Europe and the USA who anticipated that Finland would most likely slide “behind the Iron Curtain” (Wuorinen 1954: 657; Karsh 1986: 265). The interviewees described the Border as “a tightrope on which the Finns had to dance without any safety net” (Tauno 2013, pers.comm., 22 August); or as an “unfamiliar bog where bog holes were impossible to pinpoint” (Aili 2013, pers.comm., 20 August). Ralf Törngren, a Finnish-Swedish politician, called the situation “a puzzling phenomenon” or “exceptional”, because Finland’s position during the Cold War was impossible to describe with any of the conventional labels of international politics (Törngren 1961: 161; Holsti 1986: 643). The YYA Treaty and the Paasikivi-Kekkonen line offered complex considerations on the issues of sovereignty and created a relativistic ambience that questioned the exercise of overt political power, influence and intimidation in an asymmetrical power relationship such as existed between Finland and the Soviet Union. The Border found itself running between Finland and the Soviet Union, but with two shadowy, parallel borders. The YYA Treaty from the Soviet side and Kekkonen-Paasikivi Line from the Finnish side flanked the Border as its “personal bodyguards” (Heikki 2013, pers.comm., 22 August). The outer wall of defence –Raja – the Border in Kailas’s poem, had changed into a diplomatic template where political, economic, and cultural borders were negotiated.

The Border as such represents the state, and it either confirms or contradicts expectations bestowed upon it. The Paasikivi-Kekkonen line and the YYA Treaty divided opinions in Finland between those who saw these foreign policies as state failure, forcing Finland to accept a submissive posture toward the Soviet Union (see: Krosby 1960: 234), and those who acknowledged them as the only reliable and reasonable course of action to take, in order to retain Finland’s independence (see: Wuorinen 1954; Spencer 1958; Treverton 1982). The YYA Treaty and Paasikivi-Kekkonen line as national imperatives, however complex and compromising they were in detailed application, were able to create and maintain a reasonable balance between Finland and the East-West partition. As a marker of sovereignty, the Border between Finland and the Soviet Union was founded on the principle of building strength through appeasement and cautious diplomacy. It went entirely against the superpowers’ accelerating rearmament programs and their race to establish ideological, military, and economic hegemony. However, the Border outlasted the Cold War protecting if not overall sovereignty of Finland, then at least the political status quo.
The Border as a Neighbour

The impact of time on identity formation is fundamental. Time has a ripple effect on everything that exists physically or mentally. From the point of departure, time allows people and their entire individual existence to immerse in a larger, ever expanding history of human consciousness that both delineates and blurs, century by century the evolution of human forms, activities, and the language that signifies their reality. This is also the case with the phenomenon of borders. Borders evolve through time, demonstrating a trajectory that reacts to and reflects socioeconomic, ideological and global political conditions. As Paasi and Prokkola term it (2008: 17), this “historical path-dependence” of borders creates a contextualized empirical, historical, and cultural reality for the Border. This in turn influences the ways in which the Border’s identity forms, the way people experience the Border, and the reality it creates. Although it is certainly a valid argument that “borders do not exist merely in space but also in time” (Paasi & Prokkola 2008: 17), it does not mean that "historical path-dependence" – a contextual approach – permanently affixes borders to any discrete historical moment or period. Rather, the borders serve as a time corridor where memory narratives, such as nationalist practices, iconographies and personal narratives can travel freely between the past and present, thus refuting Hegelian conventional thinking of the past as a linear forward movement governed by the clearly defined laws of causality.

The last years of 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s created drastically new configurations of identity formation for the Finnish – Russian state border. The YYA Treaty was dissolved, the Soviet Union collapsed, Russia was reborn, and Finland joined the EU. The ontological reality of the Border as a “defence line” changed into a commonly institutionalized and internationalized frontier. Efficient and professional border control policies on both sides of the Border were standardized, and the border officials started to cooperate more closely with one another, displaying an understanding that managing the overall security of the Border is a mutual task. The Border itself became more porous. Cross-border traveling for private citizens of Finland and Russia became relatively easy, and trade, scientific and technical cooperation formed new opportunities for authentic and unguarded interaction between Finns and Russians after decades of silence and non-activity.

From the 1990s to the present, the Border, although not anymore the ultimate divider and guardian between Finland and the Soviet Union, maintains its solid political identity as an agent of sovereignty for both Finland and Russia. On the other hand, ambivalent emotional and psychological associations with the Border fragment any efforts to define the Border unequivocally. Heikki describes this more lenient and liberal attitude toward Russia that illuminates the open or unfinished identity of the border’s ‘being-in-time’:
Of course it is a relief that the Soviet Union is no more, but the token of its existence is permanently branded on my land, country, and in me. I am older than the Border. In my earlier childhood, it did not exist. Then it came and separated us from the Soviets; and now us from Russians [...]. The wise say that time makes history of us. Well, I am almost history ... [a long pause] I am just wondering ... how my ‘pal’ over there [motioning with his hand toward the direction of the borderline] fares throughout history. (Heikki 2013, pers.comm., 23 August).

Heikki’s comment echoes Wilson and Donnan’s observation that borders can eventually serve as a physical record of a state’s past and present relations with its neighbours (1998: 9). The records that can be accessed through accurate documentary evidence (physical knowledge) create but also limit the Border’s identity, as well as the reality it creates, in a sequential or temporal manner, thus resulting in erecting a hard-and-fast boundary between the past and present. Heikki’s comment shows that temporal dimensions of the Border form a continuum where the past can be drawn into the space of the present, and where even the future may be speculated. From an ontological perspective, Heikki’s observation attests to the validity of the insight that as important as accessing the factual accuracy of the Border is, to access individual accounts of the Border based on experiences, attitudes, and stories of the Border is also important. These individual accounts or ‘ghost histories’ of the Border illustrate the manifold relationship between the Border and the memory. They interrupt the movement of coherent and ordered historical progression by introducing discontinuous, repetitive, contradictory and fragmented data that contests the belief that the past can be pinned down, or that there can be a singular historical truth of the Border at any given time.

Sometimes the Border carries narratives of memory that emerge from the past so strongly, that they cannot be contained in history books or historical documents. They emerge in the midst of the present like spectres, with the power to ‘spectralize’ or haunt the present reality. One of the most powerful spectres that came to fore in interviews was the first nation state border between Finland and the Soviet Union, established in 1918 when Finland declared its independence from the Soviet Union. Kaisa, an eighty year old North-Karelian Finn elaborates: “This border [meaning the Border of 1918] is a real border of Finland [...] Yes, I know it doesn’t exist anymore, but it is nevertheless a real border of Finland … [a long pause] hm … at least in the way I understand Finland. That it doesn’t exist anymore, doesn’t make it less real” (Kaisa 2013, pers.comm., 26 August). Kaisa’s comment raises the question of the role and significance of these ‘ghost histories’ of the Border, and how they permeate through people’s lives, experiences, and understanding of the current Border.

‘Ghost histories’ of the Border operate both on conscious and unconscious levels, as can be seen in Arvi Perttu’s novel, Skumbria (2011). In Skumbria, the undercurrent theme is Finland’s relations with Russia, but perhaps more specifically, the relationships between people living in the Karelia borderland that
straddles the current international border between Finland and Russia. The novel is situated in the era after the collapse of the Soviet Union, but reflects upon and flashes back to Soviet times. The more open border allows transnational processes such as cross border traveling and collaborating in economic, cultural, and scientific arenas. However, the historical legacy of the Communist regime and the two consecutive wars between the Soviet Union and Finland during the Second World War exerts influence in the background.

The spectre of the first nation-state border between Finland and the Soviet Union is raised in a dialogue between a Finnish speaking Russian-Karelian Pauli who has married a Finn and now lives in Finland, and Hannu, a Finn.

Hannu: “Nature in Finland is the best there is the world.”

Pauli: “Well, the nature in our Karelia [Russian Karelia] is exactly the same.”

Hannu: “No wonder. It is the part of the Old Finland.”

Pauli thinks to himself: “I didn’t start correcting him.” (Perttu 2011: 193)

In this awkward dialogue, the historical pattern of the Border and its spectral dimensions become evident. The ‘Old Finland’ with its ghost national border with Russia has not yet found its place between its historic-political representation and the contemporary Finnish reality. The border between past and present is blurred, indicating that the past is not finished and left behind. The ‘Old Finland’, left on the other side of the current Finnish-Russian national border, is still embedded in Finland’s geographical memory and the understanding of Finland’s territory. The ‘Old Finland’ with its ghost Karelia, demarcated by the Border of 1918, still represents a cultural-aesthetic utopia, a birth place of Finnish identity and origin, but the on other hand, it represents a geographical utopia which was lost in the war. Hannu sings the praises of the beautiful nature of Finland, extending it quite naturally, to include the ‘Old Finland’; politically distant and unattainable, but not so historically or culturally. Using Amy Novak’s concept, this “historical gaze” penetrates the boundaries between past and present, and transgresses the state border (Novak 2004). What has been, in this case ‘Old Finland’, does not necessarily mean that any meaning or value has been lost or dislocated. In the dialogue, Hannu’s unconditional and absolute view of the source of the beauty of ‘Old Finland’ is established through a confirmation of what he already knew to be “true”. His knowledge is based on those meaning-making images – the life experiences and Finnish mythology of Karelia as an ancestral land and a homeland of Finnish origin, which formed Karelia into a national collective and enshrined it in the cultural imagination. Hannu is so certain about his authoritative knowledge that he casts a suspicious, if not out-rightly contemptuous, eye on anybody who claims to know different. His peremptory attitude, unfortunately, renders Pauli silent.

Somehow, the historical, topographical and geographical reality of Karelia is negotiated between the real and imaginative, between the current nation-state
border and the ghost nation-state border. As much as ‘Old Finland’ is real to Hannu as a part of Finland’s historical totality and existential reality, it is unreal to Pauli as a Russian-Finn. Hannu’s view is countered by Pauli, who understands Karelia not as a historical, lost utopia still culturally belonging to Finland, but as a real geographical and physical space in Russia, where real people live and exist in ‘real time’. Is Pauli’s comment, “I didn’t start correcting him” a disarticulation evoking the postcolonial strategy of “the East is speaking back to the West” and conveying his sense of not belonging, or simply his unwillingness to belong to a Karelia as defined by Finns? What is there to be corrected? What does he know that Finns do not know, and how does he know that what he knows is correct? Pauli’s countering-silence brings forward the competing Russian discourses of personal experience of the contemporary Karelia, and confronts the Finnish collective national history and memory of ‘Old Finland’. Pauli’s confrontation, although through silence, destabilizes the reader’s (if not Hannu’s) conventional ideological and political constructions of Karelia as an undifferentiated historical, psychological, and sociocultural collective space for Finns. Ghosts – be they spectral borders, phantom lands, people, ideas, or beliefs – are real in the sense that they always evoke response by forcing the present to encounter the past.

**Border as a Wailing Wall**

As demonstrated above, state borders do not exist in a contextual vacuum but are embedded and shaped in ethno-national distinctions, and geopolitical and socioeconomic influences. They are linked in many ways to the past, as they are simultaneously constitutive of the present and the future. The next ontological level – the Border as a Wailing Wall, is perhaps the most personal level where the Border creates an ontological reality and where encounters with the Border become an intimate and private experience, a kind of personal psychological biography. The Border’s identity as a Wailing Wall (also known as a Western Wall, so providing an interesting parallel to Kailas’s *Raja*) denotes a separation from something beyond our senses; promises that are yet to be fulfilled; regret and lamentation; the longing for something deeply felt but rationally unattainable; and finally, atonement. Although Finland had survived the war, and Finns were restored to their geographic and political nation, they had yet to be restored to their relationship with death, life after the war, themselves, and with the ‘enemy’. The mental world projected by the Border through the metaphor of a Wailing Wall, manifolds the constructions of presence, splitting into ‘normal’ chronological time and psychological time, both of which both run parallel to each other. Psychological time refers to the time that addresses the degree of significance a certain person assigns to his past, present, and future. This entwined awareness of inner-outer, present-past, known-unknown-becoming are so strongly emphasized in encounters with the Border, that they become core constituents of
the psychological structures of the Border, as well as of the person who experiences the Border either consciously or unconsciously.

However, to come to understand or even identify the psychological structures of the Border and the barriers that hinder them from being realized (e.g. ideologies, beliefs, bias) is a complicated psychological process that requires both chronological time and psychological time to renounce exact time frames. Consequently, when existential certainty – produced by framing human existence and experience within exact time frames – disappears, the interpretation of experience is no longer bound to an objective or empirically defined reality, but yields to a new way of interpretation through perception, emotion, and imagination. Furthermore, what makes this process even more difficult, is that the effects of the Border on one’s psyche may occur unnoticed, and, consequently, remain abstract and ‘impersonal’. They might never be realized or perhaps after many years, may return unexpectedly. They can be directly felt through a personal encounter, or indirectly through somebody else’s experience or through family history (Hirsch & Miller 2011: 6). In the following example, the primary encounter with the Border had happened two generations before, but the role of the Border’s psychological effect can still be felt after decades have passed. Frank, a fifty-seven year old Canadian, reflects on his father’s encounter with the Border:

Dad visited Finland about ten years ago. He comes from Karelia, I don’t know the name of the place, but it is now on the Russian side of the Border. He really had wanted to see this place for years [...] You know .... Dad is a tough guy (chuckles) ... he has that sisu ... see, being a real Finn and all (more chuckles). But a few years back he told me that he had cried like a baby when he had visited their old homestead back in Karelia. It wasn’t the old home that made him cry; he didn’t remember it actually. It was that darn Border and everything it entails (Frank 2013, pers.comm., May 27).

What did the Border entail that caused such a strong emotional reaction in Frank’s father? The root-seeking phenomenon of Frank’s father and his effort to connect with the past entailed crossing the Border, but crossing to what? His roots, the point of origin and his family history were technically located simultaneously in two countries, Finland and Russia. He did not have any exact memories about his old home; his memories about Finland were based on general facts, a few photographs of his relatives, stories about his parents’ experiences of Finland, and the Finnish language he was still able to speak. His sense of remembering and belonging, together with vague memories only pointed to the past but were unable to be manifested.

Did Frank’s father really visit Finland when he visited their old homestead in Karelia? To do this, he must have temporarily reversed chronological time in order to re-enact the sense of proximity to the reality he wanted to revisit. If he was successful, then he crossed the Border from Finland to Finland. If he failed to reverse the time, he crossed the Border from Finland to Russia. In psychological
time, he therefore exists in two mental planes: past and present. Marita Struken argues that the purpose of re-enactments such as time reversals, is not to represent the past events, but to produce an effect that is independent of the accounts of the others, such as eyewitnesses, photographs or other material objects. What is left is the effect – an aura of historical reality– that the re-enactment process presents (Struken 2011: 287). In other words, Frank’s father does not participate in these past events, but rather in the transmission of the effects which emanate from the events. In this context, the Border, no matter whether it exists in either chronological or psychological time, becomes a Wailing Wall as it is always present in externalizing the pain associated with the past.

Other interviewees expressed similar accounts to Frank’s father. The next example shows how the Border affects the subconscious. Liisa, a forty-year old Finn, living in the USA comments:

My family comes from Turku. As far as I know, we do not have any family ties with Karelians. I have always taken the Border as a self-evident fact. I feel gratitude for sure but as I said, I have never thought about it, really. But my son is now an exchange student in the Helsinki area and visited St. Petersburg with his friends. It is amazing how close it is to Finland ... you just cross the Border ... and there it is. Never thought about it. My son has experienced something totally unknown to me... crossing that (Liisa’s emphasis) Border. I think I cried a little ... I somehow feel upset for no reason, right? (Liisa 2013, pers.comm., May 25).

“That border” is a loaded expression that sparks an affective response in Liisa. Where does this response come from? Liisa’s response, although not understood cognitively, demonstrates the Border’s centrality in individual and collective consciousness and memory. What happened in the bordering process in Finland after the war, is tantamount to the Finns’ understanding of themselves and the world around them. “That border” being physical, is also psychological. Liisa’s affective response that she is not able to reason reveals some unacknowledged issue, feeling, or experience associated with “that border”. Like the Wailing Wall, the Border is multi-layered in the way that personal, interpersonal, political, and social aspects come together, thus inducing different mental states. Will people such as Liisa repress, remember, transcend, or forget the Border? This is an open question that does not have any correct answer. These interviews support that the borders become psychological i.e. they create a personal mental spaces. They also reflect Graham Green’s observation of power of the borders to create the bizarre atmosphere created by the psyche or inner recesses of the mind:

The border means more than a customs house, a passport officer, a man with a gun. Over there everything is going to be different; life is never going to be the same [...] The atmosphere of the border – it is like starting over again; there is something about it like a good confession; poised for a few happy moments between sin and sin. When people die on the border they call it ‘happy death’ (Green 1971: 14).

On a psychological level, the Border and a Wailing Wall are alike, separating but bringing together, becoming a threshold or a passage, an instructor or a
messenger that gives us a perspective on how understandings of human intersubjectivity or relationality are crucial for human survival.

**Border as a Dream Maker**

The last ontological level of the Border as a Dream Maker is still evolving. The main issue that repeatedly emerged from the interviews concerned the burning and current question of establishing an open border between Finland and Russia. The question of the open border is acute, especially, in the Parikkala Municipality³ where an old border-crossing checkpoint is planned to be transformed into an international border crossing point. Furthermore, discussions of signing a visa-waiver program between Finland and Russia have raised concerns in Parikkala. On the other hand, these debordering developments would ensure “easy” trans-nationalism (a reality that that paradoxically preceded nation states and national borders (Vertoveck 1999), which could ensure economic growth on a national level and create the influx of needed revenue for local businesses in peripheral areas. While these developments offer undisputedly valid argumentation for improving economy, they also produce counter arguments. Questions of security on individual, national and global levels, ecological threats, and the fear of land confiscation for the purposes of cross-border logistics have caused people to view the new debordering plans with a degree of caution. Heikki views the situation as following: “We get along with Russians. They can now travel freely to Finland. Why do we have to change the situation by insisting on creating a visa-free zone? It is the same as asking for troubles” (Heikki 2013, pers.comm. 23 August). Pirkko continues in the same vain: "If we open the Border, does it mean that we will have the same rights in Russia as Russians have in Finland? Can we travel to Russia without visa, buy land, and expect service in Finnish? I don’t think so, and therefore, we should proceed cautiously" (Pirkko 2014, pers.comm. 13 October). Uncertainty; not knowing about potential impacts the open border could have, and not knowing whether the more permeable border occurs only in one direction – thus furthering asymmetrical relationship between Finland and Russia – perpetuate some of these fears and suspicions. Ambiguous and overly optimistic comments from politicians, local administrators and businesses have not mitigated fears or elicited trust in decision-making procedures, but rather made the borderlanders irritated. For example, Sirpa Pietikäinen, Member of the European Parliament, promotes debordering processes in her interview for Parikkalan-Rautjärven Sanomat⁴: "I would compare exemption from visa to the end of the rainbow. It is very close and worth travelling towards. It has a great impact on regional economy and on the whole EU" (“Viisumivapaus ja raja-asema tukevat toisiaan” 2013: 4). The issue in the Parikkala borderland is not the desire to tighten the border controls and make the Border less permeable. Rather the problem is to determine a degree of porosity of
the Border. Tauno comments on Sirpa Pietikäinen’s interview: “Russia is an opportunity, but it cannot provide any economic miracle to Finland. What is it exactly they [politicians] try to sell? Some kind of a fairy tale? Our Border enables us to proceed cautiously; we don’t have to leap (Tauno 2014, pers.comm. 13 October). The Border as a Dream maker reveals the need to include a more locally participatory approach to decision making concerning the Border even if the Border is now heavily impacted by the forces of globalization.

**Conclusion**

In this study, the research goal was to identify the multiple personalities of the Border (the Finnish-Russian national border). These draw mainly from socio-historical origins, evolved in response to external pressures, economic incentives, societal and legal demands, and modes of ideological conditioning. Although the Border has been described as a living entity that bears specific names that illustrate its ontological nature, this does not mean that the Border’s identity is fixed at the moment of the conception of these names. The names are not rigid designators, and so do not dictate ways of thinking about the Border and its character through the changing apprehensions of time. Rather, the names help move the Border from an empirical or physical reality, to a more volatile and humane space which allows disparate identities of the Border to become more visible, easier to reflect upon, and consequently allows us to understand the reciprocal relationship between the Border and people. This reciprocity also enables us to explore the processes of hybridization which arises from contact. Names help to identify each hybrid occurrence that the Border goes through, and also the hybridizing processes people go through when they attribute these names to the Border. These processes revealed contesting ideological and political narratives that both established and dismantled the Finnish state border, depending upon the speaker’s viewpoint.

The interviews and texts strengthened the notion that the concept of border (be it conceptualized in topographical, political, symbolic or aesthetic manifestations), “cannot, however, be taken only at face value” (Schimanski & Wolfe 2010). In that case, can they then be taken at their hybrid value? The ontological identity of the Border is emphasized at each of these hybrid levels. Once experienced and reflected upon, the hybrid nature of the Border shifts or relocates the Border from being an epistemological object to a subaltern agency, which enables us to create a site where individual voices have both recognition and significance. The Border between Finland and Russia serves as a medium for these voices – it can and will talk, if we are willing to listen.
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Notes
1 The author does translation from Finnish to English.
2 They were paratroops who worked behind enemy lines. They often worked as spies or saboteurs (e.g., Haapanen Atso (2013): Viholliset keskellämme: Desantit Suomessa 1939–1944.
3 Parikkala is a border town in South-east Finland.
4 Parikkalan-Rautjärven Sanomat is a regional newspaper issued twice a week.

References

Research materials
Research materials include personal comments from and interviews of the following anonymized informants:
Aili, 2013, pers.comm., 20 August
Eeva, 2013, pers. Comm., 6 August
Enni, 2013, pers.comm., 6 August
Frank, 2013, pers.comm., May 27
Heikki, 2013, pers.comm., 23 August
Kaisa, 2013, pers.comm., 26 August
Liisa, 2013, pers.comm., May 25
Pekka, 2013, pers.comm., 20 August
Pirkko, 2013, pers.comm., 6 August
The material is in author’s possession.

Literature


Displaced Borders: The Written Traumatic Borderline between Pskov Province and Chechnya

By Mari Ristolainen

Abstract

This article examines the narrative construction of borders through an analysis of “non-professional writing” produced by the residents of Pskov. It discusses the construction of national borders and the symbolic meanings invested in them, with the empirical focus being placed on the symbolic Russian-Chechen border. The theoretical essence is the realization that due to the constructive and narrative natures of border production, the creation of a national borderline does not necessarily pre-suppose that the two sides share a geographical border. The article also addresses questions of traumatic memory and links border production with the concept of cultural trauma. By asking where Russia’s borders currently located, this article provides an example of the cultural construction and symbolic displacement of the “national border”, and a representation of how the national b/ordering processes differ when viewed from both “bottom up” and ”top-down” perspectives in the contemporary Russian Federation.

Keywords: Russia, Chechnya, Pskov Province, Chechen wars, cultural trauma, b/ordering, border displacement, non-professional writing
Introduction

National borders territorialize our thinking and provide parameters that we need to live within. Nevertheless, borders are not just territorial lines that can be drawn by governments and maintained by politicians with “top-down” policies. Borders are dynamic processes of cultural production and negotiation that take place far away from the parliaments and cabinets. Focusing on “local texts” about Chechnya from the Pskov province (Pskovskaia oblast) in Russia, this article looks to show how traumatic events have delocalized the notion of border and turned it into a shifting and multi-layered concept. The concept “local text” in this article is understood as non-professional writing (poems, short stories) by the residents of Pskov, self-published in self-paid books, newspaper articles or on the internet.

The main research questions posed by this article are: Where are Russia’s borders currently located? What signifies a border? How does a border come into existence and become meaningful? What makes borders significant and relevant? This article argues that “national borders” are no longer perceived as geographical locations and physical lines on the map. “National borders” exist in certain topographical location – de jure – but their de facto symbolic location differs from the topographical location. For instance, “national borders” can be drawn up or constructed between areas that have no geographical connection between them, but due to for example a traumatic event, a symbolic national border and border-crossing processes are formed between these areas. This article provides an example of the cultural construction and symbolic displacement of the “national border”, and a representation of how the national b/ordering processes differ when viewed from both “bottom up” and “top-down” perspectives in the contemporary Russian Federation.

Where are Russia’s Borders Located?

“Russia starts here!” – an advertising slogan plastered on city buses in Pskov (Amos 2011). Both the Soviet and contemporary Russian local history books lump together modern Russia and the medieval Rus when constructing the image of Pskov province as a strong historical border region, emphasizing that the city of Pskov was involved in 123 wars between 1116 and 1709 and has only been occupied twice: in 1918 and in the 1940s (Bologov: 1970; Ivanov, 1994). Today Pskov province borders the Baltic countries of Estonia, Latvia, (the European Union and NATO) and Belarus (the Commonwealth of Belarus and Russia). The geograph-
The geographical location of Pskov at the border has strongly influenced the economic development of the region after the collapse of the Soviet Union (Alexseev & Vagin 1999: 46).

Pskov province has been a major defensive outpost on Russia’s western border for centuries. The geographical location has also influenced the positioning of the Russian Armed Forces. Today, Pskov province is famous for its 76th Airborne Division that has been a part of hostilities in Chechnya, South Ossetia, Georgia, and Ukraine, and which suffered heavy casualties, especially during the Chechen conflict.

Pskov province is undisputedly a geographical border region, but one may ask if in fact the post-Soviet border formation has really taken place in the minds of Pskovians and what has influenced this “bordering” and border formation process. The Russian Federation’s national border, EU border, and NATO border all exist with border poles, fences, border guards, and passport controls. Yet, it seems that in people’s minds that this post-Soviet border is still rather vague – in a way it has been either not recognized or not signified. This observation is based on my ten years’ experience of researching Pskov Province – its people and texts (cf. Ristolaïnen 2008). Comparatively, several studies have shown that in Estonia (on the other side of the border), the state border with Russia has a totally different political and symbolic significance than in Russia. Estonia is a small country that regained its independence after almost fifty traumatic years of Soviet occupation and started a whole new nation-building process with the border construction (for more on the border formation from the Estonian point of view see for instance: Merritt 2000 and Assmuth 2005). The actions of the Russian Federation have demonstrated great power complexes, for example by prolonging the signing of
the border agreement, arguing about the proper location of the borderline, strongly protecting the rights of the “cultural Russians” in Estonia and Latvia, and insisting upon its rights in the “near abroad” atmosphere. These actions have served to diminish the meaning of the border and their neighbour as an independent country. The border agreement between Russia and Estonia was finally signed in February 2014, some 23 years after it regained its independence in 1991.

Consequently, from the point of view of Russia, it is important to ask where Russia’s borders are exactly located and asserted in people’s minds, and how they become established. One approach to this question is to take border mobility and dislocation as a hypothetical starting point. Already in the late 1990s, Etienne Balibar offered a provocative opening for the discussion of the presence/absence of borders by arguing that “borders are no longer at the border” (Balibar 1998: 217). According to Balibar, borders are vacillating—“borders have stopped marking the limits where politics ends because the community [contract/origin] ends” (Balibar 1998: 220). Recently researchers have again started to speak about the dislocation and relocation of borders. Hastings Donnan (2010) has observed how borders have become more porous, and observes how the “visibility” of state borders has begun to diminish. Henk van Houtum (2013: 173–174) declares that the word border is a verb and that borders can be drawn anywhere. According to Chris Rumford (2006: 156–157) borders are no longer national but may take many different forms, and the important borders in people’s lives do not remain fixed. Personal circumstances influence how we experience borders and where we locate them (Rumford 2006: 159). Contemporary border producing practices seem to be analysed increasingly through the concepts of dislocation and/or relocation (e.g. the instability of European borders since the disintegration of the Soviet Union; the post-Cold War world order; global work force mobility; human trade; the alleged crisis of the nation state, etc.).

Moreover, modern warfare no longer crosses borders in the strict sense. To defend one’s Motherland is to undertake something other than just attacking an enemy’s expansionism at the border (Balibar 1998: 218). A good example of the relationship between modern warfare and the dislocation of borders is the global “War on terror” and the United States’ naval base in Guantanamo Bay that holds prisoners of war captured in Afghanistan (Vaughan-Williams 2009: 29–32). After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the border between a “safe home” and the “unsafe world” has become confused—dislocated. Furthermore, new technologies have enabled new targets for warfare and made borders even more dislocated. For instance, the increased use of unmanned aerial vehicles in contemporary conflicts (see, Kreps & Kaag 2012), and the cyber wars and assaults that operate in cyberspace cause more and more disruption and further the dislocation of borders.

These notes on “border dislocation” could also be applied to the context of post-Soviet “border formation”, where Pskovian soldiers have been part of war operations far from their home and the closest state border. Moreover, the Pskov
76th Airborne division suffered heavy casualties during the wars in Chechnya, so bringing a certain contact, perception and reality to events that occur away from the geographical proximity of “home”.

**What Signifies Russia’s Borders?**

In order to clarify the statement that borders have become displaced, the signifying factors that construct borders and/or make borders relevant for people need to be determined. In Russian tradition, the concept of “border” (*granitsa*) has a distinctive socio-psychological meaning. The “Russian border”, either artificial or natural, is initially a defense line protecting us, from the hostile them (others). (Solomeshch 2001.) The Soviet Union had both international and internal borders located in the country’s territorial periphery, often inhabited by non-Russian nationalities who were considered to be hostile to the Soviet rule (Chandler 1998: 10–11). After the Russian Revolution of 1917, the Soviet people were deliberately taught to think of themselves as being surrounded by enemies, “the imperialists”, who would crush them if they could. The perception of “enemy” has been repeatedly deployed, both to mobilise against actual external danger, and also to justify the struggle against a supposed enemy on domestic ground (Fateev 1999: 102–104; Solomeshch 2001; Gudkov 2005: 14–15). The concept of enemy (or rather the “lack of enemy”) could also be used to explain the Russian behaviour in the prolonged negotiations concerning the Estonian-Russian border agreement. As Sergey Lavrov, the Foreign Minister of Russia, stated in the border agreement’s signing event: “We never considered Estonia our enemy” (Lavrov 2014). Perhaps this is a reason why it has been so challenging – both officially and in people’s minds – to recognize the national border between Russia and Estonia. Moreover, the “lack of enemy” concept could be used to comprehend the “transferring” of the border in Crimea, and the extremely disrespectful attitude of Russia toward the borders of a sovereign Ukraine.

Consequently, it can be stated that in order for the border to be “real”, i.e. “to exist”, there needs to be an “enemy” behind it. Therefore, the concept of “enemy” can be seen as one signifying factor in both the external and internal border formation processes in Russia. Moreover, it has to be noted that especially during the Cold War, the concept of “enemy” was present in many countries national consciousness and thus influenced their border formation (see, for instance: Robin 2003). After the events of 9/11, “enemies” were brought back to peoples’ everyday lives on a global scale and accordingly, the concept of an “enemy” in border formation processes could perhaps be more globally applied.
Where is the Enemy – There is the Border?

Where do enemies emerge from and who are they? In the Soviet Union, enemies were created as a product of state propaganda and used as a tool for controlling timid people (Fateev 1999: 70). War creates enemies. Just as with the Soviet Union, Russia has undergone many wars and border disputes during its Post-Soviet existence. The Chechen wars – the first Chechen war 1994–1995 and the second Chechen war 2000–2009 – serve as an example of both how to create an enemy and of dislocated borders.

In general, foreign military observers consider the Chechen wars poorly planned operations initiated under horrible conditions. Poorly trained Russian forces were fighting in cities against Chechen fighters who knew the city layouts by heart. The Chechen fighters had also been part of the Soviet armed forces and thus had an excellent knowledge of Russian military tactics and procedures. Moreover, they spoke Russian and could easily listen to communications. These mounting difficulties created a significant degree of combat stress among soldiers whom it was felt that nobody really cared about (Thomas & O’Hara 2000: 46; Oliker 2001; Oushakine 2009: 180–181; Sieca-Kozlowski 2013). These “unreasonable” circumstances created a hatred and enmity among many of the Russians. Enmity creates enemies – Enemies create war – War creates enemies, and so a vicious circle is created.

Pskov province is located about 2,500 kilometres from the Chechen Republic and has no geographical connection with Chechnya. Nevertheless, Pskov province’s militarily strategic position has brought the border of the Chechen Republic close – closer than many Pskovians ever wanted. Consequently, we can ask if an enemy is identified, then does this define the existence or perception of the border?

![The Caucasus region and Chechnya © Wikimedia Commons](image)
Chechnya is located on Russia’s south-western border squeezed in between Ukraine, Georgia and Kazakhstan. The country and its people have been defined by war and issues of recognition over centuries (Evangelista 2002: 1–2).

Under the cover of heavy fog, late in the night of February 29 in 2000, Chechen fighters overtook a company of paratroopers from the Pskov Airborne Division near a village called Ulus-Kert in a remote mountain valley. In four bloody hours, the Chechens destroyed the company, killing 84 paratroopers who were mostly originally from the Pskov province. Only six survived. At first, Russian military officers declared that a military victory had been won and did not admit this, the heaviest single loss of the entire second Chechen war (Wilmoth & Tsouras 2001: 91–93; Blandy 2002: 14–15).

However, only a week earlier, 25 soldiers from another Pskov detachment had been killed in a mountain battle – Pskov had suffered more than a hundred dead in one week. For comparison, in the first Chechen war of 1994–1995, a total of 120 men from Pskov had been killed (Blandy 2002: 16). A week after the battle of Ulus-Kert, the Russian military officials admitted the heavy losses. It was impossible to ignore them because the casualties were from one unit, from one province, so the inhabitants of the province all knew about the losses. (Wilmonth & Tsouras 2001: 96; Blandy 2002: 22). Consequently, conditions of collective trauma grew among the Pskovians, resulting both from this terrible war episode and also from the insult given by the ruling power.

How do Borders Emerge from Traumatic Conditions?

The battle of Ulus-Kert formed a cultural trauma that the Pskovians began to narrate immediately after their sons returned home in caskets. For the Pskovians, Ulus-Kert became a focal point that appears as a border between a ground of death and their own living space. In many frontier areas, e.g. in Europe, North America and Australia, a border crossing may be associated with death (Houtumn & Boedeltje 2009: 226; Weber & Pickering 2011). According to Weber & Pickering (2011: 5), border related deaths occur at the physical border, en route, in offshore or onshore detention, during deportation, on forced return to one’s homeland, and even within the community as a result of a hate crime, labour exploitation, withholding of subsistence, or the promotion of conditions of legal and social precariousness. Through deaths, the displaced border may be experienced as both universal and continuously present. The perception of this type of dislocated border as a “landscape of death” can be observed at the US-Mexican border, where border crossings, death and disappearances are becoming a form of cultural trauma for migrants, their families and communities. Moreover, recent Latino and Mexican literary representations (i.e. border writings) are “cementing” the border as a space associated with death and loss. (Caminero-Santangelo 2010: 308, 310.)
How did certain events become widely represented and thus regarded as a cultural trauma? According to Jeffrey C. Alexander (2004: 8–10), cultural trauma is constructed by repeating and mutually reinforcing a particular event. A historical event (or something similar) must “be remembered, or made to be remembered” (Smelser 2004: 36), i.e. it must be “narrativised” to the point where it becomes an essential part of memory associated with profound collective pain (Caminero-Santangelo 2010: 310). In this case, cultural trauma becomes a phenomenon in which the primary carriers of the actual trauma (i.e. the eyewitness soldiers, mothers and relatives who lost their sons, etc.) are extended to the larger society, and how this society (and in particular the non-primary carriers of a traumatic event) reinforce the memory of the event. Jennifer Yusin (2009: 459–460) has formulated a so-called “geography of trauma” in which, according to her, border becomes “a trope for understanding how historical specificity and trauma exist simultaneously, and how our historical understanding equally emerges from the realities we cannot deny and from the traumas that we cannot know”. Consequently, border writing supports the “geography of trauma” and offers a new form of knowledge: “information about and understanding of the present to the past in terms of the possibilities of the future” (Hicks 1991: xxxi). This also explains how “new” and “displaced” borders may emerge, like those in the case of the Pskovian paratroopers.

Following the battle of Ulus-Kert, several publications and internet pages containing poems and short stories dedicated to the event emerged. Pskovians were seeking, thorough writing, to understand and rehabilitate the traumatic events. In this case, such writing can be considered as a “contact zone” between borders and traumatic events. As a result, expressing a traumatic event in writing becomes a significant new source of border formation and dislocation for the Pskovian collective consciousness.

A Written Borderline

The following section aims to explain how the borderline between Pskov and Ulus-Kert is expressed in the texts written by Pskovians, and how “border displacement” occurs in this local non-professional writing. The main research material consists of a book called “A step into immortality” (Shag v bessmertie) edited by Oleg Dement’ev and Vladimir Klevtsov, first published in August 2000. In addition to this publication, internet texts, newspaper-published poems, and songs have been used as research material. These texts are written both by the relatives of the deceased soldiers and by other citizens of Pskov. Similar types of local commemorative books to the diseased soldiers of the Soviet-Afghan and Chechen wars exist for instance in Altai, and these types of books can be characterized as being textual equivalents of portable memorial sites dedicated to traumatic events (Oushakine 2009: 237–238).
The first edition of the book “A step into immortality” was compiled only a couple months after the battle of Ulus-Kert and contained only a short article and the biographical details of the deceased paratroopers. The first edition was presented as a gift to President Vladimir Putin when he visited Pskov on August 2, 2000, on the Day of the Paratroopers. The second edition was published following the president’s visit in in 2001. It contained extensive new material and some texts written by relatives. New editions followed and the book became both broader and more versatile. The latest, 6th edition (2007) of the book contains a detailed description of the battle of Ulus-Kert, and the names and pictures of all the deceased paratroopers. In addition, the editors have collected more texts, poems and photographs from the relatives and other Pskovians that needed to work out their collective sorrow, for example by looking for explanations for why their sons died:

Alexander did not know that failing commanders had asked to fire at themselves (kill themselves). The soldiers panicked and random shooting started. And one of the enemy bullets took the life of a soldier. (Dement’ev & Klevtsov 2007: 178)

The whole village cried. The fellow villagers did not know that the commandoes from the 76-th Airborne Division had got on the trail of bandit formations that were going to break into Dagestan. Ninety soldiers battled against almost three thousands warriors. Nobody supported the commandoes, because the “businessmen of war” from Moscow had forbidden it. When will the names of these people will be published? (Dement’ev & Klevtsov 2007: 180)

His gun was overheated from the shots. And suddenly a bullet hit him in the chest. The soul of a soldier-commando departed to eternal rest, to the white sun… (Dement’ev & Klevtsov 2007: 187)

The 6th edition is both a critique of the aftermath of the battle of Ulus-Kert, and a longing obituary by the bereaved who demand explanations and recognition from the State. Oleg Dement’ev stated that the facts contained in the 6th edition are about 80% correct and he had received “no complaints” from the Army (Dement’ev 2013). It has to be noted that there is a tenacious rumour that the Chechens offered to spare the paratroopers’ lives if they let the rebels pass on their way to Dagestan, however the Russians are reputed to have refused (Osborn 2006). The slow and misleading explanations and unpleasant rumours made the process of grieving even harder for the relatives of the deceased soldiers. Many Pskovians wondered what they were fighting for and for what cause did they die. “Everybody cried. Many questions were thrown in the air: Why in peaceful Russia are young men dying, and the main thing – for what? There are no answers yet.”
Most of the texts connect the battle of Ulus-Kert to the battlegrounds of the Second World War, and some as far back as the “border disputes” of the Napoleonic wars. Here, the factual geographical location of the Pskov region on the frontlines of WWII is connected with a mental frontline with Chechnya – connected with unresolved mourning resulting from significant losses. The concept of border as “a ground of death” joins these battlegrounds together and forms an example of the displacement of borders in written form; as borders which emerge from traumatic conditions.

For centuries
You were proud of your shield
Also during troubled years
On father’s land and father’s house.
During the days of Napoleon
And in the forty-first there was no paradise.

Almost three burning years
The Pskov Province resisted,
It did not bend in front of the enemy.
So it was, and indeed will be.

From old soldiers you learned –
You have not lost your honour!
You covered yourself with high glory,
Your arrows have now been laid down.

Picture 1: “Under the protection of two fathers” (courtesy of Oleg Dement’ev 2013). Irina Panova – a girl who was eight months old when she lost both her father and godfather. (Dement’ev & Klevtsov 2007: 256–257)
The two-headed eagle did not flee
Its wing-bearing regiments.

The boys will go, with other eagles,
But the battle will not be forgotten,
In the name of the servicemen’s Motherland
On the turn of the two centuries…
We bow without words.13

Many of the studied texts connect, combine, compare and find familiar aspects between two geographical locations, such as Pskov and Ulus-Kert, or the Caucasus area and different Russian cities. These examples endorse the suggestion that borders are indeed vacillating and unpredictable. Borders are present everywhere as “enemies” surround us and have become more invisible and volatile (cf. the global rhetoric on the “War on Terror”).

Winged infantry
I didn't leave fire …
Forgive, the sixth company,
Russia and me.

Lost, immortal
You became real
In the fight under Ulus-Kert,
As in the fight for Moscow.

Forever guilty
In front of you is the country,
That didn’t save
A Russian soldier

Farewell, the sixth company,
Gone for centuries, –
Immortal infantry
Heavenly regiment.14

Local memorial events have been organized all over the Pskov region where local music ensembles play and amateur poets present their poems dedicated to the diseased soldiers and so share the sorrow in the community. Through these events, the symbolic national border and also a border-crossing becomes a shared experience, and these performances recognize and validate the displaced border.

Argun gorge … Death and hell …
A paratrooper doesn’t have a way back.
Also the battle-order is short,
The last in life – this time.

Fire isn’t ceased,
And after the fight – a bad dream …
Our boys, why did you have to go to Chechnya to die in war?
Beautiful, strong, young
To shoot and fall in scorching heat, in smoke?15
These examples also demonstrate how local writing presents us with an insight as to the effects of trauma on the individual and community. Local writing identifies what is destroyed by war and also indicates the new borders and structures, such as patriotic education, that emerge from the traumatic or post-traumatic condition.

B/ordering from Local Trauma to National Entertainment and Patriotic Education

The two Chechen wars have been both a tragic and much disputed topic in Russia for the past 20 years. Motives to speak about Chechnya have been very different, including political, ideological, social, psychological, or even commercial aims. There is little official public discussion of the Chechen wars. However, the internet provides a new forum in which these “painful topics” may be discussed (Ristolainen 2014). Still, the image of the “Chechen enemy” has been deliberately constructed and maintained, for instance by the mass media and especially by the State controlled main TV-channels. Many Russians consider the Chechens to be bloodthirsty barbarians, and the Russian government has certainly used this image for their own advantage. (Zvereva 2005: 303–304.) It seems rather deliberate that Chechnya has remained one of the world’s most poorly understood conflict zones.16

The interpretations and uses of the book “A step into immortality” have changed considerably over the years. This can be demonstrated clearly just by
looking at how the cover pictures have changed from a peaceful mountain scene with flowers, to a picture of a “Rambo” style soldier of fortune.


In general, the battle of Ulus-Kert has been interpreted in Russia in two ways: firstly, as a defeat for the Russian military, and secondly, as a glorious last stand.
made by the paratroopers. The latter confirms the Pskov Airborne Division’s reputation as an elite force whose war efforts and sacrifice were quickly preserved in heroic myth. Officially, the battle of Ulus-Kert has been seen as an example of bravery and sacrifice, with the paratroopers made to look like heroes and martyrs who fell in the name of the Motherland, antiterrorism and the soldier brotherhood. Twenty-two of the fallen were posthumously awarded the highest title of honour in the Russian Federation – the Hero of Russia, and the rest received the Order of Courage state decoration. The five survivors were also awarded the Order of Courage. (Dement’ev & Klevtsov 2007: 24–64.)

In honour of the sixth company, a massive parachute-shaped monument was erected in Pskov in 2002. In addition, a column in a Pskov square named “The Hero-Paratroopers” (Ploschchad’ Geroev-desantnikov) and several other memorial plaques around the Pskov region (cf. Picture 4) have been dedicated to the Pskov paratroopers. In Moscow, an illegal memorial obelisk dedicated to the sixth company was erected in a street named after the first officially recognised Chechen President Akhmad Kadyrov in 2007. To top it all, one of the streets in the Chechen capital Grozny was also named in honour of the Pskov paratroopers (Chada-yev 2008). These monuments can be seen as symbolic “boundary pillars” and a confirmation of the border displacement – to form a borderline of their own from Pskov, through Moscow, to Grozny. Moreover, remembering death in these “living places” crosses the border between life and death, and thus the traumatic border becomes continuous (cf. “the landscape of death” at the Mexico-US border).

The entertainment industry arrived after the “monumentalisation” of this displaced border. A bizarre musical “Warriors of Spirit” (Voiny dukha) had its prem-
iere in 2004, and was based on the heroic deeds of the Pskovian paratroopers, where the protagonist fights *Superhero*, a henchman of the evil *Provider* (Rakhkova 2004; Dement’ev & Klevtsov 2007: 300–301). In addition, several oversimplifying films were made of the battle of Ulus-Kert (Regamey 2007). For instance, a film called *Breakthrough* (*Proryv*) 2006 was Kremlin-funded and although the battle ends in defeat, it represents the battle of Ulus-Kert as an example of sacrifice, bravery and patriotism. In the film the Chechens are characterised as an army of extremists, mercenaries and drug-addicts, with an intent to take hostages and harm innocent civilians in the near towns and villages. (Osborn 2006.)

The book *A step into immortality* was also included in a national program entitled: “Patriotic education of the citizens of the Russian Federation for 2006–2010”. “Patriotic Education Programs” demonstrate a revival of the policy of State Patriotism in Russia that includes many Soviet features, such as centralized control, curricular rigidity and political-ideological functions (Rapoport 2009, 141–142). According to Oleg Dement’ev (2013), he was offered 1.1 million Rubles for printing 10,000 colour copies of the book on high grade paper. However, this tempting offer would have meant that he would have lost the copyright of the work. Dement’ev refused and was offered 600,000 Rubles for a black-and-white version. He refused again and took out a personal loan – the 6th edition was published in 2007. (Dement’ev 2013.)

Being included as part of the patriotic education program changed the nature of the book. It shows how the Patriotic Education Program uses the book to portray how the “enemy” fighting on one side of the border can be represented, by way of a contrast to “us” – the heroes fighting on the other side. The enemy “other” is from particular place, Chechnya, that promotes terrorism, and the terrorist threat is global and interconnected. Within the Patriotic Education Program, the book becomes a boundary narrative emphasizing the evil nature of Chechens and thus represents a border that divides the Russian state and the anti-Russian (Chechen) narratives that should be “educated” through patriotism.

This new explication of the book cements the image of Chechnya as an enemy and validates the written borderline between Pskov and Chechnya. The “bottom to top” texts about the battle of Ulus-Kert and the faith of the Pskovian paratroopers are used in creating “top-down” b/ordering processes. All in all, this is a striking example of how a local trauma has been turned into a vehicle of national entertainment and patriotism.

**Conclusion: Unreasonable War and its Displaced Borders**

This article has defined a paradigm that reshapes the representations of borders in the contemporary world. It provides an example of cultural construction and symbolic displacement of a “national border” and a representation of how the national b/ordering processes differ when viewed from “the bottom up” and “top-down”
perspectives in the contemporary Russian Federation. A geographical border, although real and supported by national policies, has a diminished meaning when not support or honoured by a “written border”. The tragic case of the Pskovian paratroopers reveals how Russia’s borders have become displaced. Traumatic events tend to indicate the existence of borders, beyond mere geographical lines or political policies. In this case, borders become meaningful in peoples’ minds through the unreasonable conditions of war that cause traumas. These traumas are written “from the bottom up” by ordinary people. Their literary representations (i.e. border writings) reinforce the border as being a space associated with traumatic events, and with the enemy on the other side of what has become a displaced border. These representations have then been used by agencies including the government and entertaining industries, by reinforcing the heroic myth and strengthening the notion of a displaced border for their own advantage. “Top-down” agencies alter the social perception of national cohesion and belonging by turning local trauma into national entertainment, and a form of patriotism that leads to a clear differentiation between “us” and the “enemy”. A written borderline between Pskov province and Chechnya, also represents a symbolic national border and has been established and signified by a collective adoption of a traumatic event. There are not many borders that can’t be crossed, yet this type of displaced border may be so momentous and resilient that it may seem insurmountable.

Unreasonable war

Draw me a world that is like day,
That it would be possible to look at it from above.
Draw me a world where there is no evil,
That there was no death from the cruel war.
Never to collect broken windows,
Not to re-implant the pulled-out hair.
The killed people – the forgotten question,
And in hearts of mothers the intruded fear.
Burning tanks here and there,
To understand nothing, totally ludicrous, totally ludicrous …
On a shoulder a machine gun, you run at random,
Only the knock of a machine gun is carried far away.
To see a bird flying far away,
But only smoke and carrion crows, only carrion crows,
The injured faces of the killed friends …
More and more crosses, more and more crosses.
Draw me a world that is like day,
That it would be possible to look at it from above.
Draw me a world where there is no evil,
That there was no death from the cruel war.
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Notes
1 A quote from a song called Shestaia rota (Sixth company) by Stanislav Konopliannikov, album “Niko krome nas?”, 2009.
2 Note on transliteration and translation: With the exception of some commonly occurring names, Russian words are transliterated according to the Library of Congress system. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are by the author.
4 ‘Cultural Russians’ is a term for the ‘Russian speakers’ living in Estonia used widely in academic literature. It refers to the dominant language and cultural association of these people without political connotations. See more in: Merritt 2000.
5 ‘Near abroad’ (blizhnee zarubezh’ee) is a post-Soviet term for the independent republics which lie near to or border Russia. ‘Near abroad’ also refers to Russia’s political and economic influence on these countries that belong to Russia’s ‘sphere of influence’, and are strategically vital for Russia. (Humphrey 2009: 41–42.)
7 Most specializations in the Russian armed forces have their own annual holidays.
8 “Александр не знал, что гибнущие командиры вызвали огонь на себя. В рядах боевиков началась паника, поднялась беспорядочная стрельба. И одна вражеских пуль оборвала жизнь гвардейца.” (Dement’ev & Klevtsov 2007: 178.)
9 “Плакало все село. Не знали односельчане, что десантники из 76-й воздушно-десантной дивизии встали на пути бандитских формирований, которые прорывались в Дагестан. 90 гвардейцев сражались почти с тремя тысячами боевиков. Десантникам не было никакой поддержки, так как ее запретили оказывать «бизнесмены войны» из Москвы. Когда будут обнародованы имена?” (Dement’ev & Klevtsov 2007: 180.)
10 “Его автомат раскалился от выстрелов. И вдруг пуль ударила в грудь. Душа гвардейца-десантника улетала в вечный покой, к белому солнцу…” (Dement’ev & Klevtsov 2007: 187.)
11 I interviewed Oleg Dement’ev via e-mail on February 2, 2013. All photographs reprinted from the book “Step in immortality” are republished here with his permission.
13 Памяти псковских десантников погибших в Чечне // C. Макашин // На протяжении столетий // Гордилась ты своим щитом // Когда дожилось лихолетье // На отчий край и...

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Encounters along Micro-Level Borders: 
Silence and Metacommunicative Talk in Service 
Encounter Conversations between Finnish 
Employment Officials and Immigrants

By Tarja Tanttu

Abstract
This article examines the interaction between Finnish employment officials and 
their immigrant clients in service encounter conversations. It employs the con-
cepts of metacommunicative talk, silence, agency and asymmetric interaction sit-
uation. Such service encounters between native speakers of Finnish and immi-
grants going through the integration process and speaking Finnish as their second 
language constitute situations of institutional interaction, characterised by asym-
metry. Asymmetry during the service encounter arises from the roles and power 
relations between the official and client, a familiarity with the routines associated 
with service encounters, and the use of Finnish as the language of conversation 
during the encounter.

This article examines two authentic service encounters, recorded in a Finnish 
employment office. The encounters are analysed using discourse analysis, com-
bining micro-level analysis of language use and macro-level analysis of the situa-
tion. Interviews with the employment officials and background information col-
lected from the officials and clients via questionnaires are used in support of the 
qualitative analysis.

Officials use different methods of interaction with their clients. In addition, the 
individual characteristics of officials and clients and their cultural differences in-
fluence the construction of interaction during a service encounter. Finnish offi-
cials can sometimes handle service encounters with very little talk – sometimes 
with hardly any talk at all. However, metacommunicative talk can serve as a vehi-
cle for reinforcing the client’s agency and supporting the immigrant in learning 
the language and customs, as well as in establishing a foothold in the new com-

Keywords: Service encounter conversation, institutional interaction, meta-
communication, silence, Finnish as a second language, immigrants, integration
Introduction: Everyday Interaction Situations in Constructing and Dismantling Borders

The path by which immigrants progress from being outsiders to becoming members of society and citizens of their new home country can be long-winding and involve several phases. After crossing the physical national border, newcomers face several other borders, such as language and various social, cultural and societal borders. Most people moving to Finland must learn a new language and new ways of interacting. They must learn to understand the underlying principles governing the way in which society functions, and also the services provided by society and its organisations in their new home country. To become a member of the community, they may need to find a place of study or a job, and establish contacts with the native population.

Ordinary interaction with people such as neighbours, study or work colleagues, or authorities forms a vital part of such integration into a new community. Micro-level encounters of this kind enable newcomers to learn the customs, language and communication culture of their new country of residence. The border between outsiders and belonging – or exclusion and inclusion – often becomes visible through interaction.

In recent decades, these partially invisible cultural, linguistic and social borders, the crossing of such borders and bordering processes have become a topic of interest in multidisciplinary border research, due to an increase in worldwide mobility and geopolitical changes (Newman & Paasi 1998; Paasi 2011; Newman 2011). Since the so-called spatial turn of the 1990s and the identification of the mobility paradigm, issues of place, space, borders and mobility have also become a focus of inquiry in linguistic and cultural studies (Blunt 2007: 684; Weigel 2009). In particular, central themes include issues related to the politics of mobility (including the mobility of labour), diasporic and hybrid identities, the processes of inclusion and exclusion, and the related exertion of power (Donnan & Wilson 2001; Sadowski-Smith 2002; Lan 2003; Vila 2003; Schimanski & Wolfe 2007; Berensmeyer & Ehland 2013). Also, the question of so-called dislocated borders, i.e. where the borders to be crossed are defined and located, when moving for example from one state to another, is still topical in border research (Balibar 1998).

This article considers the interactional situation between the official and immigrant client as one arena of border negotiation, where borders are crossed from one’s own culture into a foreign culture. By using metacommunicative talk, i.e. by offering the client an explanation of the course taken by the service encounter and of the client’s own actions, it is possible that officials could reinforce the client’s agency and so facilitate their establishment of a foothold in the new community – ‘crossing the border’. On the other hand, it may be asked whether the possible absence of talk by the official excludes the client from the handling of matters that concern him or her, and potentially turn silence into a boundary. This examination
focuses on authentic conversations between Finnish employment officials and immigrants during service encounters.

Such encounters between immigrants and officials involve the drafting of plans and decision-making, which is important not only for the immigrants’ integration and future, but also from the perspective of the entire society into which they are being integrated. For this reason, encounters between immigrants and officials form an important research topic (Kala kuivalla maalla 2005; Pitkänen 2005; Hammar-Suutari 2006 and 2009). Such encounters mark the starting point of the building of the immigrant client’s life in the new country. The early stages of integration involve charting the immigrant client’s background and planning his or her future, as well as explaining the practicalities of Finnish society, for example the school system, health care, social services and the duties and responsibilities of various authorities. In particular, communication practices in various types of service encounter conversations in Finland have been studied as part of a project conducted by the Institute for the Languages of Finland (2002–2007). This project examined the practices involved in service encounters in the public and private sectors (Asiointitilanteiden vuorovaikutuskäytänteiden tutkimus [Study on communication practices used in service encounters]). Most of the data collected under the project comprises service encounters at the Kela (Social Insurance Institution of Finland) offices and at R-kioski convenience stores.1 (Sorjonen & Raevaara 2006; Lappalainen & Raevaara 2009). Although relatively little research exists on the interaction between immigrant clients and officials in Finland, Salla Kurhila has examined service encounters and interaction between native and non-native speakers of Finnish in her publications (Kurhila 2001, 2006a and 2006b: 225–228; see also Kupari 2007). With respect to learning the Finnish language and integrating into Finnish society, it is important to note that (besides a Finnish teacher), over a long period of time various officials may be the only communication partners who speak Finnish with the immigrant. So, successful service encounters may play a significant role in the immigrants’ integration process (Kokkonen 2006a, 2006b and 2010; Brewis 2008). Moreover, the study of service encounters involving immigrants provides perspectives on the learner language and the conditions of communication in such a language: with the communication partners entering the situation on very different bases – for example, one of them is in the position of just learning to function in a new language and in new situations – how well can communication succeed? It is therefore anticipated that research into this field can also yield more information on the special characteristics of official language and service encounters with officials from the perspective of immigrants.
Conversation During Service Encounters and Key Concepts

This article examines interaction in conversation during service encounters, employing the concepts of ‘metacommunicative talk’, ‘silence’, ‘agency’ and ‘asymmetric interaction situation’. In an asymmetric interaction situation, the parties have different resources in terms of their knowledge or skills – for example language skills – which affects their abilities to participate in and influence the situation and also the course of the conversation. The parties may also have different rights and responsibilities that affect their participation in the interaction. This is typical of institutional interaction situations, such as service encounters with officials, where the professional and institutional identities of the parties have a bearing on the situation (Drew & Heritage 1992: 3–4; Raevaara & Ruusuvuori & Haakana 2001: 16–23).

Recent critical research on institutional interaction situations such as service encounter conversations, has aimed to counter prevalent assumptions that clients visiting state offices possess uniform and sufficient communicative skills and the knowledge required to take care of their business. Officials, for their part are not always able to take account of their clients’ individual needs and life situations (Codó 2011: 725; Hammar-Suutari 2009: 62–63, 146–147). The asymmetry of the relationship between the expert and client can be analysed from existential, epistemic, legal and ethical perspectives. On the existential, human level, the expert and the client are equals and their encounter is symmetric. However, on the epistemic level or the level of knowledge and expertise, their relationship is asymmetrical. This also applies to the relationship at legal and ethical levels, since experts always have more responsibilities and power than their clients in terms of legislation, regulations and professional ethics (Gerlander & Isotalus 2010: 3–19; Hammar-Suutari 2009: 120). Asymmetry in institutional interaction has been studied using the concept of the gatekeeper (Erickson & Shultz 1982; He & Keating 1991; Chew 1997a; Chew, 1997b). For example, the official may be viewed as a gatekeeper who possesses knowledge of the administrative practices of the institution, practices related to service encounters and the structuring of interaction during the service encounter, accompanied by the power to either share or not share these resources with the client. Asymmetry is present in many forms in service encounters between immigrants and employment officials. It arises, for example, from the roles of the official and client, the language used (Finnish as a native language – Finnish as a second language), and from power relations (expert knowledge Vs layman’s knowledge, access to expert information).

Metacommunicative talk is used to explain and regulate interaction. This is usual in classroom communication and so-called ‘teacher-talk’, for example. The purpose of metacommunicative talk is to ensure that the matter is understood, to direct attention to either something or to the actions of the parties involved in the interaction, to regulate turn-taking, to summarise and correct, and to negotiate
meaning. Metacommunicative talk is usually employed by the person with the power to regulate interaction in the situation (Stubbs 1976: 162; Moutinho 2014: 119–120). In the analysis of examples cited in this article, metacommunicative talk (hereafter ‘metatalk’) refers to explaining actions and reinforcing understanding through talk: the official explains his or her own actions and structures the situation and the course of the service encounter for the client via talk. Broadly speaking, within this context metatalk belongs to the group of metadiscursive strategies (see Luukka 1992: 22–26).

Existing research provides several typologies of silence which occur during social interaction (Kurzon 2007: 1673; Ephratt 2008: 1909–1910). Within the linguistically oriented approach, silence has been viewed as a psychological, interactive or socio-cultural phenomenon (Bruneau 1973: 20; Kurzon 1995: 57). Psychological silence refers to very short pauses in a conversation, reflecting deliberation or thought, or deliberately slowing the pace of speech in order to ensure the addressee understands what is being said. Interactive silence is longer than psychological silence and is related to interaction, for example turn-taking, whereas sociocultural silence refers to phenomena such as the social and cultural practices that underlie both psychological and interactive silence, and which influence their duration. Silence has also been examined as eloquent silence, a rhetorical silence that serves as a linguistic sign similar to speech (Ephratt 2008: 1910–1911).

In most Western cultures, talk is understood as something which connects people, however, such cultures may even view silence as intimidating. Silence can become a border that separates people and increases the distance between them by giving rise to emotional uncertainty, fear and feelings of inferiority, all of which can contribute to preventing integration into a new community. In other cultures, talk may be considered a factor which separates people, and silence may be viewed as safe. Features of both notions can be identified with respect to communication within Finnish culture (Salo-Lee 1996: 46; Carbaugh 2009; Wilkins & Isotalus 2009). Scollon & Scollon (1995) distinguish between two different types of linguistic politeness strategies, related to the amount of talk and silence: involvement strategies and independency strategies. Involvement strategies include being voluble, acknowledging the other person (for example, by using his or her language or dialect) and expressing mutual views, mutual knowledge and empathy. Independency strategies, on the other hand, include being taciturn or reticent and increasing distance, leaving the other person alone and respecting their privacy. Expectations with respect to the amount of talk vary in different situations, however, volubility is usually perceived as ‘warm’ and ‘intimate’, whereas taciturnity may be viewed as ‘cold’ and ‘unintimate’ (Scollon & Scollon 1995: 39; Salo-Lee 1996: 52).

Small pauses form a natural part of interaction. In natural everyday conversation however, such pauses are usually very short, with a duration of less than a second to a few seconds (see e.g. Jefferson 1984). In this article, silence refers to
pauses in the service encounter that have a longer duration than in everyday conversation. In a broader context, silence is understood as an absence of talk; a lack of talk in asymmetric situations, during which the official would be able to reduce the level of asymmetry by reaching out to the client and supporting the client’s understanding of the situation by explaining it, rather than remaining silent. Within this context, silence refers to human silence, and silence as the absence of talk (Schmitz 1994). It is a period characterised by an absence of talk that can be measured in time, for example due to the official having to update the customer’s information on the computer during the service encounter, print out various forms, or use the computer to search for the information required by the client. Sometimes the beginning of the service encounter can involve a long, silent moment, during which the client has arrived but the official is still entering the previous client’s information on the computer before serving the new client. At other times, silent moments occur when the client is thinking of what to say – or how to express his or her thoughts in Finnish. In addition, the absence of talk can constitute ‘thematic silence’ related to a certain topic (in this context, knowledge concerning practices related to visits to the employment office) (Ketola et al. 2002; Kurzon 2007). In this context, silence does not therefore refer to absolute silence, since periods with no talk can be filled with other sounds, resulting from actions (see for example Kurzon 2007: 1683).

Within sociological research, agency is frequently used to refer to goal-oriented action by an individual, and the individual’s free will and ability to act (Jyrkämä 2008: 191–192; Gordon 2005). According to Jyrkämä (2008: 193), the concept of agency is strongly linked to structures, i.e. social factors that create limitations and obstacles to human action, but which also provide opportunities. Agency is also contextual and tied to time and place; it is interactive and negotiable: agency is realised in relation to other people in a given situation (Jyrkämä 2008: 196). Within interaction situations, agency has been examined e.g. as the ‘practical, contextual actions taken by an individual to influence the course of the situation in the moment, and its outcome’ (Wallin et al. 2008: 157). In this article, agency refers to the opportunities the interacting parties have to participate in the handling of the matter in question, and to influence the course of action and decision-making. Despite the asymmetry that is present in the situation, immigrant clients are not passively subject to the official’s actions; where possible, they are an active, equal party to the interaction, with the ability and free will to take goal-oriented action.

To be able enter the community of his or her new home country, the newcomer must understand how to behave in the new environment. Only those who master the discourse can take action or participate (Corner & Hawthorn 1989). However, on their own, newcomers cannot necessarily discern the practices and customs of their new home country. They may need the help of natives in order to understand the division of duties between various organisations in the new society, or how to
correctly interpret various communication situations. For this reason, silence, absence of talk or leaving things unsaid may create an invisible boundary to the newcomer’s integration into the new community, and subsequently, his or her active agency. Metatalk, on the other hand, can provide the opportunity to cross this invisible boundary by means of interaction. Small talk on casual topics unrelated to the service encounter can also serve the same purpose (Salo-Lee 1996: 52–53).

Immigrants Integrating in Finland

Immigrants with varying backgrounds can take highly different paths towards settling down and integrating in Finland. The reasons for immigration have also become more varied: in the 2000s, an increasing number of people immigrated to Finland due to work, study or family ties, while in the 1990s immigration largely occurred on humanitarian grounds. At the time, immigration to Finland particularly tended to consist of asylum seekers, refugees, and so-called returnees which refers to Finnish citizens living outside Finland or people of Finnish origin (expatriate Finns) who return to Finland, as well as people of Finnish origin from the former Soviet Union (Return and expatriate Finns).

It is clear that an illiterate refugee arriving in Finland needs a different kind of support and guidance compared to a person with a vocational or academic education who has moved to Finland for work-related reasons. Such divergent backgrounds have a major impact on the entire integration process and the immigrants’ opportunities for engaging in successful interaction, including encounters with various officials. Account should therefore be taken of various immigrant groups and their needs during the provision of public services. In addition to services aimed at immigrants, a growth in immigration also increases the need for special measures promoting integration. In Finland, the integration of immigrants is governed by the Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration (1386/2010). The purpose of the Act is to support integration and the immigrants’ opportunities to play an active role in Finnish society, on equal grounds to the rest of the population (Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration).

A key point of contact offering public services for immigrants is formed by the employment and economic development offices or labour force service centres (hereafter referred to as employment offices). Integration services provided specially for immigrants include guidance and advisory services, initial assessments and the preparation of integration plans, as well as integration training. Study of the Finnish or Swedish language features strongly as part of integration training, in which the necessary literacy skills are also taught. Training can also involve vocational courses or practical training. Integration training aims to provide immigrants with the readiness to enter work or further training, as well as societal,
The number of immigrants in Finland has grown steadily. At the end of 2012, there were 195,511 foreign nationals living permanently in Finland, in comparison to only 98,600 in 2001. Statistics show that the size of Finland’s foreign population has nearly doubled during the 2000s. However, these figures do not include all people with an immigrant background who permanently reside in Finland. For example, people who have moved to Finland from abroad and obtained Finnish citizenship or asylum seekers are not included in such statistics. For this reason, the number of people with an immigrant background residing permanently in Finland is significantly higher than the figures provided above would indicate: at the end of 2012, 285,471 people who had been born abroad were living in Finland. Of these, 62% were foreign nationals, and Estonians and Russians constituted the largest groups of foreigners (Maahanmuuton vuosikatsaus 2012, Annual report on immigration 2012). In citizens’ everyday lives, increasing immigration means that a rising number of native Finnish speakers encounter immigrants – as neighbours, colleagues and clients – who are learning Finnish. Alongside growing immigration, multiculturality, multilingualism and a diversity of values and customs will become an increasingly visible element in Finnish society. Integration is thus a two-way process that requires commitment and interaction from both immigrants and members of the receiving society.

Two Service Encounters and their Analysis

Two recordings of authentic service encounters between immigrants and employment officials have been created as part of a broader collection of data on service encounters in one Finnish employment office, particularly in the unit offering integration services for immigrants. Most of the clients using this service point have not lived in Finland for very long, and are included within the sphere of integration measures, i.e. they participate in Finnish language training or apply for various vocational training or practical training placements in accordance with their integration plans. During the initial years in Finland, the aim is to learn the language, practices and customs of the new home country. At this stage, integration services provided by the employment office can be a vital source of support. When analysing recordings of service encounters within the unit in question, it should be borne in mind that the recordings were made during the early stages of the immigrants’ integration process. This may therefore influence the extent to which clients require some explanation of the practices associated with the service encounter, or the division of duties between various authorities.

Two different service encounters have been selected for analysis in this article. These encounters are examined from the perspective of silence and metatalk, employing discourse analysis. The aim is not the broad generalisation of the observa-
tions; instead, a detailed qualitative analysis aims to picture and understand two different service encounters and the varying methods used by officials in encountering the client. The analysis combines observation of language use at micro-level and observation of the service encounter at macro-level. In addition, background information collected from officials and clients based on questionnaires is used in support of the qualitative analysis. The analysis also utilises interviews with officials in order to gather background information, and observations made in these interviews regarding interaction during service encounters. The interviews with officials revealed that officials too can view service encounters with immigrant clients as significant arenas of integration: meeting an official and speaking with him or her can provide the client with an opportunity to take a further step towards becoming a full member of society (See e.g. the interview dated 30 August 2012).

This article draws on both the interactional and constructionist traditions of discourse analysis. Interactional discourse analysis examines real, individual interaction situations and their progress. The aim is to understand and interpret situations based on what happens during the interaction situation (Luukka 2000: 148). Highly empirical and inductive in nature, conversation analysis takes an interactional approach to the study of discourse. As the analysis proceeds from the phenomena found in the data to a more common level, the approach is highly data-oriented (see e.g. Kurhila 2000: 360; Luukka 2000: 149; Raevaara & Sorjonen 2006). In line with the constructionist approach to discourse analysis, this article does not examine interaction situations as if they are detached from the broader contexts of language use. Instead, the micro-analysis of interaction is linked to the broader, social and cultural macro-level (Drew & Heritage 1992: 17–19; Luukka 2000: 151; Moutinho 2014: 213).

Interaction between the official and client is examined on the basis of two service encounters: do any problems arise during the interaction, and how are they solved? What roles do silence and metatalk play in service encounters? The chosen service encounters are typical examples of conversation between an official and an immigrant in such a situation. In both service encounters, the clients come to the office in order to provide the official with documents needed by the authorities in order to process issues relating to their clients. One client brings a certificate received on the completion of a course, and the other a contract for a practical training period. The official must process the documents brought by the client and record the client’s information on a computer. In both cases, the official schedules the next meeting. These two service encounters provide fruitful opportunities for parallel examination, particularly due to them both representing a short, highly routine service encounter. However, for several reasons the interaction involved in the two situations develops in very different directions: while one service encounter involves plenty of talk, the other involves very little.
Silent moments due to the official’s actions are particularly interesting to the study, as during such moments, the client must wait for the situation to progress. Moments of this kind render the routines related to the service encounter visible, alongside the power used by the official to structure the situation. Will the official allow the client to wait in silence – leaving the silence open to the client’s own interpretations – or will the official fill the silence, for example by explaining to the client what she is doing and why? Instead of being an empty space in the conversation, a pause is filled with conclusions – and in an interaction situation, pauses and silences are also subject to interpretation. For this reason, a pause constitutes action, and silence is filled with action even if nothing is said. If the client is familiar with the routines of service encounters with Finnish officials and acquainted with the characteristics of Finnish communication culture, she is likely to be able to interpret the silences punctuating the official’s actions in the right way: ‘the person is concentrating on handling my matters’. If, on the other hand, the client is an immigrant who is unfamiliar with visiting Finnish offices, and based on her earlier experiences (for example, they may have left their home country to flee the authorities), then officials evoke feelings of fear or distrust, and the silence may be interpreted very differently.

The service encounters examined in this article are brief in duration. In the first example, the total duration of the service encounters is 3 minutes and 15 seconds. The official and client are mainly silent: the service encounter includes only 45 seconds of talk. The official enters the client’s information into the computer in silence, while the client waits for the situation to progress. In this example, the duration of the longest uninterrupted period of silence is two minutes. In the second example, the total duration of the service encounter is 2 minutes and 30 seconds. The second service encounter does not include any pauses lasting longer than a few seconds. Instead, the official continuously explains to the client what she is doing and why, or what the client must do next. In these examples, silence and metatalk can be viewed as two different approaches employed by the officials, each influencing the course of the encounter in its own way.

Example 1 [see Appendix 1 for translation and Appendix 2 for notation glossary]:

Asiakkaana 29-vuotias nainen, äidinkieli venäjä, asunut Suomessa 1 v
Virkailija 1
3 min 15 s
27/06/2005

Asiointitilanteen alussa asiakas täyttää tilanteen tallentamiseen liittyviä tutkimuspapereita tutkijan kanssa ja juttelee niistä muutaman sanan myös virkailijan kanssa. Kun tutkimuspaperit ja -lupa on täytetty, asiakas aloittaa varsinaisen asioidon näin:
In this example, attention is drawn to two long periods of silence, during which the interaction between the official and client is broken – one period of silence lasts for two minutes, and the other for nearly thirty seconds. These silences are very long during a conversation. Action by the official conceals the absence of talk: the silence is filled by the tapping of the official’s keyboard, as she updates the client’s information. Prior to the two-minute silence, the official has uttered only two words to the client: joo (yes) and kiitos (thank you). During the periods of silence, the official types on the computer while the client is idle, sitting and waiting. The official does not inform the client of what information is being recorded and why. There is no further discussion about the client card either – to understand the purpose of the card, the employment office client needs to know that the date of the next appointment at the employment office is indicated on the card.

On lines 7–8, the official seems to refer to the client card and the next appointment to be marked when she mentions that the client had applied for courses held in the autumn: ‘kun ei ole vielä tietoa kuka pääsee ja kuka ei ni laitetaan sinne ’ [.

(‘there is no information about who will be selected and who will not so let’s put there.’); however, this sequence is not completed, and the official does not make either the next appointment date or what she was going to write on the card explicit.

The official’s explanation on course admissions, given on lines 7–8, seems initially unclear to the client, since she interrupts the official by beginning to talk about a Finnish language course she has applied for. This shifts the focus of conversation from the client card, to student selections for the Finnish language course. On lines 10–13, in her longest sequence, the official attempts to articulate the fact in two different ways in order to make the matter understandable to the client: that student selection for the course has not yet been completed (‘niistä ei ole tehty vielä valintoja’ and ‘ei ole valittu vielä sinne suomi kaksi kursseille’) (‘the selections have not been made yet for the Finnish Two courses’), and that a
letter will be sent to the client to inform her of the student selections (‘siitä tulee tieto sitten kotiin and elikkä heinäkuun lopussa tulee kirje kotiin siitä että oletko päässyt kurssille’) (‘the information will be sent home and so at the end of the July, a letter will arrive home on whether or not you have been selected for the course’). Interestingly, the official breaks up this sequence concerning student selection for the course with a silence lasting nearly thirty seconds, in order to continue typing on the computer. At the end of the service encounter, although the official mentions the point at which information on student selection for the course will be sent to the client, no mention is made of the client’s further plans or of the next date at which she is expected to report to the employment office – or of what she should do if she is not admitted onto the Finnish language course.

In the first example, the official serving the client is relatively inexperienced. At the time of the service encounter, she had been working with immigrants and as an employment official for only four months (Interview on 28 June 2005). The official’s lack of experience may have resulted in the need to focus closely on the administrative tasks involved in the service encounter, for example updating the client’s information in the client records. This may have created periods characterised by an absence of talk during the service encounter, as the official needed to take a ‘timeout’, so to speak, from their interaction with the client while focusing on typing. It also seems that the official and client do not know each other in advance, which may contribute to the situation’s formal atmosphere. The client has just completed her first Finnish language course, and it is noticeable from the interaction during the service encounter that she does not yet speak Finnish very well. The client’s language skills may therefore influence the amount of talk during the service encounter. However, attention is drawn to the fact that, despite having lived in Finland for only one year, the client seems fairly familiar with routines related to employment office visits. It seems the client knows that she must report to the office after completing the Finnish language course, and the routines related to the client card are familiar – so perhaps no further reference is made to the card for this reason. This may partially explain the absence of talk on the part of the official.

In the second example, the client is visiting the office for a second time on the same day. He is going to begin a practical training period in a car repair shop. On his previous visit however, he did not bring along the practical training contract to be signed before training begins, in order to render his insurance cover valid.
Example 2 [see Appendix 1 for translation and Appendix 2 for notation glossary]:

Asiakkaana 21-vuotias mies, äidinkielinen venäjä, asunut Suomessa 3 v 6 kk
Virkailija 3
2 min 30 s
01/11/2005

01 A: LÄHESTYY VIRKILIJAN PÖYTÄÄ. [OJENTAA PAPERIN JA ISTMUUTUU
02 V: [no /nyt/ on uusi paperi salla ( ) kiito: s? (4.0) eli nyt siä olet
03 siellä sitten: marraskuun ja joulu:kuun.
04 A: [mm, *niinku pari kuukautta*.
05 V: joo? tästä päivästä ( ) ne vakuutukset ov=vomasska ( ) sitte=vasta kun tää ( ) sopimus
06 on tääla virallisesti tehty niin sen takia on nyt hätä sahaa sulle ( ) paperit kuntou. ALKA
07 KÄSITELÄ ASIAKKAAN PAPEREEITA JA SELITÄÄ SAMALLA
08 A: mikä todistus mun piti vielä tuoda.
09 V: ne sitä_ ef ( ) kun se harjottelu loppuu ( ) sitten sun pitää Penttilä ( ) todistus? ( ) jossa
10 Pentti kertoa et million sinä olet ollut harjoitteleuta ( ) ja mitä sinä olet siellä tehnyt.
11 A: joo,
12 V: ja siihen ei ole mitään lomaketta että Pentti voi ( ) jos se löytää sieltä firmasta puhtaan
13 >puhdasta< paperia niin kirjottaa [sille.
14 A: [ASIAKAS NAURAA ( - ) voi käsin kirjoittaa.
15 V: mutta se nyt riittää kun sää tuot ( ) näistä molemmita jaksosta sen saman todistuksen sitten ( )
16 [tammikuussa. LYÖ LEIMOJA PAPEREEIHIN
17 A: [joo.
18 V: onko salla se meidän kortti? ( ) työvoimatoimiston kortti.
19 A: ei.
(2.0)
20 V: no missäs [se on.
21 A: [no mä en >muista missäs se_on.<
22 V: OTTAA UUDEN ASIAKASKORTIN JA ALKAAN KIRJOITTAA SITÄ ASIAKKAKALLE (- - ) no mä annan
23 sulle ( ) laitata sen lendingpakoon? sitte=talteen ja ( ) sit sä aina ( ) joka ilta säs katsot sitte tähä et
24 ( ) mikä päivä se oli million piti tulla työvoimatoimin[soon.
25 A: [Ejoo! NYOKYTELEEL
26 V: eikö [niin.
27 A: [mm.
28 V: ja täss_on nyt sun uusi osoite SANOO OSOITTEEN ÁÅÅÅÅÅSAMALLA KUN KIRJOITTAA SEN
29 KORTTIIN (9.0) ja tuo on to sun henkilötunnus? ( ) ja ensimmäinen pävär tämamikkuuta
30 toimisto on [kinni niin mä laitan tähän toinen ensimmäitä ja nollakuus? ja ( ) kirjotan tähän
31 todistus? ( ) ja sitte=mä laitan tähän meidän puhelinnumerhon? (4.0) jos tarvitsee soittaa? ( ) ja
32 nyt joka ilta katsot sitten ( ) tähän kort[tiin,
33 A: [NAURAA ejoo!.
34 V: ja muistat että [toinen pävär.
35 A: [Emuistan kyllä.[NAURAA
36 V: [muistat tulla työvoimatoimistoon [papereitten kanssa.
37 A: [Ejoo!.
38 V: okei? ( ) mie annan tästä sinulle ( ) sun oman ( ) kopion ( ) OJENTAA ASIKAANKALLE HÄNEN
39 KAPPALIIENSA HARJOITTELUSOPIMUKSESTA ole hyyvä? ja mie laitan sen koncelle ja mie
40 lähetän Pentille postissa sen.
41 A: joo ( ) kiitos sulle. NOOSEE JA LAHTTEE JO OVEA KORTTI
42 V: selvä kijitos /hei=hei/.
(personal identity code), ‘todistus’ (certificate), ‘puhelinnumero’ (telephone number), ‘työvoimatoimisto’ (employment office). At the beginning of the service encounter, attention is drawn to the official’s explanation to the client, regarding the reasons for the need to bring the training contract to the employment office before the practical training period begins – rather than merely entering the contract details on the computer. At the end of the service encounter, the official informs the client of what will be done with the practical training contract: the client will receive one copy, another copy will be sent by mail to the practical training instructor, and information on the practical training period will be recorded in the employment office’s client files. Based on the official’s actions, we can infer that, in addition to the actual matter at hand – receiving the practical training contract – the official aims to reinforce the client’s agency during the practical training period, by supporting the client in understanding what kinds of administrative procedures are related to the training.

This service encounter involves plenty of humour: this can be heard in the official’s expressive tone of voice and in how the official instructs the client on obtaining a certificate after the training period and carefully storing the new client card. The client is about to begin his practical training period in a car repair shop, which happens to be used by the official for car repair services. This explains the informal reference made to the client’s practical training instructor. Also, a potential conflict (on lines 18–37) is dealt with by employing humour: the client has apparently lost the employment office’s client card, and so the official has to prepare a new one. The official jokingly provides the client with instructions on the careful storage of the new card: humour is communicated by the exaggerated stressing of certain words, and the instructions make the client laugh. In the interviews conducted with her, the official mentioned that she deliberately uses small talk and humour to establish a connection with the client (Interview on 30 August 2012).

The official in the second example has long experience in the role: at the time of recording, she had been working as an employment official for immigrants for over nine years (Interview on 31 October 2005). As the client happened to be embarking on practical training in the car repair shop used by the official, this provided an opportunity to discuss the training on more familiar terms, in a more informal atmosphere. In addition, the official and client were apparently already acquainted, as the client had lived in Finland for a relatively long period and had visited the office on previous occasions. The official had an understanding of the client’s language skills: it seems that she was able to evaluate the manner and pace at which she could speak to the client.
Discussion: Little or Plenty of Talk?

In the service encounters examined in this article, both clients’ matters are handled despite clear differences between the encounters in terms of their structure and atmosphere. Different meanings can be attributed to silence during such situations. Provided that the client has sufficient knowledge of the routines underlying service encounters with Finnish officials, the functioning of Finnish society and its service system, and the division of duties between various authorities, explanatory metatalk is not required. In such cases, silence or absence of talk can be expected and considered unproblematic during a service encounter; it demonstrates that the official is focusing on taking care of the client’s matters and not on supporting the client’s integration via interaction. Nevertheless, silence or the absence of talk can form a boundary to integration if the client is unfamiliar with the customs and practices of his or her new home country, and if these are not explained. Metacommunicative talk can therefore provide support, and ease the entry into and learning required to understand a new culture.

In the first example, the encounter involves very little talk: the official does not explain her own actions to the client, nor does she explain what is being recorded on the computer or on the client card, or how the client should proceed during the autumn if she is not admitted onto the Finnish language course. Silence dominates the service encounter: its total duration is 3 minutes 15 seconds, of which talk accounts for only approximately 45 seconds and silence for 2 minutes 30 seconds. When the official has turned away from the client and is typing on the computer, the client silently remains seated, flicking through her papers. To an external observer, the silence feels uncomfortably long, since the official provides no explanation for the silence. Despite this, the atmosphere during the situation is friendly and business-like – it could be even described as formal. The official uses rather polished standard language (for example, ‘onko sinulla asiakaskorttia’, ‘olet hakenut syksyn kursseille’, ‘niistä ei ole tehty vielä valintoja’, ‘oletko päässyt kurrssille’) (‘do you have a client card’, ‘you have applied for the courses this autumn’, ‘the selections have not been made’, ‘whether or not you have been selected for the course’). The official seems to be solely focused on providing an answer to the client’s question, and her actions are consistent with typical institutional interactions – conforming with expectations, characterised by task-oriented action and limiting the talk to certain, task-related topics (Drew & Heritage 1992: 24–25; Wilkins 2009: 78–81).

In the second example, the situation has a different atmosphere: while business-like, the encounter is friendly and relaxed. It includes more characteristics typical of normal everyday conversation: there are only a few, short pauses and some overlapping talk, dialectal expressions are used (for example ‘mie’, ‘hätä saaha kuntoo’), and there is variation (for example ‘siää’ ~ ‘sinä’ ~ ‘sää’; ‘mie’ ~ ‘mää’; ‘harjottelu’ ~ ‘harjoittelu’) and colloquialisms (for example ‘sulla’, ‘tää
sopimus’, ‘to sun henkilötunnus’, ‘millon’, ‘nollakuus’). The use of humour also makes the atmosphere more informal. These features suggest a transition between so-called transactional and interactional speech: in other words, a transition from conversation centred on the exchange of information, to everyday conversation (such as discussing feelings and sentiments) which bridges the gap between the parties (Chew 1997b: 210). This is more atypical during institutional interaction (Drew & Heritage 1992: 24). The total duration of the situation is 2 minutes and 30 seconds, of which short pauses account for a total of 20 or so seconds. Despite the amount of talk and humorous use of language by the official, the atmosphere remains business-like and the main focus is on handling the client’s matters.

In the second example, in addition to solving the client’s problem the official seems to concentrate on explaining practices to the client. She explains the connection between the training contract and validity of insurance cover, provides instructions on preparing a training certificate, explains the purpose of the client card and discusses who will be informed of the training contract and how. Explaining one’s actions and practices to the client – why things are done as they are – instead of merely updating the client information and recording the reason for the visit without explanation, can create and reinforce trust between the client and official. Rendering the official’s actions and the employment office’s practices understandable to the client may increase the client’s agency in the handling of his or her own matters: when the information required is not merely in the official’s hands, the client has the opportunity to meet the official on more equal ground. By gaining an understanding of how Finnish society, services and organisations function, it is easier for the client to become a full member of society. The availability of information on visiting various offices, and the demystification of the practices and processes involved in dealing with the authorities and society at large, can therefore be viewed as an emancipatory process for immigrants (see Chew 1997b: 219–220).

Based on the examples presented, when examining them from the perspective of integration, in the first example, language – or more precisely the lack of it, the absence of talk, and silence may form a boundary to, or at least unnecessarily slow down the process of becoming a full member of society. How can a newcomer learn the practices related to dealing with authorities, or to navigating the maze of various interacting organisations, if such practices and connections are not explained? Moreover, explaining practices can reduce the asymmetry of interaction and support the newcomer in gaining a foothold in the new society.

When comparing the clients’ backgrounds, one’s attention is drawn to the fact that the client in the first example has lived in Finland for only one year, whereas the client in the second example has already lived in Finland for three and a half years. In the first example, the client is applying for her second Finnish language course. The second client however, has already obtained a practical training position in which he must be able to manage using Finnish. The clients’ Finnish lan-
guage skills therefore probably influence the amount and type of Finnish used by the officials in the situation. If the client speaks only a little Finnish, it is most probably rather difficult to explain the situation to the client in Finnish. In such cases, it can be practical and beneficial to the client if the official speaks just a little Finnish, using the most simple and unambiguous expressions possible. In most cases it is possible to use an interpreter, or use non-linguistic means of communication or any languages common to the client and official.

Conclusion
In every situation, the parties to interaction have many borders to cross before a genuine encounter is possible. This particularly applies to interactive situations related to the integration process – in everyday encounters with neighbours or colleagues, or during service encounters.

In asymmetric service encounters, metacommunicative talk could function as a tool for reinforcing the client’s agency. During her interview, the official in the second example mentioned that she first explains to the client why she is about to ask questions related to e.g. family relations, before actually posing the questions, and why such information was needed. She also pointed out that, by doing this, she gave the client the opportunity to prepare an answer and to consider how much he wished to reveal. The same official also spoke of the computer’s role during the service encounter, saying that she provides the client with a great deal of description of what she is typing on the computer. She felt that it was important that the client understood what information was being recorded and why this was being done. With respect to the role of metatalk, the official brought up the aspect of learning Finnish: ‘I find it important that the client hears spoken Finnish. This is extremely important, and I might be the only one who speaks Finnish to the client during that day.’ (Interview on 30 August 2012).

Officials employ different methods when encountering their clients. In addition, the individual characteristics of officials and clients and their cultural differences influence the construction of interaction during a service encounter. Finnish officials can handle service encounters on the basis of very little talk – sometimes with hardly any at all. This can constitute an efficient and appropriate method: for example, if the client speaks only a little Finnish, then silence can provide relief, a break during which the client has no need to struggle to understand what the official is saying. On the other hand, some clients may consider an absence of talk on the part of the official to be rude and impolite. When examining various service encounters in a broader context, as part of the immigrants’ integration process – as steps towards becoming a full member of society – metacommunicative talk can support the learning of the language and customs, and therefore the integration process as a whole. However, during asymmetric interaction situations in particu-
lar, silence, or a lack of explanation of new or foreign practices can exclude the newcomer from the community.

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**Notes**
1. R-kioski is a chain of convenience stores mainly selling a range of everyday items.
2. The service encounters have been recorded on video for the author's ongoing doctoral dissertation. The data includes a total of 130 service encounters. The situations involve 145 different immigrant clients and three female employment officials who speak Finnish as their native language. The majority of clients included in the data speak Russian, Kurdish or Dari as their native language. However, the data features clients with a total of 35 different native languages from all over the world, for example Russia, Estonia, Iraq, Turkey, the United States, Spain and Germany. The clients included in the data comprise 60 men and 85 women. Since the language used in the service encounters is mainly Finnish, the data does not include immigrants who are in the very initial stages of their integration process, nor does it include service encounters in which interpretation is used. In addition, the data includes interviews with officials and questionnaires filled in by the clients and officials in order to provide background information. Most of the data was collected in 2005 and complemented with interviews in 2012. The data has been collected and is being stored by the author of this article and MA Tuija Särkinen from the University of Eastern Finland. All informants participated in the study on a voluntary basis.
3. English translations of the examples and explanations of the symbols used in the transcription are included as appendices.

**References**

**Research data**

Interview on 30/08/2012. Interview with official 3. Interviewer Tarja Tanttu. Transcribed. Stored by the interviewer.


**Literature**


*Return and expatriate Finns*. Ministry of the Interior:


Appendices

APPENDIX 1: Examples in English

Abbreviations:

A = client
V = official

Example 1

The client is a 29-year old woman, mother tongue Russian, has lived 1 year in Finland
V1
3 min 15 s
27/06/2005

At the beginning, the client is still filling in the papers about video recording the encounter for research purposes. She discusses the papers with the official and the researcher. When the papers and permission for recording and research are ready, the client begins by saying:

01 A: well, uh, my course () [is /finished, GIVES A PAPER TO THE OFFICIAL
02 V: [yes?
03 A: (he)re is /the certificate, GIVES ANOTHER PAPER TO THE OFFICIAL
04 V: thank you? STARTS TYPING WITH THE COMPUTER
(120.0)
05 V: here you are, do you have a client () card like this. GIVES PAPERS BACK TO CLIENT
06 A: yes. GIVES HER CLIENT CARD TO THE OFFICIAL
07 V: you have (.) applied for the courses this autumn, however (.) there is no information about
08 who will be selected and will not so lets’ put [there,
09 A: [I want to (.) Finnish Two? *I=don’t know*,
10 V: the selections () have not been made yet (.) for the Finnish Two courses (.) the information
11 will be sent home. STARTS TYPING INFORMATION USING THE COMPUTER AND ON THE CLIENT
12 CARD
(26.0)
13 V: so at the end of the July, a letter will arrive home on whether or not you have been selected for
14 the course or (.) Finnish Two [course, GIVES THE CLIENT CARD BACK TO THE CLIENT
15 A: [yes? thank you. bye. PACKS PAPERS IN HER BAG, STANDS UP AND
16 LEAVES
17 V: bye=bye. CONTINUES TYPING WITH THE COMPUTER

[1248]
Example 2

The client is a 21-year old man, mother tongue Russian, has lived 3 years 6 months in Finland.

The client has returned to submit a contract for practical training which he had forgotten on the previous occasion.

01 A: approaches the official’s desk. [hands over the paper and sits down]
02 V: [well now you have a new paper.] thank you? 4.0 so
03 now you are there in November and December.
04 A: [mm. *So a couple of months.]
05 V: yes? from this day on. (...) those insurances are = valid (...) only = after when this (...) contract
06 is officially made here, so that is why we must hurry to get your (...) papers ready starts to
07 handle the client’s papers and explains simultaneously
08 A: which certificate I had to bring now.
09 V: well it is that (...) when the practical training ends (...) then you have to ask for a certificate from
10 Pentti (...) certificate. (...) where Pentti explains when you participated in the training (...) and what
11 you have done there.
12 A: yes.
13 V: and there is no form for it so Pentti can (...) if he can find clean empty paper in the firm, which he
14 can write on [it].
15 A: [client laughs (- -) can write by hand.]
16 V: but it is enough if you bring (...) one certificate for both of these periods then (...) in
17 January. stamps papers
18 A: [yes.]
19 V: do you have our card? (...) the employment office card.
20 A: no.

(2.0)

21 V: well where [is it.]
22 A: [well I don’t remember where it is.<]
23 V: takes new client card and starts writing it for the client (- -) well I’ll give you (...) you’ll put it in your wallet? then = safe and (...) then you’ll always (...) every evening you’ll look
24 at it so that (...) what day it was when I had to come to the employment office.
25 A: [eyes. nodding]
26 V: isn’t it [so.]
27 A: [mm.]
29 V: here’s your new address says it aloud when writing it on the card (9.0) and that is your
30 social security number? (...) and on the first of January the office is closed so I’ll write the
31 here second of January, zero six and (...) write certificate here? (...) and then I’ll write the
32 telephone number here? (4.0) if you need to call? (...) and now every night you will look at (...) this card.
33 A: [laughs eyes.]
34 V: and you’ll remember that [the second of]
36 A: [I’ll remember.] [laughs]
37 V: [you’ll remember to come to the employment
38 office with the papers.]
39 A: [eyes.]
40 V: okay? (...) I’ll give you (...) your own (...) copy (...) gives the client his copy of the contract
41 for practical training here you are? and I’ll enter it into the computer and send it to Pentti
42 through the post.
43 A: yes (...) thank you. stands up and walks towards the door.
44 V: ok thank you /bye=bye/.
APPENDIX 2: Symbols used in the transcription of data

Intonation and vocal pitch
- Falling intonation
, Level intonation
? Rising intonation
/ Sequence began or spoken at a higher pitch than surrounding talk
\ Sequence began or spoken at a lower pitch than surrounding talk

Stress and pace of speech:
_ Underlining indicates stress or emphasis on the underlined word or part of the word (e.g. joulukuussa)
* Sequence spoken more quietly relative to the surrounding talk
>: Sequence spoken more quickly relative to the surrounding talk
<: Sequence spoken more slowly relative to the surrounding talk

Word duration:
- cut-off word (e.g. tou- eiku tammikuussa)
>: prolonged sound (e.g. kiitos)
_ fusion of two consecutive words; legato pronunciation (e.g. no sita_et)

Pauses and overlap:
(0.9) Pause duration in seconds
(.) Micropause
= Utterances linked without a pause
[ beginning of overlap

Other symbols:
£ Speaker is smiling or laughing while speaking
( ) Brackets indicate an unclear sequence
(-) Brackets with one dash: unclear word
(- -) A longer unclear sequence
NAURAA Non-linguistic action is described using small block letters (e.g. OJENTAA PAPERIN)
Thematic Section:
Concurrences: Culture Bound and Unbound

Edited by
Diana Brydon, Peter Forsgren & Gunlög Fur
One of the central concerns of the postcolonial effort has been to recover the voice and agency of the subaltern in an effort to find alternative articulations to monolithic imperial representations. Universalizing perspectives obscure their origins and threaten to silence alternatives, regardless of their validity or influence. How then, do we account for intersections, contentions, imbalances, and bridge-building as part of the manner in which human beings narrate and engage with their world?

This volume of *Culture Unbound* showcases contemporary postcolonial scholarship collected under the auspices of *Concurrences in Colonial and Postcolonial Studies*, a University Research Center at Linnaeus University in southern Sweden. The center gathers senior as well as postdoctoral scholars and graduate students from different fields interested in how colonialism and imperialism affected encounters in various contact zones across the globe. The *Concurrences* research looks for ways to expand the understanding of conflicting and simultaneous claims regarding culture and history. Influenced by the postcolonial concern with recovering the voice and agency of the subaltern, the principal purpose is to investigate various cultural archives – formal and informal, traditional and digital, fiction and documentary text – in order to map multiple and concurring claims of reality, experience and meaning in time and place.

We recognize that this is a challenging project for which there are few successful models or guidelines and propose that any viable response requires cross-disciplinary fertilization and widespread collaborative efforts. We therefore find it essential to employ and further develop theories and methods that legitimize, problematize and communicate multimodal and multivocal forms of concurrences without trivializing the contested power relations that influence who is heard, where and in what way.

The present collection of articles roams across territories, centuries, and disciplines, demonstrating the many varied settings to which colonialism bequeathed its legacy. They all struggle to make room for diverse and many-faceted processes, which cannot adequately be described in binary terms or easily delineated categories. As a result, they present different innovative methodological approaches to the study of cultural encounters inflected by colonialism and imperialism. They demonstrate, each in their own way, the bounded nature of Western interpretations of these encounters and of colonial systems of interaction. In doing so they
contribute to this journal by suggesting that colonial legacies constrict culture in specific ways, causing, as it were, a culture bound. That boundedness, however, can also be unbound, in part, through a recognition of those discrepant and concurrent modes of reading that characterize postcolonial approaches.

Historian Linda Andersson Burnett employs the concept of “ecology of knowledge” to interpret a patron-client system that demonstrates the formation and function of information gathering in late eighteenth century Britain. Focusing on the example of George Low, a Presbyterian Minister on the Orkney Islands in the North Atlantic, Andersson Burnett tells a story of a man with an abiding interest in natural history and environment. The network into which Low enters stretched far beyond his immediate context, revealing an ancillary system connecting scholars and explorers from England to Linnaeus and his system of categorizing the world, to European fascination with the “unknown” northern regions, as well as to British overseas colonies. It demonstrates concurring circles of knowledge that interlace and jostle one another in the assembling of information to feed the ferocious appetite for information concerning the natural world at the end of the 18th century, during the period commonly associated with the birth of a modern and secular form of knowing the world. Andersson Burnett chooses to analyze these connections as an eco-system of knowledge transfers. This serves at least two purposes. On the one hand it moves the focus from “great” individuals (explorers, naturalists, scientists) to systems of circulation and dependence, transcending both class and geography; on the other hand it demonstrates the many ways in which global and imperial power intersected with local hierarchies and systems of knowledge. While not forgetting structures of inequality, the essay on Low’s gathering of Orkney information suggests a novel approach to interpretation and visualization of the many different forms of knowledge production.

Visual art scholar Melanie Klein discusses education as a contact zone in her study of art education for Black students in South Africa during the era of Bantu education around the middle of the twentieth century. Her search for an “antireductionist” perspective leads her to pay specific attention to “punctual evidence” forming patterns of temporary stability. Art education for Black students, primarily in conjunction with teachers training, was expected to advance civilization and modernity, at the same time as it emphasized and encouraged specific formulations of African authenticity and ethnicity. Black leaders and artists, however, did not always adopt or agree with these definitions. Through examples of the Black South African sculptor Job Patja Kekana and the white educator John Grossert, she demonstrates that artistic expressions and art education in apartheid South Africa had multiple and sometimes dubious origins and at times unexpected or contradictory consequences. Her methodology exposes “an alternative art historical narrative” with aesthetic concepts that are not fixed but instead point out struggles regarding artistic and intellectual self-definition.
Historian Hans Hägerdal analyses an early example of Swedish travel fiction, the novella *Swensken på Timor* (The Swede on Timor) from 1815, “translated” by the Swedish author Christina Cronhjelm from a purported English account. It is a tale of a Swedish sailor who after a shipwreck is adopted by an indigenous group on Timor, marrying a local woman and converting to Islam. Since there has been a tendency to reproduce ideas of cultural otherness in European travel writing, Hägerdal examines in what ways this novella relates to the European discourse of the tropical or Asian other. Hägerdal shows that some historical facts can be traced in the novella, but more than anything else the text is dominated by literary tropes of romantic exoticism, which explains its remarkably positive portrayal of the indigenous society and to some extent even Islam. At the end of the article Hägerdal underlines that the non-white protagonists of the novella are not merely exotic objects, but on the contrary stand out as subjects whose words and attitudes convey European ideas of natural life and love, and that the important thing with *Swensken på Timor* is that it gives a vision of a society at the margins of Asia which did not conform to the discourse of race and evolution that was taking shape in Europe around the time it was written.

Historian of ideas Mikaela Lundahl examines some of the conflicting and competing historical facts and narratives connected to the UNESCO World Heritage site of Stone Town in Zanzibar, Tanzania, using the concept of friction as a way to analyze how various actors narrate “the same” event(s) in different ways, and interpret the other actors’ accounts as fantasies or fabrications. Lundahl compares the World Heritage narrative of global values and of (material) cultural fusion and harmonization with local narrations of loss and marginalization. The article raises questions about who has the power over historiography as well as questions concerning what the effects of heritagization are, especially if it silences other narratives that are concurrent and locally more important. Lundahl’s article participates in the theoretical discussion of the concept of cosmopolitanism, contributing to discussions elaborated by scholars such as Homi Bhabha, Stuart Hall and Robbie Shilliam who have redefined cosmopolitanism in different ways in order to give the concept a less Eurocentric definition, and a definition more related to global migration.

Literary scholar Piia Posti employs the concept of concurrence to address the simultaneous and sometimes conflicted allegiances of contemporary travel writing as exemplified in two texts by Swedish writer Sven Lindqvist, *Exterminate all the Brutes* and *Terra Nullius*. Through close reading of his work, she illuminates the challenges of writing postcolonial critique through the conventions of a genre long steeped in colonialism and argues further that globalization, anxiety about the genre of travel writing and the tension between fiction and non-fiction in such work may best be understood as interconnected discursive fields. Whereas most Western travel writing is conventionally complicit with colonialist habits of mind, Lindqvist sets out to critique colonialism. Yet despite these good intentions, the
achievements of these texts are mixed at best. Posti argues that what is interesting about Lindqvist’s travelogues is that a tension emerges between the claims to authority of his postcolonial critique (based on his historical reading and analysis) and his role as travel writer (where he bases his claims on his experiences of travel). In these texts, she notes, “the privileged positions of the postcolonial critic and the contemporary travel writer concur” in ways that problematize his critique. She situates these travel narratives as in some ways concurrent with the postcolonial critique of literary theorists writing at the end of the twentieth century, using the decolonial theory of Ramon Grosfoguel to suggest a possible route forward beyond the impasse at which postcolonial thinking now finds itself. In particular, she finds inspiration in Grosfoguel’s invocation of the Zapatista mantra, “walking while asking questions,” with its potential for rethinking the concurrent relations among local, global, and universal in ways that can do justice to ways of knowing that were previously eclipsed by narrowly conceived conceptions of a Eurocentrically-based universal. Her sustained engagement with Lindqvist’s work demonstrates the productivity of the concurrences model for understanding Swedish investments in understanding postcolonial critique and complicities beyond their current articulations.

The concluding essay also extends postcolonial critique into new geopolitical domains. In this essay, literary scholar Fedja Borcak addresses a particular form of writing back against imperial othering, which he terms “subversive infantilisation.” In his view, this term describe strategies adopted in contemporary Bosnian literature depicting experiences of the 1990s war. Subversive infantilisation challenges paternalist Western discourses on Bosnia and Herzegovina, by “re-rigging” them, often by filtering them through the perspective of the naïve child narrator, to open up a space of undecidability for the reader. Citing Maria Todorova’s coinage of the term balkanism (theorized on the model of Edward Said’s Orientalism), Borcak explains that Western discourse on the Balkans has been to a large extent unchanged for roughly 200 years. Western discourse on the war and media depictions of it continued in this balkanist vein. Given this situation, Bosnian writers repeat this infantilizing discourse that casts Bosnia and Herzegovina as a child state, inhabiting and using it (through subversive child narrators) to “dissolve it from within.”

Taken together, these essays illustrate the versatility and resilience of the concept of concurrences for enabling new readings of cultural production within and beyond the binding structures of discursive, geopolitical, and historical power structures.

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Re-rigging Othering: 
Subversive Infantilisation in Contemporary Bosnian-Herzegovinian Prose

By Fedja Borčak

Abstract
In this article I put forward the concept of subversive infantilisation to designate a phenomenon in contemporary Bosnian literature, which by using a certain kind of childish outlook on the world undermines paternalistic and balkanist Western discourse on Bosnia and Herzegovina. By analysing primarily the portrayal of the role of mass media in a few literary texts, principally books by Nenad Veličković and Miljenko Jergović, I highlight the way in which these texts “re-rig” and by means of irony and exaggeration illuminate the problematic logic inherent in the subject position from which one represents the other. Textual characteristics of subversive infantilisation are contextualised further and seen as a discursive continuation of experiences of the 1990s war in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Keywords: Subversive infantilisation, balkanism, Bosnian literature, Jergović, Veličković, Samardžić
Introduction

On 14 April 1992, with a voice void of everything save for the determination to deliver the latest news, the television reporter Senad Hadžifejzović confirmed to Bosnian-Herzegovinian viewers what they had feared would happen for some time: the outbreak of war, which would lead to the dismembering of the federation of Yugoslavia and put the Bosnian state in a political, social and ideological shock, which has not, even after two decades, eased off (see “Senad Hadžifejzovic - Rat Uzivo 1992-04-14”). However frustrating the slowness of the reconstruction has proven to be, the pace is unsurprising considering the complexity of the continuing conflicts, of which not only the fierce nationalist rivalry between the three major domestic factions (Bosniaks, Bosnian Croats and Bosnian Serbs) is the problem, but also the involvement of the international community (or “the Western governments and multilateral institutions controlled by those governments” (Bose 2002:6)), which has added further layers to the core of the problem.

This constant state of enmity has made Bosnian-Herzegovinian post-war society burst with opposing narratives, explanatory models of varying sophistication, and a range of possible (or impossible) solutions proposed to ease the tensions. Consequently, contemporary Bosnian literature dealing with the 1990s war reflects and contributes to this intricate discourse in different ways, either by criticizing or by reiterating reactive collective (nationalist) identities, historical narratives, etc.

The attention of the present article will be directed at literary texts experimenting with ideological alterations, and producing new, differentiated claims which set out from an attitude highly critical towards ideological grand narratives, be they Titoist, nationalist or, more recently, the capitalist ones induced by the international community in connection with the end of the war and protected in the course of reconstruction (Kazaz 2004:138). What interests me is a particular cultural implication of what has been conceived as a deep “resentment at foreign paternalism,” a paternalism that is widely considered to be repressive and imperialist in today’s Bosnia and Herzegovina (Hunt 2001:239). I propose the concept of subversive infantilisation to describe a particular way of responding to such paternalistic Western political involvement and the discursive foundation supporting it. I argue that the cultural phenomenon of subversive infantilisation deconstructs American and Western European discourse on Bosnia and Herzegovina by shiftily “re-rigging” – i.e. imitating yet displacing the inherent logic in the implied Western epistemic statements regarding Bosnia and Herzegovina. This re-rigging, I argue, can open up a way of thinking characterised by undecidability, which opposes absolute claims on, for instance, ethnicity and identity, and helps perceive possibilities in the world that do not yet exist, but which can be thought and potentially realised. This attitude of undecidability is especially important for a society impatient with the certainties of totalitarian narratives.
The Event of War

In a 2004 survey, Enver Kazaz listed major tendencies in Bosnian post-war literature, one of them being what he called “the infantilisation of narration” (infantilizacija naracije), which he observed in the works of a number of authors across the spectrum of ethnical affinity, such as Tvrtko Kulenović, Bekim Sejranović, Aleksandar Hemon, Fadila Nura Haver, Goran Samardžić and Alma Lazarovska, among others. Two other authors producing infantilised narrations are also mentioned, namely Nenad Veličković and Miljenko Jergović, whose books Lodgers (Konačari) and Mama Leone, respectively, will be addressed in the course of this article. In infantilisation, Kazaz sees the construction of narratives that, with the help of ironic and hyperbolic (sometimes litotetic) oversimplification, portray historical courses of events with the aim of undermining stiffened and simplified discourse on Bosnian-Herzegovinian society. Most often this is done from the perspective of the child, or the “naïve narrator” (Avdagić 2012:140), in a fashion somewhat reminiscent of works like Voltaire’s Candide, Kurt Vonnegut’s Slaughterhouse-Five, or Imre Kertész’s Fatelessness. Although the use of the child’s perspective is not a literary convention unique to Bosnian post-war production, its frequent recurrence in this literature is remarkable and demands to be explained with attention to the contextual circumstances of Bosnia’s ideological transition. Another key characteristic of infantilised narration is its way of changing authorial focus from retelling historical grand narratives built on ideological dogmata to telling stories about individual experiences of everyday life, thus affirming perspectives on “the the bare elements of human life” (Kazaz 2004:163, my translation). According to Stijn Vervaet, who addresses Veličković’s Lodgers, the infantilisation of narration enables “the author to tell his sarcastic truth about the war or at least to pose some sarcastic questions about how the war is understood and represented by the nationalist opposing forces as well as by the TV-watching West and its prejudices about ‘the barbaric Balkans’” (Vervaet 2010:8).

However useful the notion of infantilised narration is, I would like to somewhat redefine the contours of the concept in the hope of going beyond the original definition’s limitation to “authorial” truths and strictly text-inherent features. Using instead subversive infantilisation underlines, of course, the phenomenon’s critical stance, and may furthermore help to open up the dimension of social mobilisation shaped spontaneously (pre-subjectively) in response to the historical event of war as well as circulating ideological templates, both domestic and foreign. It is important to recognise that although subversive infantilisation is a phenomenon dependent on the space of discourse, it does to a large extent spring from the non-discursive experience of the event of war. Not least of all, the range of studies focusing on memory in Bosnian post-war literature has shown how es-
sential it is to see much of the aesthetic production as a result of a traumatic break in personal and societal history.

This break has led to an increased level of pessimism with regard to totalitarian narratives, which, according to Kazaz, is visible in the strong focus on “small stories, personal confessions, intimate autobiographical narratives and testimonies of ordinary people” that work to preserve the “autonomy of the individual against the totalitarian ethno-nationalistic model of society” (Kazaz 2012:85). Personal remembrance is opposed to ideologically encoded social memory. A similar observation is made by Branka Vojnović (2008), who also stresses that these first-person accounts should be seen as important witness accounts resulting from the authors’ need to formulate and psychologically deal with an event that radically disrupted the sense of personal belonging and made it impossible to turn back time and return to established concepts of identity. The witness, in the words of Sibylle Krämer, is someone:

who is present (in the flesh) at an event, perceiving it with his own eyes and ears and therefore able to give an account to those without access to the event. The witness is medium and messenger in so far as he transmits; that which he transmits is a perception, a bodily experience which he has to “translate” into public speech. (Krämer 2005:19)

Testimonies qua literary enunciations can have no hope of actually catching the present which was once experienced bodily (non-discursively), which is why Krämer stresses the necessity to understand them as translations of experiences into archived perceptions. The witness metaphor is telling if its dimension of violence is kept in mind. In his event theory the philosopher Alain Badiou (2009) stresses that the political event (as a break in history) forces those witnessing it to witness and furthermore demands that they testify, or at least position themselves in relation to it. Bodily inscriptions thus turn into a matter of knowledge.

The novelty of an event is expressed in the fact that it interrupts the normal regime of the description of knowledge, that always rests on the classification of the well known, and imposes another kind of procedure on whomever admits that, right here in this place, something hitherto unnamed really and truly occurred. (Meillassoux 2011:2)

One should see the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina as an event not only in the sense of a profound human tragedy, but also as igniting the questioning and ultimately the dismissal of naturalised ways of thinking about a wide range of issues. In the renunciation of the mythologies offered by domestic nationalist occultism and the deconstruction of the liberal discourse coming from the West, subversive infantilisation should be seen as a reaction to an event – or better yet as a mobilisation of those subjects, as Badiou would put it, “faithful” to the event; those acknowledging it as a break in the tradition of what is considered true (Badiou 2009:53). At the same time as the faithful subject is constituted, it keeps the implications of the event alive; implications that can further question old truths and tentatively propose new understandings. In this sense, subversive infantilisation
does not merely record experiences of war, but also claims political space and deterritorialises dominant epistemic discourse, making possible undecidable, not yet known epistemic possibilities.

Seeing as One is Seen

In the texts analysed in this article, the war is often the cause of disillusion and revaluation of what was hitherto held to be true: the world reveals itself to be much more complex and a far more unsafe place than it had appeared at first, in childhood. It is not always the case, but for the most part the infantilising character of a text springs from the perspective of a first person child narrator, whose playful gaze on the world clashes, as soon as war strikes, with the “adult,” conventional way of understanding the surroundings. This type of child perspective is rather common in contemporary Bosnian literature and seems to be effective in posing questions about the complexities of post-war Bosnia. Not least of all, the frequent coming-of-age story, I argue, is often allegorically paralleled with the historical stages of the Yugoslav federation. If the child growing up in Yugoslavia prior to the war acts in a milieu characterised by social stability and personal carefreeness, the outbreak of the war entails the disillusions coming with adolescence and the acute demand to reconsider many aspects of life that previously had been taken for granted. Vervaet argues that these texts make an effort not only [try] to convey the experience of war but also [tend] to reflect on the ways in which war can be represented through literature and how the war experience often becomes a turning point in the life of people, influencing their understanding and framing of the past and its connections with the present. (2010:6)

One example of the event of war is found in Goran Samardžić’s 2006 novel Šumski duh (The Forest Spirit). In the first half of the book, the multi-ethnic narrator Kosta’s childish naiveté is portrayed with all its carelessness, creativity and joy. The second half, however, starts with Kosta’s homecoming to Belgrade after serving in the Yugoslavian military shortly before the war and his realising that his Serbian friends had changed while he was away:

My friends were no longer the same. They’d even gotten hold of a rifle, with an adjustable scope, and a pistol. We called them babies. I could ask them: “Where are your babies?”, and they would reply in concordance: “In a safe place, you Turk” (Samardžić 2006:85. My translation).

Never having been an issue earlier, Kosta’s differing ethnicity from the Serbian majority has now become a problem, excluding Kosta from his friends’ new games. Also new is the expansionist mindset of his friends: “To love and to protect our street corner alone was no longer enough for my friends. There was something drawing them yet further away. One could, it seemed, occupy oneself with just about anything, even with the love towards one’s own country” (Samardžić 2006:83. My translation). The sudden change in attitude reflects the quick spread
of nationalist discourse in Serbian society (as well as in other Yugoslav territo-
ries), and the weapons signify the gaining momentum of politicised militarisation
preceding war. They also seem to point out a disturbing ambivalence in the ado-
lescent transition: young men on the edge of adulthood playing with babies/guns.
In its critical way of displacing the stereotypically masculine image of the brave
warrior, this is one particular way of infantilising. The motif of children holding
guns, and its function of displacing of stereotypes, can also be found outside the
literary medium, for instance in the photography of Milomir Kovačević, who in a
series called “Mali vojnici” (Small soldiers) photographed small children posing
with real-life guns in the ongoing war. The most emblematic of these photographs
is perhaps the one depicting a young boy with arms wearing a beret and a Mickey
Mouse shirt (Kovačević 2012).

A different type of subversive infantilisation is found in Nenad Veličković’s
novel Lodgers (2006), in which the reader follows the teenager Maja’s written
account of her experiences during the siege of Sarajevo. As a first person narrator,
she writes in diary form, not with the sole purpose of recording experiences, but
perhaps primarily to make sense of what is happening around her, both for her
own sake and for her readers’:

The war is being waged between Serbs, Croats, and Muslims. Davor says that the
war is being waged because the Croats have Croatia, the Serbs have Serbia, but the
Muslims don’t have Muslimia. Everyone thinks it would be right for them to have it,
but no one can agree where the borders should be. Dad says that Davor is a dunce
and that the war is being waged because the Serbs and Croats want to divide Bosnia
and kill and drive out the Muslims. I don’t know what to say.

[…] No! I don’t think I’ll be able to explain objectively and impartially to an average
foreign reader why war is being waged. Probably, like all wars, it’s about taking ter-
ritory and plunder. But I can’t think of a probably for why a city of half a million in-
habitants should be bombarded day after day from the surrounding hills. Why would
anyone (in our case the Serbian artillery) destroy houses, burn libraries, and shatter
minarets and the poplars planted around them? (Veličković 2006:9. Italics in origi-
nal).

Asking her family about the increasingly acute political situation, Maja is present-
ed with different explanations for the causes of the war. Although the two ac-
counts given by Dad and Davor differ on which side is to be blamed for the war,
they share a certain schematic simplicity. At first sight, this might seem to have to
do with the older family members’ attention to Maja’s age and her level of fore-
knowledge. But considering that their explanations clash and that their versions
are very much rooted in Bosnian society – people do offer similar explanations, as
do domestic politicians and foreign administrators – they can very well be seen as
equivalent to epistemic statements that are more or less discursively archived.
Maja, however, instinctively distances herself and takes an undecided stance: “I
don’t know what to say.” She does, however, not merely settle with the illuminat-
ing comparison of domestic nationalist narratives. In the second part of the pas-
sage quoted, she addresses her implied foreign readers – something she does regularly and with an ironic sense of humour. On this particular occasion, foreign readers are asked not to expect a clear-cut explanation for the situation, or to buy into simplistic narratives – which they might very well do, Maja seems to suggest, if they are not forewarned explicitly.

A few pages later Maja again stresses the foreign subject’s lack of knowledge about the war and its contextual circumstances: “A foreign reader might well ask who they [the different domestic factions] are and how they differ. Just as I might, for instance, wonder what the difference is between Boers and Pygmies” (Veličković 2006:17). What Maja does here is to adopt the implied discursive position of the Westerner, and then subtly displace the formal logic of the – again implied – statement that seems to accompany such a subject position. The statement (l’énoncé) as a component of discursive play is here understood, according to Michel Foucault, as an archived epistemic claim found in a single enunciation or in a set of enunciations:

[T]he statement, as it emerges in its materiality, appears with a status, enters various networks and various fields of use, is subjected to transfers or modifications, is integrated into operations and strategies in which its identity is maintained or effaced. Thus the statement circulates, is used, disappears, allows or prevents the realization of a desire, serves or resists various interests, participates in challenge and struggle, and becomes a theme of appropriation or rivalry. (2002:118)

By constructing a representation of the others (Boers and Pygmies) which is parallel to the Westerner’s implied – seemingly poorly informed – representation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Maja appropriates a statement, or better yet, mimics a certain representational logic inherent in the portrayal of others. She positions herself in relation to Boers and Pygmies as would, in her mind, a Westerner do in relation to the different groups in Bosnia. Seemingly, she recognises foreigners’ lack of knowledge of the Bosnian war situation as something natural and understandable: Bosnians are as other to Westerners as Boers and Pygmies are to her. She does not, however, appropriate the statement out of empathy, but rather illuminates and comments on the way the statement is constituted. What is targeted is the ignorance of local differences in the position of the “global” subject, i.e. the subject that perceives (the rest of) the world from a position of assumed privilege. In the parallel that Maja makes she is on the one hand a victim of the epistemic violence committed, and on the other hand a perpetrator making use of the very same logic in the representation of others. She both sees and is being seen. Her choice of others draws on colonial discourse: The term “Pygmy” is, of course, considered pejorative and lumps together different ethnicities persecuted throughout history, e.g. the Aka, Mbuti and Twá, on the basis of their relatively short height. The Boers are, in contrast, descendants of French, German and Dutch settlers who immigrated to South Africa in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In illuminating the lack of knowledge about others, Maja subtly
displaces the mimicked statement, hinting at the discursive circumstances in which the statement is articulated; the invisible subject position is marked out in what is sometimes called the “triangle of representation”. By highlighting the subject’s participation in the construction of the representation it is possible to draw attention to the contingent, rather than naturalised, character of a single representation or a particular discursive practice (Prendergast 2000:11). In the words of Mikhail Bakhtin, the authoritative statement is transformed from an “absolute dogma” to a “working hypothesis for comprehending and expressing reality” (Bakhtin 1981b:61).

In the act of subversive infantilisation, this sort of mimicking, displacing, and intentionally oversimplifying complex matters is highlighted, as already suggested, from the perspective of the child’s naïve play and generally childishly uninformed outlook on the surroundings. Rather than being patronising or belittling, which is usually something associated with the term, infantilisation here entails play, spontaneity, and openness with regard to what may be the consequences of the naïve questions asked. Being a child, Maja is by design excluded from many aspects of social life. This is evident in that she hardly ever leaves the museum at which her family stays; all her anecdotes of what happens in different parts of the city are second-hand accounts of what family members or temporary visitors have experienced. This is not necessarily a deficiency, for what the perspective lacks in immediacy is balanced by how it benefits from fresh eyes and a sort of unconditional consideration. Her outsider position entails no real responsibility to the norm system of the adults, and her position as a child can be compared to the character type that Bakhtin called “the fool,” whose “right to be ‘other’ in this world” is based on the surroundings’ general acceptance of the character’s naïvety, which gives the character the possibility to express strange, even ridiculous, thoughts about social life. This dialectic outsider position enables a critical point of view, and the child as a character has the potential “to portray the mode of existence of a man who is in life, but not of it, life’s perpetual spy and reflector” (Bakhtin 1981a:161). The child, being someone who sees life “from below” and questions conventionality by turning naturalised views upside-down, is an ideal infantilising subject.

I believe that this outsider position is what ultimately makes readers forgive the young boy in the following scene from Miljenko Jergović’s Mama Leone from 1999. Sitting alone in the living room, the boy narrator finds a rather grotesque pleasure in watching news reports from the war in Vietnam:

I laugh whenever I see little slant-eyed mothers next to their little dead husbands on the TV. Saigon and Hanoi are the names of the first comedies in my life. I spell them out loud, letter by letter, laughing my head off. Those people don’t look like us, and I don’t believe they’re in pain or that they’re really sad. Words of sadness have to sound sad, and tears have to be like raindrops, small and brilliant. Their words aren’t sad, and the tears on their faces are too big and look funny, like the fake tears of the
Images of the suffering Vietnamese in the 1960s do not affect the boy in the slightest; and certainly not in the way it “should”, in the way his grandmother is affected by the same images. His hyperbolical insensitivity even makes him suspicious of his grandmother’s sincerity: “Grandma loved the little slant-eyed mothers and pretended she understood them” (Jergović 2012:63). One is urged to ask why the boy is unable – despite the self-awareness of his anomalous feelings – to feel any empathy for the people depicted on the news, whose suffering, tears and language are questioned. Reasons for the apparent dehumanisation of the suffering other seem most likely to be found in the effects of the television medium, which fails to convey the immediacy of tragedy – the alienated reaction seems to depend on the logic of how the news report is constructed as a representation. This medial process of voyeuristic and imperialist possession of the depicted subject has been massively debated, for instance, by Susan Sontag in her seminal book *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003). It is indeed a frequent theme in Bosnian literature, where mass medial representations of the 1990s war have become emblematic for the general attitude of the international community towards the suffering in Bosnia. In *Lodgers*, for instance, Maja learns that soldiers defending Sarajevo have come up with the plan to injure or kill neighbourhood dogs in order to get the sympathy required to finally receive help from the international community:

> In Germany, we could ask Granny, there wasn’t a wealthy lady who didn’t belong to a society for the protection of animals. In capitalism people didn’t like each other. The less you liked your neighbour, the more you cared for your dog or cat. Just let ten ladies see Sniffy without legs and ears, and there’d be military intervention. (2006:105)

And here is another example discussing the role of media, from Semezdin Mehmedinović’s book *Sarajevo Blues*, which addresses the Ferhadija Street Massacre on 27 May 1992, when 26 Sarajevans were killed and over a hundred people were wounded by artillery shelling as they stood queuing for bread.

> Shots of the mass killing at Ferhadija circle the globe; pictures of the dead and massacred turn into an ad for the war. It doesn’t matter that these people have names: TV translates them into its cool language, the naked image. The camera disembowels images of their psychological content to create information. And all the massacres that follow reproduce the same images. So the world can see what is going on here. But is this really possible when television sees right through the lack of compassion in human nature just as long as tragedy doesn’t hit home? The sense of tragedy arrived with the bodies bags wrapped in the American flag, and not before then, not through TV reports from Vietnam. (1998:83)

Here, as in Jergović, the inability to mediate suffering is paralleled with American reactions to the Vietnam war, but what is perhaps more accentuated by Mehmedinović is the close tie between the Western attitude toward the suffering of the Bosnian population and the question of acting or not acting when presented with
information about atrocities taking place elsewhere. Among others, Thomas Keenan (2002) has addressed this matter quite directly, contrasting the international passiveness to the enormous amount of information available to governments and public opinion about the situation in war-torn Bosnia, and ultimately dismissing the humanist assumption that people are automatically moved to action if shown proof of human tragedy. With Badiou’s event theory in mind, one is able to understand this sudden insight originating from the war as a “new truth,” revealing what has always been the case, but not yet known.

What is interesting is that when the little boy narrator in Jergović addresses the Vietnamese tragedy, thereby raising questions of the logic of representation, he is also indirectly addressing the position of the Bosnian subject during the war, which was quite similar to the Vietnamese considering the situation in which one is being observed but not helped. Jergović lets the young boy assume the position of the passively gazing subject, and recreates a situation parallel to the scenario in which the Bosnian population appeared before a global audience for years. This staging, or re-rigging, is soaked in an exaggeration that functions as a way of drawing attention to the problematic subject position and the equally problematic logic of representing the other. The child’s surprisingly uncanny laughter, infantilising the seriousness of tragedy, initiates the recognition of the dehumanisation of the people represented, be they Vietnamese or Bosnian. The global memory of the war in Vietnam functions as a support in articulating the memory of the Bosnian war experience, much like what Michael Rothberg (2009) has called multidirectional memory, which entails that memories of other atrocities, say the Holocaust or the war in Vietnam, contribute, by being borrowed, referenced or negotiated, to the way another tragedy is remembered and formed discursively. The process of multidirectional memory in this context is perhaps not primarily a matter of articulating a new narrative of one’s own, which is what is emphasised by Rothberg, but of deconstructing Western attitudes.

The Balkanist Motivation

Up to this point, the position of “the West” – this complex metageographical category targeted in subversive infantilisation – has been somewhat taken for granted. As I have only hinted at, the presence of the West in these texts is to a large extent implicit, or subtly implied. This is especially true for the imagined Western gaze, which, however blind to differences within Bosnian society, is portrayed as relying heavily on the fundamental otherness of the Balkan subject. I would like to argue that the infantilising texts depend on the reader’s familiarity with Western discourse on the Balkans. Without this level of foreknowledge, the young boy’s alienated view of the televised suffering of the Vietnamese in Jergović’s *Mama Leone* does not fully make sense; neither does Maja’s attentiveness to foreign
readers’ ignorance of the ethnic differences in Bosnia and Herzegovina in Velićković’s novel.

As Maria Todorova (who, inspired by Said’s *orientalism*, coined the term *balkanism*) and others have noted (cf. Goldsworthy 1998; Norris 1999; Wolff 1994), Western epistemic discourse on the Balkans has in large measure been handed down from generation to generation to a large extent unchanged for some 200 years. During these two centuries the Balkans have been associated with “industrial backwardness, lack of advanced social relations and institutions typical for the developed capitalist West, irrational and superstitious cultures unmarked by Western Enlightenment” (Todorova 2009:11-12). Bakić-Hayden reminds us that “violence in the Balkans has been not only a description of a social condition but considered inherent in the nature of its people” (Bakić-Hayden 1995:918). The region has in some sense been a mythological “point of no return” similar to Romanian Transylvania, or “a multicultural Babel that just might be chaotic enough to make peaceful co-existence an impossibility” (Karakasidou 2002:576). Gregory Kent suggests that the lack of political will on the part of the international community during the war sprang from the discourse of balkanism, influencing – at the same time being fuelled by – the massive media coverage: “This inherently quasi-racist, pseudohistoric perspective appears to have informed the structurally embedded linguistic preferences of news organisations, as well as, less subtle, more direct, but still somewhat opaque, aspects of falsely balanced reporting” (Kent 2003). Discourse on the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina regularly presented the violent determinism of the Balkan people as the sole cause of the destruction of Yugoslavia. When the political discourse, however, changed shortly after the genocide in Srebrenica in 1995 and started to focus on Serbian expansionist aggression, governments became more interested in participating more actively in the conflict resolution (Kent 2003). This interest did not become any smaller by the end of the war, and international involvement was stepped up with the beginning of the process of reconstruction.

Although the Western governments and institutions see themselves as the “flagbearer[s] of a vision of liberal internationalism in a place destroyed by competing particularist nationalisms” (Bose 2002:6), the international community must be regarded as a dominant player that actively participates in the power struggle (together with domestic ethno-nationalist groups), and that does so according to its own political and economic interests in Bosnia. The task of reconstruction has been described as a project to a large extent orchestrated according to the interests of foreign administrations, on many occasions resulting in what Sumantra Bose describes as “direct intervention in Bosnia’s public life, especially through the person of the civilian head of mission who coordinates the multi-agency international effort, the ‘high representative’”, who has several times outright “dismissed elected Bosnian officials deemed ‘obstructionist’” (Bose 2002:7).
Embedded in this structure, there is a balkanist notion of the Bosnian as deterministically infantile and incapable of structuring a stable society, which seems to justify a “helping hand”, or rather a colonial administrative organisation. Todo-rova stresses that balkanist discourse is a discourse on an “imputed ambiguity” rather than an orientalist “imputed opposition” (2009:17), and shows how the Balkans has had the status of “incomplete self” rather than “incomplete other”, meaning that people from the Balkans have been perceived less like the other than have, say, Turks or Arabs (2009:18). Historically, the self-perception constituted by intellectuals in the Balkans has indeed been characterised by a strong sense of in-betweenness, which has been manifested in different, often ambivalent ways in relation to the concept of European modernity; either as a lack (in comparison to the cultural capital of metropolises such as Paris and London), or as an asset (e.g. in not having any part in the imperialist machinery of modernity). The ambivalence has found expression in the emblematic metaphor of the bridge between civilisational horizons and stages of development, not least in Nobel laureate Ivo Andrić’s novel *The Bridge on the Drina*, which problematises the arrival of Austro-Hungarian modernity (bureaucracy, technology, ideas) in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Milutinović 2011).

It certainly has hegemonic consequences that the potentially productive concept of in-betweenness is replaced by incompleteness in today’s political discourse. The concept of incompleteness is key to understanding how the Bosnian population on the one hand can be dismissed as deterministically uncivilised, yet on the other be wilfully encouraged to transgress this determinism by affirming liberalist ideas in order to become complete selves:

The degree to which various countries, authorities, social groups and individuals have embraced the free market and democracy – always evaluated by those powerful who set rules of the game – has become a yardstick for classifying different regions, countries and groups as fitting more or less into the category of “us,” i.e. “(post)modern-Western-liberals.” (Buchowski 2006:464–465)

Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000) calls this teleological narrative one of transition and emphasises European history as the yardstick: Western discourse excludes others from discursive equality by labelling other regions’ histories as examples of underdeveloped and immature European histories. There is no doubt that the transition narrative plays a decisive role in many Bosnian discourses, not least the political one. Especially the European Union has become a symbol of the sought-after Western standard and has intimately appeared together with notions of modernity, civilisation and prosperity (Helms 2008:98). Bosnian society is constantly urged to transgress a number of negative labels (socialism, inefficiency, collective thinking, primitivism) in order to reach a set of good ones (capitalism, efficiency, individualism, modernity). Inherent in this notion of development, Linda Tuhiwai Smith says, “is the notion of progress. This assumes that societies move forward in stages of development much as an infant grows into a fully developed adult

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human being” (2005:105). One might say that Bosnian society has been subjected to a patronising infantilisation ever since it parted from Yugoslavia and was encouraged to strive for progress and societal organisation according to liberalist values. The view of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a child state is made recognisable (or diagnosed) by way of subversive infantilisation, which inhabits and uses this very perspective to dissolve it from within.

Final Remarks

In the response to this infantilising view, manifested through subversive infantilisation, the matter of illuminating and deconstructing balkanist discourse goes beyond the West’s general attitude to Bosnia as well as the reluctance during the war to take action. It is in the end a way of addressing the acute social problems of today, which are at least partly caused by international involvement (primarily the effects of the Dayton Peace Agreement). If the West, by affirming the Bosnian’s culture-deterministic primitivism and inability to organise a functioning society, has been able to justify the West’s self-acclaimed guardianship over Bosnia and Herzegovina, subversive infantilisation functions as a means by which it is possible to attack the very root of the problem, namely the logic of the current configuration of balkanism. What is interesting is that the infantilising texts are not concerned with arguing against Western statements in the form of “Bosnia is X” by creating similarly propositional statements like “Bosnia is Y”. Neither is the point to target specific enunciations, say the Dayton Peace Agreement or even less particular representations in mass media. As I have tried to show, the idea is instead to highlight the logic by which the dominant assertions in these types of enunciations are created. The literary texts experiment, in other words, with the authority by which one can claim “X” in the first place. They challenge dominant means of representation, as Ania Loomba would say, by appropriating and inverting the statement “Bosnia is X” in order to show that its simplicity does not correspond to the complexity of Bosnian social reality and that the authority invested in the representations is conditional rather than self-evident (Loomba 2005:63). The question concerns the how of representation, including the aspects of delimitation and control of the field of representation.

As it does not propose any more or less explicit alternative explanatory models, subversive infantilisation is open-ended and presents no predetermined answers that would simply work as counterstatements to Western statements. There is no new ready-made image of war, history or culture, nor a new messianic ideology waiting to be established. Rather, subversive infantilisation affirms an attitude similar to the Derridean concept of undecidability, thus rejecting any such politics that is in one way or the other teleologically determined. It seeks to maximise “differences, allowing them to come to the fore and allowing them to continue to thrive, while at the same time not absolutely fixing such differences or ascribing
them to the identity of a particular group” (Calcagno 2007:34). Undecidability also “points to the desirability of being willing to question and challenge what is currently accepted as self-evident in our ways of thinking and acting, while at the same time refusing to specify how we should think or act otherwise” (Patton 2007:770). In the example of Veličković’s Lodgers given earlier, the narrator Maja does indeed question and challenge the way of thinking inherent in those simplified explanations for the war that are given to her by members of her family, but at no point does she propose an explanatory model of her own. Subversive infantilisation is in this light neither parasitic nor nihilistic – in the sense that it settles with producing rubble – and remains patient enough to let the aporia be the space for a yet-to-come.

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References
An Eighteenth-Century Ecology of Knowledge: Patronage and Natural History

Linda Andersson Burnett

Abstract
This article analyses the construction and dissemination of natural-history knowledge in the eighteenth century. It takes the mapping and narration of Orkney as a case study, focusing on the local minister and amateur natural-historian George Low and his network of patron-client relationships with such prominent natural historians as Joseph Banks and Thomas Pennant. It focuses too on Low’s network of informants and assistants among local island farmers, and argues that canonical natural-history texts were the products of collaborative and interdependent processes that included a large number of actors from all strata of society. To conceptualise how natural-history knowledge was created in this period, the article applies the metaphoric description ‘an ecology of knowledge’. This approach enables a focus on a large number of actors, their collaboration and influence on each other, while also paying attention to asymmetrical power relationships in which competition and appropriation took place.

Keywords: Ecology of Knowledge, Patronage, Natural History, Scotland, George Low, Concurrent Narratives
Introduction

In 1772 a ship stopped in Orkney on its return to Britain after an expedition to Iceland. On board were the prominent English botanist Joseph Banks and his companions – the Linnaean disciple Daniel Solander, the Scottish physician James Lind and the Swedish student Uno von Troil. Banks and Solander were veterans of the first Cook expedition to the South Pacific in 1768-71, and these well-travelled natural historians now turned their gaze to the far North Atlantic, which they considered to be an unknown region worthy of exploration. To help them survey the Orkney archipelago the explorers enlisted a young local man, George Low (1747-1795), to be their guide. Low impressed Banks, who later recommended him to other prominent British natural-historians and antiquarians such as Thomas Pennant and George Paton, with whom Low entered into patron-client relationships and with whom he exchanged a large number of letters. The encounter between Banks and Low not only impacted greatly on the latter’s life but also had a decisive bearing on how knowledge about Orkney, and its northerly neighbour Shetland, circulated in eighteenth and nineteenth-century texts – creating a cultural legacy that remains in operation today.

In this article I will analyse why eighteenth-century natural historians turned their gaze to regions within Britain such as Orkney, which were perceived as domestic hinterlands, and how natural-history knowledge about such places was constructed and disseminated. I will argue, using Low as a case study, that canonical eighteenth-century natural-history publications were the result of dynamic collaborative and interdependent processes that depended on a range of individuals and agencies rather than the independent and unaided observations of a small number of elite natural historians whose names have graced the library shelves. Eighteenth-Century Britain had, as Roy Porter and John Gascoigne have demonstrated, a decentralised natural-history tradition (Porter 1977; Gascoigne 2003). Unlike in continental Europe or Scandinavia, there was no formal training for scientists and natural history was therefore the domain of a large number of people. British natural history was, however, not unique in drawing on a multitude of voices. Natural historians from across Europe utilised local informants from all strata of society.

To conceptualise how knowledge about peripheral regions was collected, narrated and mediated in the eighteenth century, I will apply the metaphoric description of ‘an ecology of knowledge’. Used in biology to denote the relationships between ‘living organisms and their environment’, in the social sciences and the humanities the term ‘ecology’ has been applied to analyse interdependent, dynamic and hybrid relationships between people, groups and the environments in which they operate (Oxford English Dictionary 2008). An ecological approach permits us to move the focus of our enquiry beyond a prominent individual towards the wider system in which they function; a system where ‘each factor and organism
has influence on the others, and many complex interrelationships are required to sustain [it]’ (Weaver-Hightower 2008:155).

Low’s close contact with members of the British natural-history elite provided him not only with intellectual mentors but also with powerful patrons who aided, or at least promised to aid, his career. By locating Low and these men within an ‘ecosystem’ of eighteenth-century knowledge production, I will also investigate the function of patrons and clients within that system. I will pay particular attention to the key role such patron-client relations played in bringing together people of different social strata, and in thereby facilitating the production and circulation of scientific knowledge. An important aspect of this system is the extent to which its ‘organisms’ adapted or evolved in order to work together. Originating in a farming family before becoming a minister residing on outlying Orkney, yet then discovered and supported by a pan-British aristocracy while still collaborating with local farmers and ministers, Low’s case illustrates that during the eighteenth century the boundaries of social status and geographical location could be significantly transcended within the ‘ecology of knowledge’. Although I focus on a domestic British context in this article, the ecology approach can also be applied when analysing European natural-history texts about overseas colonies in order to move away from a binary view of the European naturalist narrating the colonised subject’s landscape. The usage of this metaphor does come with some caveats. It should not be interpreted as meaning that the relationships between people in the ‘ecology’ were either natural or preordained. The agency of individual actors was dependent on historically created conditions and relationships such as economy, traditions, ethnicity, status, religion and gender. Another point of caution is that although we can potentially imbue a large number of people with agency it is important not to deny the asymmetry of power that existed within the ecology, where some actors possessed more resources than others whether these were located within Britain or in overseas colonies. Patronage relationships, for example, were built on the principle of a powerful and influential patron collaborating with a client of lower social status. These actors could nevertheless work in symbiosis and co-operation, as Low did – initially – with his more powerful patrons. Yet, relationships in an ecology can also result in competition, appropriation or even elimination (Weaver-Hightower 2008:155-157). Through an analysis of Low’s career I will discuss how conflicts often occurred when patronage relationships broke down or had run their course. Throughout the article, I will pay attention to competing claims of knowledge which came together but did not always concur.
Exploring the Highlands and Islands: Developing an Ecology of Knowledge

In the second half of the eighteenth century, British intellectual activities revolved around the study of the natural world not only in the expanding overseas colonial territories but also domestically. The Highlands and Islands of northwest Scotland in particular attracted a growing number of naturalists who were keen to map and study a region that had up to that time often been imagined as a *terra incognita* by both Lowland Scots and Englishmen. Perceived from the fourteenth century onwards as a cultural and geographic region increasingly distinct from the rest of Scotland, the Highlands and Islands came to be imagined as a dangerous and savage place that early modern travellers often avoided unless they had to go there for political or religious reasons (Brown 1891; Rackwitz 2007). Although a tiny handful of earlier naturalists had started to map this region, such as the Gaelic-speaking islander Martin Martin (c. 1660-1719), who surveyed the Western Isles of Scotland and the physician and botanist Robert Sibbald (1641-1722), who collected questionnaires about flora, fauna, topography, and ethnographic data from local informants in his attempt to create a comprehensive natural history of Scotland, the Highlands and Islands was not really considered an attractive arena for natural-history exploration until the 1750s (Martin 1698 and 1703; Withers 2001: 80). This shift came about after the Jacobite followers of the exiled Scottish Stewart dynasty were defeated in their final attempt to restore the Stuarts to the British throne, from which they had been ejected in 1688-89. Although the Jacobites had come quite close to their ultimate objective of taking London, they were forced to retreat to their Highland heartlands and were destroyed in a showdown battle against the Hanoverian British army of George II at Culloden, north east of Inverness, in 1746. After Culloden, the Highlands and Islands region experienced severe reprisals for its support of Jacobitism, including military subjugation, the confiscation of land and the enforcement of acts banning traditional Highland weaponry and costume (unless worn by conscripts to the British army). With the eradication of Jacobitism heralding the break-up of the Highlands’ often war-like traditional society and the region’s subsequent depopulation, its threat to the British state was deemed to have been neutralised. It was now considered safe to be explored and exploited (Andersson Burnett 2012: 57).

Adhering to a discourse of utility and national improvement, British natural historians depicted the Highlands and Islands as a largely untapped larder of natural resources that could provide the growing English and Lowland towns with products such as kelp, wool, hemp, slate and fish, many of which could serve as substitutes for expensive foreign imports (Andersson Burnett 2012: 55). They also proposed different schemes with regard to how best to exploit these resources, since the local population was deemed too ignorant or lazy to utilise them properly. Local people were also the object of natural-history travellers’ inventories. In
an age before disciplinary demarcation the naturalist not only collected, studied and classified plants, animals and minerals but also studied antiquities and collected ethnological information about human society. Natural historians’ surveys of the Highlands and Islands therefore functioned not only as inventories of potential economic resources that could be exploited but also provided a new positive narrative of a region that had previously been imagined in negative terms as threatening and violent (Andersson Burnett 2012).

A considerable influence on British natural historians’ expeditions and writing, and therefore another key actor in the knowledge ecosystem, was the Swedish botanist Carl Linnaeus. Linnaeus was admired by British natural historians not only for his taxonomies that introduced order and consistency to the natural world but also for his northern expedition to Lapland in 1732. In *Flora Lapponica* (1737), and in his published Uppsala University lecture on travel, Linnaeus emphasised the importance of domestic exploration and he directed the attention of naturalists across Europe to ‘hinterlands’ in which the educated naturalist could produce inventories of regions and their inhabitants previously relatively unmapped by the state (Andersson Burnett 2012; see also Withers 1995; Eddy 2008; Albritton Jonsson 2013). Having their ‘own’ northern and mountainous hinterland to explore, several of the British naturalists who surveyed Scotland corresponded with Linnaeus and informed him about their expeditions. Walker told Linnaeus that little of Scotland had been ‘surveyed’ but that he was now rectifying that. Linnaeus instructed him to: ‘Continue, as you have begun, and enter the hidden places of Nature, and conquer new kingdoms there’ (Linnaeus, 1762La III, 352/1).

This wave of British natural historians extolled the uniqueness of their Scottish expeditions and the hardships they endured. Walker, who carried out a total of six tours of Scotland between 1760 and 1786, wrote in a letter to the influential lawyer and scholar Lord Kames in 1764 that the Highland landscape was ‘as inanimate & unfrequented as any in the Terra australis’ (in Withers 1995: 137). In his autobiography *The Literary Life of the Late Thomas Pennant*, published in 1793, Pennant likewise emphasised how unusual his trip to the Highlands in 1769 had been and the endeavour it involved: ‘This year was a very active one with me; I had the hardiness to venture on a journey to the remotest part of North Britain, a country almost as little known to its southern brethren as Kamtschatka’ (Pennant 1793: 11; Andersson Burnett 2012: 58): Such reminiscences echoed Linnaeus, who likewise loved to dwell on the hardships and dangers he had endured during his Lapland expedition and who compared Lapland with Asia and Africa (Linnaeus, 1811 vol.1: 283).

Writing about natural-history travel, Pär Eliasson has emphasised this trend among eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century natural historians for extolling their own importance in surveying allegedly solitary and unknown landscapes:

> Natural historians seem to walk about in a landscape empty of people and unknown to anyone until it was seen and analyzed by themselves, cast in the role of perceptive
scientists. The landscape and its constituent parts are somewhat created anew in the descriptive process, the region becomes possible to comprehend as it is articulated or narrated. (Eliasson 2002:127)

Mary Louise Pratt, likewise, has noted that eighteenth-century scientific systems of knowing, which Linnaeus pioneered, not only silenced indigenous narratives outside Europe - by re-labelling plants with Latin names for example - but also had the same effect on local and rural narratives and repositories of knowledge in Europe (Pratt 2008: 12). British natural historians did, as discussed, elevate their own knowledge and scientific gaze. Although they often looked down at local knowledge, while having no qualms about utilising local people as guides and carriers, they also actively sought the knowledge of local and stationary amateur natural historians who tended to be ministers or local lairds and whose knowledge they often trusted and which therefore also became a part of the ecology.

In contrast to the situation in Enlightenment France, there was a firm alliance between the Church and Science in both Scotland and in England during this period and there was a particularly close relationship between the moderate wing of the Scottish Kirk (Church) – which included such prominent thinkers as Adam Ferguson, William Robertson and Hugh Blair – and the Enlightenment (Sher 1985). However, the Kirk’s scientific influence extended beyond the university cities and should not be viewed solely in terms of its relationship to the big names of the Enlightenment. The Kirk sponsored several ‘Enlightened’ schemes, such as Walker’s tours and surveys of the Scottish Highlands and Islands and they also ran the Scottish Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge (SSPCK) which operated under the principle that the ‘primitive’ Highlander needed help from Presbyterian outsiders in order to progress (e.g. Withers: 1988). Another example is Sir John Sinclair’s Statistical Account of Scotland in the 1790s, in which the Scottish clergy wrote lengthy reports in answer to a long list of questions concerning their local environment, the parish’s history, and the beliefs, occupations, and health of the parishioners. The church as an institution was therefore also part of the natural-history ecology of knowledge.

The prominence of the parish minister as a natural historian amounted also to more than merely organising and providing information; rather, it often entailed enthusiastic and hands-on involvement in natural-history studies. Ministers were not only university educated, they tended to have time on their hands and a regular income, which meant they could devote themselves to the social and scientific study of their parishes (Rendall 2009:125). Natural-history studies, which often included antiquarian studies, also provided ministers with stimulation and a relief from boredom in what could often be isolated and solitary rural locations. The same applied in rural Scandinavia. Linnaeus had, for example, recommended that students studying theology at Uppsala also attend his lectures on natural history. One of them was Eric J Grape who experimented with improvement schemes on his land and wrote about his parish Enontekiö (Andersson Burnett 2012:187-188;
In Norway, likewise, regional ministers such as Hans Strøm narrated the natural history of their localities (Løvlie 2008). In Britain, these stationary, well-educated and often eager observers were frequently used as informants by leading metropolitan natural historians such as Banks and Pennant who incorporated the ministers’ local observations into their national and international natural-history accounts. The English minister and natural historian Gilbert White noted in 1770 the merits of local observers, commenting: ‘no man can alone investigate all the works of nature, these partial interests may, each in their departments be more accurate in their discoveries, and freer from error than more general writers’ (White 1850: 91-92). Metropolitan natural historians accessed the knowledge possessed by ministers both remotely, through letters and questionnaires, and in the field, where ministers pointed the visiting natural historians to places of interests, lodged with them, and shared their knowledge with them. Although questionnaires were also sent to gentlemen and nobility, ministers often provided, as Rosemary Sweet has argued, the most detailed responses (Sweet 2004: 51). The information provided by ministers was, however, treated with ambivalence; it was accepted as valuable, and yet could be ridiculed as quaint, parochial and inferior to metropolitan scientific knowledge (Withers 1995: 154; Fielding 2008: 9; Andersson Burnett 2012: 129). The minister also risked having his work appropriated by the more established natural historian.

Working frequently in conjunction with the clergy in the attempt to map natural resources and ‘civilize’ the region were the Highland and Island lairds, who discussed issues of agricultural improvement and implemented them on their estates. A large number of these increasingly metropolitan lairds, who were educated in the Lowlands or in England and who spent large parts of the year away from the Highlands, experimented with the planting of new crops, introduced the enclosure and drainage of land, and were even involved with town planning. Their motivation came from a desire to expand both their personal purses and the wealth of the nation (Gascoigne 2003:18). One of the most influential and popular texts on improvement was Lord Kames’s The Gentleman Farmer; being an Attempt to Improve Agriculture by Subjecting it to the Test of Rational Principle. Kames also served as one of the many aristocratic patrons of John Walker and there was a ‘symbiotic relationship’ between improvement-minded aristocratic patrons and naturalists (Eddy 2002: 432). Whereas the landed elite took interest in the works of naturalists in order to improve their estates and earnings, the naturalists gained access to lands where they could examine points of scientific interest such as rock formations and received patronage to further their careers. The appointment of Walker as professor of natural history at the University of Edinburgh in 1779, for instance, was secured through his connections with the elite (ibid).
The ‘Director’ of Banks’s Orkney Tour: Introducing George Low

George Low was one of the many ministers who compiled and circulated natural-history information in the eighteenth century. He was born and grew up in Edzell, Angus, where his parents were tenant farmers and his father a church officer. At the age of 15, two years after his father died, he began a university education in the faculty of arts at Marischal College in Aberdeen. He spent one year before enrolling at the University of St Andrews in 1763 where he studied philosophy for three years and divinity for a further one year. Low’s university studies reflect the relatively democratic eighteenth-century Scottish education system in which boys from modest rural backgrounds had access to university degrees (Anderson 2001: 612-613).

Having completed his studies Low moved in late 1767 or early 1768 to Orkney, where he remained for the rest of his life. He worked there initially as a tutor to the children of the merchant Ballie Robert Graham of Stromness (Anderson 1879: xiv-xiv; Cuthbert 1995: 25-26). The Orkney into which Low arrived was not merely on the periphery of Britain, it was also on the northernmost fringe of Scotland. Orkney, and to an even greater extent Shetland, remained outside the burgeoning tourist circuit of the Highlands, which took off in the late eighteenth century. This exclusion was due in part to the islands’ distance from the mainland and the lack of regular ferries (Cuthbert 1995: 28; Fielding 2008: 131-132). It was also due to complex cultural factors. Having belonged to the Danish-Norwegian crown until the 1460s, the Orkney archipelago retained a much stronger Scandinavian cultural orientation than the Western Isles or northwest Highland seaboard, which were ceded by the Norse to Scotland almost two centuries earlier. In addition to its lingering Nordic identity, moreover, Orkney was paradoxically set apart from the rest of Scotland and Britain precisely because its recent past was otherwise much less contested and controversial than the Highlands and Western Isles. The latter areas’ strong Catholicism and Jacobitism, which for generations had put them beyond the pale of the British establishment, became after the defeat of Culloden a benign source of fascination. There followed an explosion of metropolitan interest in the Highlands, yet this process of cultural conciliation did not extend to Orkney and Shetland. By the 1760s the Northern Isles therefore remained a remote and ambiguous hinterland that was not yet fully incorporated into the nation. Orkney and Shetland offered instead an alternative or even binary cultural narrative, in which their Scandinavian heritage was celebrated (Fielding 2008: 131, 136). As with the Highlands and islands, though, Orkney society was slowly changing and modernity making inroads into island life. This applied especially to Stromness, which was turning into a lucrative trading port where ships stopped for a last time before setting off to Britain’s overseas colonial territories in Canada. Indeed, Low’s employer Graham was one of an increasing number of wealthy merchants who were modernising the islands (Cuthbert 1995: 28).
Having settled into island life, Low came to express a strong dislike for the tutoring job that had brought him there and repeatedly referred to his work as cumbersome and laborious (see Low, NLS, Adv.MS. 29.5.8. Vol.III ff. 59-60). His real passion was the study of natural history. Writing in 1772, he expressed this love: ‘I think there is no study more rational at the same time that it is amusing, than that of the works of Nature, I confess it fills up many a dreary hour to me with pleasure’ (Low f. 53). With his teaching taking up a large amount of his time, Low resorted to studying natural history late at night and early in the morning, and he constructed his own microscope in order to study marine life. He was also a very skilled ink drawer, and made copies of the plants that featured in Linnaeus’s *Flora Lapponica* (Anderson 1879: xv; Cuthbert 1995: 19). Around 1770 he started researching and writing what was to become his major work, a *History of Orkney*. In line with the ethos of the broad church of natural history the book contained historical, antiquarian, ethnographic, and natural history information.

Banks’s arrival in Orkney, who had already placed Linnaean natural history at the centre of British intellectual and imperial activities, would have been an exciting event for this budding natural historian who was appointed as Banks’s guide (Low f.54). The arrival of Banks and his entourage also illustrates the shift that had occurred in the mental mapping of the northern isles of Scotland, which now were deemed worthy of investigation. Low, writing in his *History of Orkney*, noted this change: ‘Till of late years these islands have been little known or frequented, by many they were thought barbarous and a very insignificant part of the kingdom’ (*History of Orkney*: 431). Banks expressed his gratitude to Low by providing him with both books, including Linnaeus’s *Species Plantarum*, and by recommending Low to his influential friends, Thomas Pennant and George Paton, with whom Low was going to correspond with over the next twenty years. Low, writing to Banks, responded that he would do whatever it took to contribute to ‘the Advancement of Science’ (Qtd in Gascoigne 2003: 65).

**Correspondence, Patronage and Knowledge Circulation in the Ecology of Knowledge**

Considering the informal nature of the natural-history discipline in Britain, correspondence networks between keen amateurs who exchanged knowledge, specimens, artefacts, books and manuscripts were of key importance. This was not unique to Britain: the exchange of letters between scholars – such as Linnaeus, Buffon and Banks, for example – was the vehicle for the dissemination of knowledge across Europe in the eighteenth century. Naturalists shared their observations, asked each other for information and promoted their work. It was not unusual, as the case of Low illustrates, that people from different social strata corresponded with each other. The gentlemanly code was that this had to be a reciprocal relationship – in other words, both partners had to benefit from the corre-
spondence and both had to have something to offer. In the case of Low, it was his great knowledge of the Orkney Isles that allowed him entry into the Republic of Letters. Social status was not forgotten – at the heart of patron-client relationships in these correspondence networks was an asymmetry of power between the powerful patron and his/her client – but as long as conversations focused on the shared interest in natural history and antiquarian studies, relationships across strata could be sustained (Sweet 2004: 60-61).

One of Low’s most important correspondents was the antiquarian, natural historian and book seller George Paton (1721-1807) who lived in Edinburgh. Paton was not as wealthy as Banks or Pennant, but he had an impressive library and was known as someone who promoted and aided the careers of other natural historians (Sweet 2004: 57-58). Many English natural historians and antiquarians viewed Paton as their first port of call for Scottish queries and he functioned as an agent who facilitated contact between natural historians on either side of the border (Sweet 2004: 62). In his first letter to Paton, in August 1772, Low showed his deference to this well-established antiquarian by playing down his capabilities while at the same time offering his knowledge:

I am very much obliged to my kind friends who have recommended me to you as capable of giving information anent the Natural History of the Orknies. I should be sorry if they have overrated my very small abilities by a mistaken kindness; however I should think myself very unworthy of their favour, and that I paid a very ill compliment to their recommendation, if I did not everything in my power to advance your plan, tho’ I am afraid I can be but of little service as I have not studied natural History in too systematic a manner, to serve your present purposes; what comes in my way I shall be sure to communicate. If on this or any other occasion you want any particular specimens of Birds, etc, etc, I shall do my utmost endeavour to procure them for you.

(Low f. 52).

In a letter sent the following month, Low also asked Paton to inform him if he made any mistakes since he was not an experienced natural historian (Low f. 53). Low’s claims of inadequacy were, however, carefully balanced and mitigated with assertions of knowledge and hard work, as a letter sent in November shows: ‘My list of Plants is always coming nearer perfection [,] I think I have a much larger Catalogue than has been given by any Orkney genius Before’ (Low f. 54).

To maintain their relationship Low also sent Paton local gifts such as butter, smoked geese and eggs, the latter being collected by local men who specialised in rock climbing (Low f. 60). In return for Low’s observations; his natural-history specimens and local gifts, Paton lent Low books that the latter could not get hold of on Orkney such as Pennant’s British Zoology, Percy’s Northern Antiquities, Pontoppidan's Natural History of Norway, Linnaeus's Flora Suecica and Systema Naturae, and Olaus Magnus’s History of the Northern People. Low also requested Sibbald’s work, which contained a seventeenth-century account of Orkney by the minister James Wallace. Having read it, however, Low deemed Wallace not to be
a reliable source, thus asserting the need for his own studies to his patron (Low ff. 58-60 and 66).

Through receiving a large number of natural-history books from Paton, but also Banks, which influenced his thinking and writing, Low’s knowledge continued to expand. His observations on Orkney, appreciated for their local quality, were therefore at the same time both local and global in their concerns and nature. By adopting a Linnaean taxonomy, for instance, Low placed his regional observations in an imperial ecology that set out to organise nature in accordance to a global system. The influential eighteenth-century naturalist Gilbert White, whose parochial outlook in his descriptions of Selborne in England has been praised by recent scholars, also participated in this global ecology of natural history-knowledge, as Menely has argued (Allen 1976; Worster 1977; Menely 2004). As with Low, White did this through being a Linnaean scholar who read and participated in international debates while at the same time extolling the merits of detailed local observations.

Another of Low’s key epistolary relationships was with Pennant, whose prestigious international network of natural historians included Linnaeus, Comte de Buffon and Peter Simon Pallas. Pennant was, however, equally interested in gaining information from local Scottish informants. Before his tours of the Highlands Pennant had sent out, for instance, questionnaires to local ministers, and the landed elite, in order to get ‘LOCAL HISTORIES’ and to get ‘fuller and more satisfactory Account of their Country’ (Pennant 1772:302).

In a letter from Low to Pennant in November 1772 it is clear Low was very excited to be corresponding with such an esteemed natural historian, and he expressed his eagerness to help with improving British knowledge about the islands. Low also sent Pennant lists of the fauna, insects and plants he had identified on Orkney (Cuthbert 1995: 37-38). In return, Pennant sent Low books and asked Low to do a paid tour of Orkney and Shetland, where Pennant had not been himself, in order to include it in a second edition of his Tour in Scotland. Pennant compiled a list of requests for Low which included some of the following instructions about how to conduct his research: ‘visit personally every Orkney and Shetland Isle’ and ‘keep a regular journal’. Low was also asked to make drawings and write down his observations about minerals, language use and manufacture (Low Memorandums). Pennant further promised that he would arrange for a report of that tour to be published (Anderson 1879: xxxviii). Low duly brimmed with enthusiasm. Writing to Paton in November 1773 about the proposed ‘jaunt’ he stated that he would ‘go to the end of the world to serve the men who are so obliging’ (Low f. 65).

The tour unfortunately could not happen until the summer of 1774 because of Low’s tutorial work. Low, who had been licensed to be a minister by the presbytery of Cairnston in 1771, was anxiously waiting for a parish to become vacant since ministers not only had time for scientific studies, but also had life-time ten-
ure, their own houses and good salaries (Low f. 60; Goodfellow 1903: 72). To secure his own parish he had to be noticed by the feudal superior of Orkney; namely Sir Laurence Dundas (1710-1781), the owner of the Earldom of Orkney, who had the right of patronage, which meant that it entitled him to appoint ministers of his liking to vacant churches (Rendall 2009: 244). Dundas had made an immense fortune from his career as a contractor to the Hanoverian army. With his wealth he purchased a baronetcy, a parliamentary seat and land in Scotland, England and Ireland. His portfolio also included two slave estates in the West Indies (Fereday 2008). Despite being an absentee owner and rarely visiting Orkney, Dundas wielded great power. He was not only in charge of church patronage but he also opened doors for lairds and their families to posts on the islands such as clerks or administrators of justice, as well as jobs in the legal profession in Edinburgh and posts in the British army and navy, or posts with the East India Company (Thomson 1987: 231-3). Dundas’s patronage therefore operated in regional, national, and imperial arenas.

Low was hopeful that his new and influential natural-history patrons would aid his selection, with Banks, for instance, being a friend of the Dundas family. Low therefore started a ‘campaign’ for patronage before he set out on his tour. Writing to Paton on the 30th of April 1773, he expressed that he hoped ‘thro influence in our great man Sir Laurence to be placed in a situation’ where he had more time for natural history, an existence ‘so consonant to the life of a Clergyman’ (Low f. 59). Still a tutor, but full of hopes for the future, Low finally set of on his tour in May 1774.

Low’s Great Tour

Armed with letters of introduction from his prominent patrons and books by Linnaeus (Flora Suecica and Systema Naturae) and Pennant (British Zoology) among others, Low visited the many islands of Orkney and Shetland (Cuthbert 1995: 59). Due to bad weather, he could not visit northern Shetland but eventually went there in 1778 to complete his inventory. During his tours Low carried out geological, ethnographic, antiquarian, zoological and botanical observations.

Low’s observations and his collecting and recording of local knowledge were only made possible through the participation of Orkney and Shetland people, who should therefore also be read as important actors in the ecology of knowledge about the isles. Low expressed, in his writing, most gratitude for the help and information that he received from educated informers, who came primarily from the clergy and the landed elite and whose opinions he trusted and respected (Low Tour:193-194). This is illustrated by him tending to name only those informants who belonged to these higher strata of society. Low wrote, for instance, that he had received instructions, reports and papers from the following people: Mr Sangster (Dundas factor); Mr Jack (minister); Gideon Gifford (Esquire); Mr William
Archibald (minister) and Andrew Bruce (Esquire). Writing to Paton from Walls on Shetland, Low also informed his patron that the local clergy and gentry had been very willing to help and assist him with his queries (Low f. 76; Low Tour: 29). Low did not always think highly of his fellow ministers, however. He complained, in several letters, about local ministers being ‘lazy’ and lacking an interest in answering the scholarly queries that he circulated to them on behalf of Paton (Low ff. 58-59).

Low’s knowledge gathering depended equally on his collaboration with people further down the social ladder such as local farmers and fishermen, though these people are not imbued with the same significance. Low informed Paton before his 1774 trip, for instance, about his plans for utilising local people, which included hiring a ‘Lad’ (young boy) to carry his belongings. He further noted that he would then hire people when he required them: ‘When I need to employ Rockmen [for the collection of birds or eggs], or others to examine any Grave, or other antiquity these must be employed where they are to be found’ (Low f. 71). The people who helped Low would have done so because of a number of reasons such as being paid, which, in the case of the lad was, in Low’s words, ‘a trifle [sic]’; out of kindness, or simply because their landowners ordered them to help (Low f. 71; Low Tour: 193-94).

The hired Orkney ‘lad’ is absent from Low’s narrative – he is a silent facilitator of the trip rather than someone who is imbued with agency and a voice. The rockmen who climbed the islands’ steep rocks for eggs and birds, likewise, remain anonymous in Low’s letters and manuscript. Low did, however, name one farmer informant, whose knowledge he recorded and discussed in detail. This was William Henry, an old farmer whom Low encountered on Foula, the most westerly island of Shetland, in 1774. Henry taught Low some Norn words (an old Scandinavian language which was by the eighteenth century becoming extinct in Shetland) and recited a long ballad (Low f. 81). At this time it was only farming people on Shetland who still knew some Norn. Low would not have gained any knowledge about Norn from the ministers or lairds to whom he normally turned for information. By naming the man Low, moreover, added veracity to the old Norn ballad. Low would no doubt have been aware of the controversy surrounding the authenticity of the alleged ancient Ossianic poems that James Macpherson collected in the late 1750s and 1760s and he would therefore probably be keen to include a detailed narrative of how he came across this old ballad in order to verify it.

Low’s co-operation with Henry should not merely be read through a utilitarian lens, however. The two men clearly enjoyed talking to each other and it was a reciprocal encounter in which their interests happily concurred. In return for Henry’s knowledge, Low provided the old man with gin and he was a receptive and appreciative audience. This can be seen in Low’s description of the man as:
an honest country man… who could neither read nor write but [who] had the most re-
tentive memory I ever heard of… when I saw him he was so much pleased with my
curiosity and now and then a dram of Gin that he repeated [and] sung the whole
day’.  
(Low f. 81; Low Tour: 107)

Although Low primarily socialised with the local elites during his tour, the epi-
isode with Henry illustrated that he also enjoyed and praised the warm hospitality
that he received from farmers. In return for the hospitality he was shown in gen-
eral on Foula, Low preached twice on the island to ‘a most attentive audience’
(Low Tour: 96, 117). Low’s own rural background is likely to have helped him
communicating with people from more modest social backgrounds.

Low also exhibited a revealing degree of deference towards local knowledge.
Although he did ascribe scientific and Linnaean names to local plants and ani-
mals, recording that he had for example ‘observed the Alchemilla alpina, FL.
Suec. 142 [and] Polygonum viviparum, FL. Suec. 340’, he also paid respect to
local names by recording them too. Discussing the bird the ‘white and dusky
Grebe’, for example, Low noted both its description in Pennant’s British Zoology,
and that its local island name was the ‘Little footy arse’ (Low Tour: 139, 28).

There is no doubt that clear power relationships were at work in the creation of
natural-history knowledge, in which ‘educated’ knowledge and observations by
ministers and lairds carried the greatest clout, yet Low’s writing about his tours
shows the entangled relationships that existed between people of different strata in
the eighteenth century – relationships that did not always overwrite the knowledge
of common people but instead could take on board and disseminate it.

This can also be detected in Low’s ethnographic observations. Low’s collabor-
ators were not only his informants: they were also his objects of study. Low col-
lected ethnological observations such as descriptions of the islanders’ health,
physiognomy, clothing, their work ethos and beliefs. Low, unsurprisingly consid-
ering his intended career path, paid close attention to and described local beliefs in
superstition and witchcraft, which although declining were still prevalent on both
Orkney and Shetland. The islanders on Hoy, for instance, were described as ‘much
given to superstition’ and Low dwelled on the continuing beliefs in fairies (Low
Tour: 7, 81-82). Here Low’s world view clashed with another epistemic communi-
ty and its concurrent beliefs, which Low perceived and depicted as unenlightened.
Albeit condemning their practices, by recording and narrating them Low included
traditional peasant beliefs and customs into the ecology of knowledge about the
isles.

Low was, in addition, dependent on the willingness of the islanders to share
their knowledge and artefacts with him. In a discussion of the local belief that
fairies could kill cattle through the use of flint weapons (‘Elfshots’ or ‘Elfar-
rows’), Low recounted how he tried in vain to acquire one of these alleged weap-
on. The farmers refused to part with these since they believed that as long as they
possessed them, the fairies could not attack them or their cattle (Low, Tour: 7-8, 17). In this incident Low therefore had to accept epistemological diversity and the locals’ wishes and concerns.

The Minister’s Quest for Publication

Low firmly believed that his career as a local natural historian was dependent on him getting his own parish, and worked assiduously to achieve this goal. During the early stages of his first tour, having travelled only as far as Holm, one of the south isles of Orkney, Low found out that Mr Sutherland – the minister of Birsay and Harray, an inland parish 14 km north of Stromness – had passed away. Low wasted no time in drumming up support for his candidature. In a letter to Pennant from Holm in May 1774, he asked for ‘assistance’ with Laurence Dundas (Cuthbert 1995: 60-61). Low also wrote to Paton that he had ‘never stood more in need of an extreme effort of your experienced friendship than now’ (Low f. 75). Paton, who had a strong network on Orkney, helped Low by contacting Andrew Ross, for instance, a factor to Sir Laurence and the Chamberlain of Orkney. Low’s campaign to be noticed by Dundas paid off. Staying with his friend James Alison, he received news that he was to be put in charge of the parish of Birsay and Harray through the patronage of Dundas (Doig 1955:342).

After Low finished his tour he was ordained minister of Birsay in December 1774. There is no recorded opposition to Low’s appointment. Although resentment of aristocratic patronage would eventually split the Scottish church in 1843, when many left the Church of Scotland to set up the Free Church of Scotland, there were no great schisms on Orkney in the eighteenth century (Goodfellow 1903: 71; Anderson 1879: xlix). This is not to say that the local population meekly accepted the ministers that were presented to them by their feudal superior. In fact, the islanders had something of a tradition of expressing their strong dislike of any imposed ministers they regarded as unsuitable. Considering the feisty tradition of the Orkney congregations, Low must have been regarded as acceptable since his appointment seems to have passed without incident.

Settled in his manse, Low started composing and editing the manuscript of his tour travelogue, for which Pennant was going to secure a publisher. Low also continued to write his History and other manuscripts including a Fauna Orcadensis and a Flora Orcadensis, that he hoped Pennant would also help him publish. During this time it was essential for him to continue to have a thriving relationship with his natural-history patrons in order to make sure that his manuscripts were published. Despite the rise in publishing houses and a commercial printing culture, the patronage of the aristocracy and the cultural elite still mattered and patron-client and commercial cultures existed concurrently throughout the eighteenth century (Sher 2008: 203; Griffin 1996: 10). Low was therefore dependent on the clout and willingness of his powerful patron Pennant, which is reflected by
the large number of letters exchanged during the period 1775-1783 between Low, Pennant and Paton – the latter often working as a mediating middle man – about the publication of Low’s Tour manuscript. This was also, however, a period of growing tension between Low and Pennant.

Initially the discontent between the two men revolved around Low’s remote location, with Pennant showing little understanding of Low’s geographical distance from mainland Britain. Pennant complained, for example, when Low’s letter took a long time to appear. This delay was often caused by gales which prevented the sailing of ferries carrying the letters (Thomson 1987: 238; Cuthbert 1995: 65). The same lack of understanding was shown when Low was going through personal difficulties. In 1776 Low was seriously ill and whereas Paton was genuinely concerned, Pennant seemed more concerned about the ‘loss the public will sustain’ by Low not working on his manuscript (qtd. Anderson 1879: liv). Likewise, when Low’s wife Helen, whom he had married in 1776, died after giving birth to a stillborn child in December that year, Pennant sent his condolences but again seemed to be more worried about the effect this would have on Low completing his manuscript of the Tour (Cuthbert 1995: 77). Pennant’s relationship with Low, as these episodes illustrates, was always instrumental and centred on him receiving information that Pennant himself could not access.

Whereas Low’s relationship with Pennant gradually broke down, his connection with Paton thrived and developed beyond flattery into a genuine life-long friendship. Paton and Low met for the first time in Edinburgh in 1775 when Low attended the Church of Scotland’s General Assembly and they subsequently met up on other occasions too. Their friendship was, however, primarily maintained through their frequent correspondence. Although much of it continued to deal with their shared interest in books and in natural history, they also wrote about their personal feelings and their language became increasingly familiar and less formulaic. Their letters now started, for example, with ‘My dear friend’ rather than ‘My dear Sir’ (Low f. 78). Another important indicator of their increasing intimacy was that they wrote to each other partly in Scots using terms like ‘ye ken’ (you know) rather than formal English (Low f. 86; see also Doig 1955: 343). Paton, unlike Pennant, showed great compassion when Low’s wife died. Their friendship illustrates that there was at least a potential for genuine friendships to emerge from distant patron and client relationships.

Low sent his Tour manuscript and sketches to Pennant in September 1777. Pennant informed Low that he would offer the manuscript to his friend the bookseller Benjamin White. At around the same time, a new man entered the Low-Paton-Pennant network. This was Richard Gough, a wealthy antiquarian, leading reviewer of The Gentleman’s Magazine, and the director of the Society of Antiquaries. Gough frequently asked Paton for information about Scottish antiquaries and also requested his help to locate books and manuscripts (Sweet 2004: 62). One of the manuscripts Gough wanted access to while he was writing his
Anecdotes of British Topography was Low’s tour manuscript. Pennant, who wanted exclusive use of the manuscript, did his best to prevent this from happening. Although Pennant referred to it as Low’s property, he also expressed that he had special rights to it since he had initiated and funded Low’s tour. Pennant, however, gave in and Gough was allowed to see the manuscript in March 1778 (Anderson 1879: lx-lxi; Doig, 1955: 359, 381).

When Gough published his British Topography two years later he referred to Low’s manuscript and stated that it was going to be published under Pennant’s patronage which signalled the beginning of a campaign by Gough to make sure Pennant honoured his commitment to Low (Doig 1955: 362). Writing several times in the Gentleman’s Magazine, Gough provoked Pennant by calling on him to fulfil his promise and to explain why he had apparently ‘deserted this deserving man’ (Qtd ibid: 386). Pennant and Gough ended up falling out over their interests in Low’s manuscript and each accused the other of using it in order to boost their own careers rather than that of Low. Amid the turmoil, the manuscript went missing for a few years. Low, unfortunately, had not transcribed it and therefore did not have a copy of his own.

The manuscript remained unpublished. Pennant did make some attempts, which he emphasised in his defence, but these did not lead to anything. One publisher, Mr Benjamin White & Son, complained that the text contained errors, which probably were Scotticisms and some poor grammar, something that Paton had urged Pennant to revise (Doig 1955: 377). Pennant also pushed for the manuscript to be published by subscription, but Low rejected this since he did not believe, considering his location in Orkney and his status as a minister, that he had a powerful enough network to make subscription a viable option. Low was also reluctant to dedicate the work to Lawrence Dundas, which Pennant suggested, since Low feared he might be ‘unknown’ to Dundas despite having received the latter’s patronage – thus underlining that his patron-client relationship with Dundas, who did not live on Orkney, had been the result of his powerful friends’ efforts rather than a personal relationship. Low had no savings of his own that he could use to invest in the publication either (Ibid: 365, 369, 372). In the end, it appeared that the manuscript could only be published if Pennant was prepared to invest in it himself, a financial risk he refused to take despite his promise to Low and his great wealth (see also Anderson 1879: lxvii; Doig 354). Meanwhile, Paton’s attempts to come up with new solutions as to how the manuscript could be published came to no avail, and despite Low’s membership of scientific societies, where his observations were discussed, Low’s location on Orkney meant that he could neither find suitable new patrons nor build up personal relationships with publishers and was therefore dependent on his existing network.

Here it is interesting to compare Low with the English minister Gilbert White, who also corresponded with Pennant and whose epistolary work The Natural History and Antiquities of Selborne, which consisted of letters exchanged between
White, Pennant and the naturalist Daines Barrington, was a great success. White, who resided in Hampshire, not only actively participated in London’s scientific circles, but his brother was Benjamin White, the influential publisher of natural history works who Pennant had approached about Low’s manuscript. In addition to White’s very close and personal access to publishers and scientific communities, he was also a better writer than Low, whose manuscript required more intensive efforts of an editor. White intermingled his systematic and detailed observations with charming and evocative accounts of his locality that have enthralled readers since the work was first published in 1789 and would therefore have been an easier product to sell than that of Low (Mabey 1986; Menely 2004).

While Pennant’s enthusiasm for getting Low’s manuscript published was evaporating, he still found it useful for his personal career development. He informed Low in 1783 that parts of Low’s manuscript were going to appear in the introduction to his completed *Arctic Zoology* that also used much of Low’s work on the Orkney fauna and several of Low’s illustrations. Pennant argued that this inclusion would in fact publicise Low’s works and help him secure a publisher:

> Your MS is of great use to an Introduction I am forming to my *Arctic Zoology*: but I shall rob you of nothing that can hurt, indeed as my work will appear first I shall serve you, by referring to it, and mentioning your design if it is to take place.

(Qtd in Cuthbert: 1995: 19)

Low had had high expectations from his patron and client relationship with Pennant, which got off to such a good start, but he ended up feeling very let down by Pennant’s futile attempt to get his *Tour* in print and he did not accept Pennant’s version of why the manuscript was not published. Writing to Paton in March 1783 Low expressed his thoughts about Pennant: ‘as to Monsieur Pennant I have given up all thought of his patronage’ (Low f. 92). In a later letter to Paton sent in February 1788, Low wrote that Pennant years back had ‘promised mighty things’ but that these had come to nothing (Low f. 96). He further rubbished Pennant’s claim that the inclusion of Low’s material in *Arctic Zoology* would help him find a publisher in this powerful statement: ‘[W]hat is to be published? not all published already? One has taken a leg, another an arm; some a toe; some a finger; [and] Mr. P. the very Heart’s Blood out of it’ (Ibid). Low was correct. Pennant had used in *Arctic Zoology* not only Low’s excellent illustrations but had also included, without references to Low, a large amount of Low’s observations on the isles. In the eyes of any prospective publishers, therefore, a large amount of Low’s material had already been published which would make it a less attractive text to publish.

Pennant had created an image for himself as someone who supported the careers of young naturalists while also advancing scientific knowledge. His fall-out with Low suggests that Pennant promised too much too readily and he had, in this case, failed to live up to his promise. To Pennant, Low was a remote figure on Orkney he did not need to worry too much about once Low had provided Pennant with his surveys of Orkney and Shetland. However, Pennant, to some extent,
showed a similar disregard to people from the higher echelons of society as can be seen in his argument with Joseph Banks. Banks’s career had initially benefited from Pennant’s patronage, which introduced the young Banks to natural historians across the world, and Banks in turn had supplied Pennant with data on, for example, his expeditions to the Scottish island of Staffa, Newfoundland and Iceland. The two men fell out after Pennant in his *Arctic Zoology* published, without Banks’s consent, drawings that Banks had commissioned of Iceland. Pennant had defended this act by referring to himself as a ‘public man’ who wanted to disseminate knowledge (Gascoigne 2003: 98). Banks replied angrily that it did not entitle Pennant to publish other people’s property without their consent. He also referred to Pennant as ‘an indefatigable searcher after other men’s Observations’ (ibid). By the 1780s, moreover, Banks, who had become the President of the Royal Society in 1778, no longer needed Pennant’s patronage and could therefore afford to fall out with him, illustrating the strategic aspects that were at the heart of many patron and client relations in the ecology of knowledge (Ibid: 94-98).

To add to Low’s anguish, his mental and physical health worsened from the 1780s onwards. Writing to Paton in March 1781 he informed his friend about his poor mental health: ‘I have been tormented with a nervous disease shall I call it, which has kept me almost entirely from sleep even for weeks together, except a mere dose which is every moment interrupted by stark & foolish fancies which frights me even to set pen to paper’ (Low f. 91). Low also suffered from pleurisy, rheumatism and failing eyesight, which left him almost blind. Yet, he managed to provide, with the assistance of a clerk, a lengthy entry on his parish for Sinclair’s *Statistical Accounts*, thereby continuing his contribution to the dissemination of knowledge about Orkney.

Despite his failing health, Low also spent the last decade of his life focusing on his parish – an area of responsibility he had to some degree neglected earlier. He had, for instance, celebrated communion only three times during his 21-year-ministry despite the General Assembly’s recommendation that it be celebrated once a year. Low’s preaching supposedly improved once his eyesight went and the people in his parish are said to have grown fonder of him (Goodfellow 1903: 75; Rendall 2009:129). Alongside caring for his parishioners, Low continued to maintain his friendship with Paton. In his last letter to Paton, sent on 15 January 1795, Low lamented that bad weather had prevented him from travelling and meeting his friend (Low f. 100). Low passed away less than two months later, on the 13th of March.

Low’s work was never published in his name during his lifetime. Instead it was partly appropriated by others or published posthumously. After Low’s death most of his manuscripts ended up with Paton in Edinburgh. When the latter died in 1807 they were sold off at auction and continued to be used by other writers. The Rev. George Barry, Minister of Shapinsay on Orkney, for example, published in 1805 his *History of the Orkney Islands*, which used much of Low’s writings with-
out any references to Low. Later nineteenth-century writers such as William Elford Leach and Samuel Hibbert also used Low’s manuscripts but did acknowledge and reference Low. The *Tour of Orkney and Shetland* was finally published in Low’s name in 1879. The text was edited by Joseph Anderson, who also included in his introduction a large number of Low’s letters (Doig 1955: 386-88). For contemporary scholars interested in Orkney and Shetland, and the discipline of natural history, Low’s original manuscripts, correspondence, and revised editions with commentaries are available. When historical accounts discuss eighteenth-century Orkney, in particular, Low is almost always used as a reliable – and much quoted – source and he has now received the recognition he so longed for.

At a time of intense mapping of regions perceived as British hinterlands, Low came into contact with leading eighteenth-century British natural historians and antiquarians through his initial encounter with Joseph Banks. His subsequent forays into patronised natural-history studies has been used in this article as an illustration of both the continuing importance of allegiance, or patronage, networks in the eighteenth-century ecology of natural-history knowledge and to highlight the participation of people from all strata of society in the production of natural-history surveys. A close reading of Low’s *Tour* manuscript has shown the collaborative efforts that underpinned natural-history expeditions with local farmers, ministers, and landowners helping Low. This was not always a smooth process but at times involved precarious negotiation. Beliefs held by farmers, in particular about the supernatural, came into conflict with ‘scientific’ beliefs and the informant’s social status and standing in the community played an important role in the value attached to observations and beliefs. Yet, even when there were clear epistemic clashes, knowledge labelled as quaint or even deviant was included in the ecology of knowledge by being recorded. Although not imbued with the same significance, different ways of knowing and approaching the natural world were incorporated into the ecology.

Through his patron-client relationships, Low’s knowledge and observations circulated widely during his lifetime in books by Pennant and Gough, in debates in scientific societies and in newspaper articles, and through these outlets Low’s work shaped how people perceived the northern isles of Scotland, their geography, nature and people. He was therefore an important actor in the expanding natural-history ecology of Scotland and illustrates how knowledge was requested, produced and shared. Yet, this came at a personal cost since Low’s knowledge was mediated and appropriated by other writers, rather than being published in his own name as he had dearly hoped. While his geographical location on Orkney made him a valuable commodity as a natural historian and therefore provided him with an ‘entry ticket’ into an elite scientific network, his remoteness also limited his ability to form new patron-client relationships and to find a publisher on his own. Despite the ecology of natural history knowledge containing openings for people of different strata, one of this ecology’s defining characteristics, shared
with the society in which it functioned, was an uneven distribution of power. This hierarchy applied whether knowledge was recorded and disseminated within the British Isles or by naturalists in the British Empire. Low’s enduring and flourishing friendship with Paton does demonstrate, however, that the knowledge ecosystem could sustain genuine feelings and respect alongside the utilitarian hunt for knowledge.

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Notes

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2 My application of the metaphor draws in particular on an essay by Marcus B Weaver-Hightower (2008) who has used it to analyse educational policy.

3 Boaventura de Sousa Santos has for example successfully applied the metaphor to his postcolonial studies (Santos 2007).

4 Among the canonical natural-history travellers who narrated the Highlands and Islands in the second half of the eighteenth century, making them key actors in the ecology of knowledge about Scottish natural history, were men such as John Walker, Thomas Lightfoot, Joseph Banks and Thomas Pennant.

5 The British public could read Linnaeus’s lecture in Benjamin Stillingfleet’s *Miscellaneous Tracts relating to Natural History* (1762).

6 The SSPCK had been founded by a Royal Charter in 1709 to further promote the Protestant faith, particularly in the Highlands and Islands, where superstitious beliefs were believed to be particularly strong. This was to be achieved by building schools and sending missionaries.

7 The Low letters are in the Paton Manuscript collection at the National Library of Scotland in Edinburgh: Adv.MS. 29.5.8. Vol. III, f. 52-100. These will be from here on shortened in the text as Low, f.

8 Dundas had purchased the Earldom in 1766 from the 14th Earl of Morton for £ 60.000 and in return for purchasing Orkney he got a parliamentary seat (Rendall 2009: p. 231; Goodfellow 1903: 223, Thomson 1987:232).

9 For a discussion of Norn, see Rendboe 1987.

10 In the case of James Tyrie in the 1740s they destroyed peat banks, barricaded the minister out of his own church and heckled him. Similarly, in 1745, a new minister called Mr Reid was welcomed with a riot since the islanders did not understand ‘his tongue’ (accent) (Rendall, 2009: 99-101, 118).
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**Online Sources**


Friction or Closure: Heritage as Loss

By Mikela Lundahl

Abstract
Heritage is a discourse that aims at closure. It fixates the narrative of the past through the celebration of specific material (or sometimes immaterial non-) objects. It organizes temporality and construct events and freezes time. How does this unfold in the case of the UNESCO World Heritage site of Stone Town, Zanzibar? It is a place of beauty and violence, of trade, slavery and tourism, and the World Heritage narrative does not accommodate all its significant historical facts and lived memories. In this article I will discuss some of these conflicting or competing historical facts.

The anthropologist Anna Tsing has developed the concept-metaphor friction as a way to discuss the energy created when various actors narrate “the same” event(s) in different ways, and see the other participants’ accounts as fantasies or even fabrications. I will use my position as researcher and my relations to different sources: informants, authorities and texts, and discuss how different accounts relate to and partly construct each other; and how I, in my own process as an analyst and listener, negotiate these conflicting stories, what I identify as valid and non valid accounts. The case in this article is Stone Town in Zanzibar and the development and dissolution going on under the shadow of the UNESCO World Heritage flag; a growing tourism; a global and local increase in islamisation; and the political tension within the Tanzanian union. My main focus is narratives of the identity of Zanzibar since heritagization constructs identity.

Keywords: Identity, Zanzibar, cosmopolitanism, friction, history, heritage, memory
It is always the past that remembers (Mudge 2013)

Tanzania in Our Hearts

Tanzania is a favourite among African countries by many western governments, famous for its relative peaceful and harmonious postcolonial history. It is not by accident that when President Barack Obama travelled to Africa in 2013 he included Tanzania (the other two visited states were Senegal and South Africa) in the tour. Scandinavian countries have strong relations to Tanzania and many Scandinavian individuals have personal experience from shorter or longer stays in different capacities: as missionaries, aid workers, scholars, volunteers, or just as travellers/tourists (Eriksson Baaz 2005). One reason for the Scandinavian interest is that Tanzania was a relatively unimportant colony for its former colonizer, United Kingdom, and therefore “open” to neo-colonial engagement from other parties. Tanganyika, the mainland part of the union Tanzania, became a British colony quite late, after the First World War, when Germany lost all its colonies in the Versailles Treaty. Kenya and Uganda were always more important colonies in the region for the British Empire, and still are as post-colonies. The independence era’s moderate socialist leader Julius Nyerere and his leadership is another reason, since he was seen as an excellent example of how Scandinavian social democrats imagined the new postcolonial Africa. A Tanzania ruled by African socialism, and the principles of *Uhuru na Ujamaa* (Nyerere 1968), appealed to Scandinavian benevolence. These circumstances have shaped my own image of Tanzania, both Tanganyika and Zanzibar alike, even if their histories, their identities, their place within the Tanzanian union, differ substantially.¹ One token of the outstanding place Tanzania has in Scandinavia is the fact that both Swedish and Danish aid agencies have kept Tanzania as one of their main target countries for third world aid in times of austere politics.²

But there are many reasons why this image needs an update: The image of the peaceful and equal country becomes distorted once you look beyond the majority of the population. Anthropologists have shown that even if the model of *ujamaa* might have done some good for the vast majority that was either farmers or urbanised, it did not suit nomadic minorities at all – especially the smaller and lesser well-known groups: the strong focus on farming and land was counterproductive and unsupportive of their way of living and making their livelihood (Holmqvist & Talle 2005).

Another conflict regarding majority and minority is the one between the mainland Tanganyika, and the other part of the union, Zanzibar. Often Tanzania is in fact referring rather to mainland Tanganyika and the Zanzibari archipelago is more or less forgotten. For example in a recent Swedish thesis on democratisation in Tanzania, the author (whose expertise on Tanganyika is indisputable) states in the opening that “Tanzania has been independent in 2011 for 50 years.” (Ewald

[1300]  

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Tanganyika had been independent 50 years in 2011 but Tanzania did not exist in 1961, and its other part, Zanzibar, became independent in December 1963. This mistake is very common, and usually not taken very seriously. Even Zanzibaris talks about “Tanzania” as something external, referring to “mainland” or Tanganyika, not really including themselves in it. The name Tanganyika does not have the same status as Zanzibar anymore, the latter still being the main referent to Unguja – the name of the main island of the Zanzibari archipelago, as well as to the second island, Pemba. Tanganyika is the old and official name of the mainland, which is rarely used nowadays. Naming is, as we know, not innocent; in this case these usages of names is complicit in marginalising Zanzibar in relation to the “mainland”, in confirming the fiction that Tanzania is more or less identical with Tanganyika.

Zanzibar, the Oriental Pearl of Africa

When I first arrived in Zanzibar in 2011, I thought I had come to this pearl of Tanzania – a part of Africa, but with a mystic touch of the Orient. That is how the tourist industry sells Zanzibar to the world, and the narrative consists of a mixture of western imageries and projections including pristine beaches and oriental delight. And it is of course “true” in one sense. The beaches are long, white and fringed by palm trees. Many of the hotels all over the island enact beautifully the western idea of the orient, and evoke fantasies about the kind of pleasure that scholars (Said 1978; Campbell 2001) have described as essential to western narratives about the orient. The references are subtle, since “[i]magination must take the strain when facts are few” and the goal is “to seed fantasies about sex, submission, jealousy, power and violence” (Campbell 2001: 37) without being too blunt about what it is that attracts tourist to the exotic faraway, as well as not disturbing the actual oriental part of Zanzibar, the highly religious Muslim community. Both urban and rural Zanzibar bears signs of that Muslim community, but in most cases reality does not live up to the commercialised orient that attract the tourist gaze (Urry 2002).

But it is Stone Town – Mji Kongwe –, the old part of the capital, Zanzibar City, which has attracted the world’s interest and which became a UNESCO World Heritage site in 2000. Stone Town is situated on a cape on the east coast, facing mainland and the old port of Bagamoyo. The town consists of a number of outstanding buildings along the waterfront such as the House of Wonder, the Palace Museum, and the Old Fort etcetera. Beyond these, more anonymous houses together constitutes the famous labyrinth inner part of Stone Town, one-family townhouses mixed with bigger apartment houses. There are two churches (one Catholic and one Anglican), two Hindu temples, and around 50 mosques. The estimated habitants are 20.000 but many more spend their days there coming from the outskirts, or the surrounding Zanzibar city, home to some 200.000 people.
Most of the buildings in Stone Town are built in the 19th or early 20th century, however some are significantly older, at least partially. These houses were usually homes to Arabic and Indian tradesmen and their families and employees or slaves. In 1832 the sultan of Oman decided to make Stone Town of Zanzibar the capital of the sultanate to which Zanzibar belonged already since 1698. In 1890 the British Empire made Zanzibar a protectorate with the sultan as the official leader but under the British governor, an arrangement that lasted until Zanzibar became independent in December 1963. Only a month later a revolution over-threw the Arab-dominated order that was installed by the Britons as they left governance, and in April 1964 the union with Tanganyika was established. During the pre-independence years Zanzibar was a flourishing cultural and intellectual hub for East Africa, which withered away during the 60s and 70s, as more focus and resources in Tanzania were channelled to mainland and Dar es Salaam. Many of the intellectuals were either killed during the revolution or exiled in its aftermath. In the late 80s and early 90s, the until then the quite sleepy island became a hotspot for backpacking tourists and a growing fascination for the historical and decaying place begun that eventually led up till the nomination and listing of Zanzibar Stone Town on UNESCOs World Heritage list in 2000.

This is what UNESCO agreed on as Outstanding Universal Values (OUV) in Stone Town:

- **Criterion ii**: The Stone Town of Zanzibar is an outstanding material manifestation of cultural fusion and harmonization.
- **Criterion iii**: For many centuries there was intense seaborne trading activity between Asia and Africa, and this is illustrated in an exceptional manner by the architecture and urban structure of the Stone Town.
- **Criterion vi**: Zanzibar has great symbolic importance in the suppression of slavery, since it was one of the main slave-trading ports in East Africa and also the base from which its opponents such as David Livingstone conducted their campaign.5

Obviously “history” is everywhere in Stone Town since it is a heritage site. But it is not only the aspects of history that is acknowledged in the UNESCO criteria for the site, and was considered significant for the World Heritage nomination, but other aspects of history, as well as other epochs is present in the town. What interests me is the relation between the international/global discourse and governance and the local effects/affects that became significant in and through conversations. Utterances and expressed feelings that I was confronted with in Stone Town during fieldwork and interviews is my point of departure. The fieldwork took place mostly during two visits, one in November to January 2012–2013, and one in June and July 2013, but also during a follow up in July 2014. My informants are members of Reclaim women’s heritage – a quite diverse group, but dominating are well educated middle aged women who run the centre but there are also some newly recruited women who are the “target group”: women who could benefit
from their activities. Other informants are mostly men who live in my neighbour-
hoods and who I know as neighbours, or as workers or managers at, or owners of
the cafés or restaurants that I frequently visit. Their backgrounds are very diverse,
some have been abroad for years and has returned to run a business or take posi-
tions in public administration, or they are mainlanders who came to Zanzibar to
find a work in or close the tourist industry, or they are locals who struggle every-
day to get some small money in relation to tourism, as drivers, boatmen, sellers of
curiosa etcetera. Their age differ from late teens to middle age. I also talked both
formally and informally to staff at Stone Town Conservation and Development
Authority (STCDA).

History, Heritage, Memory

The historical even ts I did expect to encounter and that would matter to Stone
Towners were related to the above listed criterions: the 19th century, when most of
Stone Town was constructed as a result of the “cultural fusion” between the Ara-
bic, Indian, Portuguese and African influence. Many significant buildings origi-
nated in this era, and they are what one encounter everyday in Stone Town. This
structure that emanates from many centuries of “seaborne trading activity between
Asia and Africa” and that led up to this cultural fusion is also possible to get a
sense of strolling around in Mji Mkongwe (“old town”). The heydays of slave
trade have been made visible through a questioned installation named “the slave
market”.6 But that was not what was on most peoples’ mind once I begun to en-
gage with what most Zanzibaris talk and are passionate about. In the beginning of
most conversations where I usually told them that I was in Stone Town to investi-
gate what the World Heritage nomination had led to for the inhabitants, the in-
formants politely would answer my questions and serve me brief comments or
maybe become a bit upset about what it didn’t give them (like no possibilities to
buy everyday necessities in their neighbourhood because all the former shops had
been turned to tourist shops run by foreigners, or to develop their properties to
fulfil their current needs). However, it usually didn’t take long until the conversa-
tion turned to other topics, usually leading to passionate micro lectures about the
Tanzanian union, which I soon learned was intensively discussed at public spaces
as the famous Jaw’s Corner where mostly men gather to exchange news and gos-
sip. That topic quickly led to conversations about events some 50 years ago that
engaged most of my informants – most of them not born or old enough to have
their own memories – and the present consequences of these events. The historical
period that keeps coming up in conversations – and also in literature once my gaze
was turned in that direction – is the era of independence and the unresolved events
of that period, such as the revolution and the constitution and the conditions of the
Tanzanian union. In daily conversations on the street, at cafés and tourist shops, as
well as with professionals in different capacities in the heritage site, topics related
to this turmoil were touched upon, one way or another. This era is not a part of the
UNESCO documentation and therefore insignificant for the actual heritagization
of Zanzibar. Both the era in itself but also the widespread assumption that some-
ingthing was lost in that process is absent from the official narrative. What actually
was lost does not form a coherent narrative, and maybe it is just loss in itself that
is the main content in these narratives: a shared experience of loss. Much of this
experienced loss can be related to what in Islands Studies is referred to as “to is-
land”: which among other things refers to the change of identity once the island
becomes a part of a bigger mainland. Marginalisation and the experience of being
an extension to this bigger unity rather than to something in itself becomes central
the new identity built upon islandness. The experience of loss is a part of becom-
ing an island, as a consequence of the decline of oceanic community and the rise
of continental, and the feeling of marginalisation or difference emerged as one of
its core traces in how it relates to the world and to its mainland.

Friction as a Thicket Path

My focus in this study was planned to focus on the present and near history: what
the UNESCO World Heritage nomination had brought to Zanzibar during its little
more than one decade of existence. However it turned out that it was impossible
to stay in the present and recent past. Or at least in the sense I was expecting, and
that the world heritagization directs our gaze towards. As Sharon Macdonald
writes in Memorylands. Heritage and Identity in Europe today about field meth-
odology: it
goes beyond simply recording “native voices” but entails a rigorous commitment to
trying to grasp the patterns of relations of which utterances, practices, feelings and
so forth, are part; and what they may be linked with. This frequently involves or
leads to reflexivity about categories of analysis and forms of knowledge production
– including the role of scholarship itself. (Macdonald 2013: 9)

I set out asking whether (world) heritagization, with its highly directed and de-
dsigned version of history, aiming to fit in the UNESCO format, were benefitting
the people living in the site, or whom it fit/unfit. Does the heritagization silence
other stories, more relevant and locally important? Who has the power over histo-
riography? This is not only a matter of concern for these people, but also a pre-
requisite to maintain the qualities of the World Heritage site if it shall remain a
living site and not a museum. My preconceptions of which other stories could
hide behind the World Heritage narratives were vague. With the anthropologist
Anna Tsing’s concept of friction, developed to study “the productive friction of
global connections” (Tsing 2005: 3), I was offered a tool to resist temptations of
simplified confirmation and closure (White 1979). This is how she came up with the concept:
The metaphor of friction suggested itself because of the popularity of stories of a new era of global motion in the 1990s. The flow of gods, ideas, money, and people would henceforth be pervasive and unimpeded. In this imagined global era, motion would proceed entirely without friction. [...] In fact, motion does not proceed this way at all. [...] These kinds of “friction” inflect motion, offering it different meanings. (Tsing 2005: 5f)

The notion of, as well as the factual, Tanzania, that mostly includes Zanzibar as an exotic appendix, creates friction whenever Zanzibaris interact with non-zanzibaris, westerners or others. With the help of the concept I could see that the preconceptions of Tanzania I brought to this study was not only a problem. Obviously they obscured my gaze to some degree, but they also turned out to be productive and challenging due to the friction that occurred when met with contradictory ideas, and hence challenged. If ideas and conceptions from the field hadn’t been put in relation to my preconceptions, I might have ignored them since they didn’t fit into my research design. Or I might have accepted them too readily, whereas friction pushed me to dwell, to stay in these uncomfortable places, to deepen my understandings, and also took me to new places, places that I did not plan or expect to go. As Tsing writes:

Roads are a good image for conceptualizing how friction works: Roads create pathways that make motion easier and more efficient, but in doing so they limit where we go. The ease of travel they facilitate is also a structure of confinement. Friction inflects historical trajectories, enabling, excluding, and particularizing. (Tsing 2005: 6)

As a Scandinavian researcher, with the background I sketched above, the narratives that questioned the legitimacy of the Tanzanian union, appeared provocative and disturbing and my immediate impulse was to resist them. I produced all sorts of counter narratives to make sense of these statements. Some of the narratives I categorised as expressions of a feeling of declassification from (former) privileged people, where the context and legitimating framework of the privileged classes got lost in the transformation brought by independence, the revolution, and the unionisation. Or the loss of a time when class differences were not questioned or challenged, when their privileges were not challenged by socialist notions of equality and ujamaa (nor integrated in the new postcolonial power structures). Others could be understood as statements coming from uninformed poor people who are either declassified or who don’t feel that they have benefitted from the socialist Tanzanian union and believes they would have been better off in an independent nation-state of Zanzibar than in the union with Tanganyika. They seem to be oblivious of the fact that the wealth and cultural richness that is attributed to pre-independence Zanzibar was not equally distributed, and they would most likely have been as poor as they are now with or without the union. These arguments, my “explanations”, probably hold some truth. However I acknowledged my resistance and begun to consider its power, and how it was distorting the narratives. When I instead looked at the friction they caused, sometimes visible in my replies...
(even if I tried to not “talk back”), I could hear and understand these notions differently.

Stone Town as World Heritage. The Tale of a Heritagized Town

To be listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site is to be identified as something extraordinary, and the international community has agreed that the site has outstanding universal values, which are of relevance for all humanity and shall be protected for an indeterminate future (Rao 2010; Frey & Steiner 2011). Obviously it is an important event for that locality and for the nation-state, who is the official stakeholder, and the nomination will eventually (at least that is what most actors aim for) bring status and more visitors, tourists, and money, to the site and to the region. More interesting from the perspective of this study, however, is that a UNESCO World Heritage nomination has performative powers: the site (or rather its agents) has agreed to perform as it self – a self constructed by the nominators based on what they saw as possible to transform to a world heritage – in the future. A self that has been defined in the nomination procedure by a small group of professionals whose most important competence is benchmarking in accordance with UNESCO’s values (Ronström 2008). In this particular case that means to perform as “an outstanding material manifestation of cultural fusion and harmonization”. Even if it is the built heritage that this refers to, it still affects the inhabitants who are expected to live and reproduce that very environment. As the anthropologist Rosabelle Boswell writes, with the example from another island in the Indian Ocean, Mauritius, which has a UNESCO World Heritage site:

This obviously required residents of Le Morne (ethnically and socially diverse) to be cast as cultural subjects and to perform a version of Creole identity, as well as to draw upon publicly articulated memories to inform their identity. (Boswell 2011a: 172)

One question this raises is how to manage culture at a World Heritage site? So far what has been done in Stone Town is efforts to preserve the material structure. But what about “the cultural fusion”? How do you manage that? Many professionals argue that it is solely the built environment that is a concern for the nomination, and that the question about managing culture therefore is of minor interest. That might formally be right. But is it possible to separate the two? Can we imagine material structures where actual people live that are conceptually and practically separated from each other? Is not the latter a prerequisite for the former? How can one expect people who live in a site, maybe unaware or uninterested in UNESCO policies, to be a part of the preservation of the town? Somehow this boils down to if materiality constitutes culture or the other way around, or what is more valuable than the other. This is of course a rhetorical question. We know that actual people rarely can compete when money, income, “bigger issues”, are at stake. But if we forget that, and assume that the cultural fusion that UNESCO has
defined as an OUV is produced and reproduced by the people living it, rather than by engineers, architects, managers, etcetera, would not a focus on this lived cultural fusion be a priority, if only as means to preserve the built material? It seems as many actors in the field assume that the causality goes the other way around, how else can one understand the fact that for example the Swedish Aid Agency would engage in heritage preservation at all: the expectation must be that the effort to preserve the built environment in Stone Town will bring tourists, money and development to the region, and therefore minimize poverty. As the anthropologist Tania Li has shown, there is a strong tendency to focus on materiality, on engineers, on some kind of technical support, when it is actually social and cultural support that was the aim for the project from the start. The latter being so much more unpredictable, uncontrollable, more difficult: better, as in easier, to put the money and time in yet another machine, infrastructure, that is somewhat measurable within the given project time – what happens after the project is finished the funder is not accountable for (Li 2007).

There is awareness among the staff at STCDA about the need to work with culture as well and their lack of competence in that area. So far there is not much available knowledge on how to work on cultural resilience, and it was not really considered when the institution of World Heritage was outlined. Even if it still is the built environment that is protected, the maintainers are the inhabitants.

Stone Town as a Site of “Cultural Fusion”

There is not one single narrative of the cultural fusion Stone Town is characterised by, but many competing and sometimes even conflicting stories, depending on who is telling it and for what reason, and in which context and time. There is no certainty on exactly when and how different groups of people first came to the zanzibarian archipelago – which shares its history with the so-called Swahili coast, or the Swahili corridor. In some accounts Zanzibar belongs to the Indian Ocean culture, or the Dhow culture – that widespread area where the traditional sailing boat named dhow sailed, from the east African coast all the way to the Philippines – rather than to continental Africa. In one obvious sense, which we soon shall return to, Zanzibar is of course a part of Tanzania and Africa.

Those who inhabit the islands today are descending from many different groups: Africans from the mainland began to come more than 2000 years ago, mostly as fishermen, and later they were brought as slaves. During the 800th century Asians started to come, the first commonly believed to have come from Persia – and their heritage is referred to as Shiraz, even though there are no available hard facts to support that there actually came people from that part of Asia. The groups have intermarried and merged during the centuries, and the descendants are referred to and identifies as Afro-Shiraz. This group is quite diverse since there has been a constant flow between the mainland and the islands and new
waves of Arabic and Indian migrants have been absorbed. Sometimes the Afro-Shiraz is referred to as Swahilis – as in contrast to people identifying and identified as Arabs or Indian. Arabs mainly from Oman have frequented and settled the islands and the coast for many centuries as traders, and Indians from the Indian subcontinent came as workforce and traders mainly during British rule. Since Vasco da Gama rounded Cape of Good Hope in 1498, Portuguese, Britons, Germans and other Europeans, have traded and settled along the coast.

This hybrid society, in “these coastal and island communities”, is often described as “cosmopolitan in flavor” due to its extensive trade relations both with the interior of Africa, the Middle East and Asia. The “cultural fusion” that the UNESCO nomination refers to is often understood as “cosmopolitan” – which is an interesting label, given that many scholars consider cosmopolitanism being a privileged western state of being (Cheah 2006). The cosmopolitanism that is ascribed to Stone Town, in and through UNESCO, can partly be understood as a result of the touristic gaze and as a projection. Yet, it can be relevant to describe Stone Town as a cosmopolitan place in the sense that a small elite – which of course is not unique for this place since cosmopolitanism is most often used to describe different elite lifestyles – of varied background has dominated the town and its culture during its whole existence. The story of the Zanzibari Princess Salme is a good example of that, which might partly explain why it is used in many contexts: one exhibition is devoted to her in the Palace Museum in Stone Town, and her autobiography, Memoirs of an Arabian Princess, is for sale all over Stone Town. Also the House of Wonder has an exhibition space about her, which in Boswell’s phrasing “appear to have obliterated the role of Arabs in the persecution and enslavement of Africans” and she argues that its “[n]ostalgic and romanticized accounts of the Arab descendant princess Salme blur the memory of slavery.” (Boswell 2011a: 173) The story about her is also used as a way to promote hotels and give an orientalist air to them. But there are other ways to understand cosmopolitanism. Stuart Hall described the Caribbean identity in terms of a history of uprooting and violent unsettling which has created diverse and mixed societies, with no grand narratives of the nation-state giving meaning to their existence, but still with a of unity, that can be described as “‘becoming’ as well as […] ‘being’” (Hall 1994: 394). The uprooting in itself, and the forced coexistence with strangers in an alien place became another “imagined community” (Anderson 1991) that Caribbean societies share in spite of other differences. Robbie Shilliam develops that idea further when he appropriates the term cosmopolitanism, that used to point at privileged peoples lifestyles transcending the nation-state, and describes Caribbeans as truly cosmopolitan in how they have come to live together and negotiate differences (Shilliam 2011). In his writings about creolity Tomas Hylland Eriksen has shown that the concept is not only valid for the West Indies, but also for the Indian Ocean, which since many hundred, if not thousands of years, has been a very creolised part of the world (Eriksen 2007).
A recurring claim is that the town pre-revolution was divided in ethnic/racial enclaves. This narrative is stressed by the Women’s heritage group, both in conversations and in their documentation, and the underlying assumption is one of a lost imagined harmony, almost in opposition to the idea of “cultural fusion” — or maybe the prerequisite for the cultural fusion. A claim contested by William Cunningham Bissell who argues that the idea of the division is oblivious of the fact that even if houses were owned and mainly inhabited by Arabs (a quite unstable category in itself since ethnic lines did not exactly follow racial) they usually had Afro-Shiraz people working and living in their households, or earlier on, descendants of African slaves. And there were also poor people of Indian and Arab descendent who lived in the poorer parts of the town according to Cunningham Bissell, so the urban geography was more blurred than these nostalgic narratives acknowledge. It is a part of the colonial nostalgia to stress the assumed harmony in the colonial society (Bissell 2011: 66f). This “nostalgia” can also be a cover for more strategic narratives supported or even created by the British colonial administration that here as elsewhere used ethnic divisions as a means to split and govern. According to Sharae Deckard it was a part of British colonial politics to project an image of an ethnified town, a projection that had performative powers:

The British colonial regime saw Zanzibar in racial categories expressed directly in spatial terms. Zanzibaris came to use those categories to their own ends. The decade Zanzibaris call the Time of Politics (1954–64) that came at the end of colonialism, in particular, was a time of politics orchestrated explicitly around race and racial geography in the city. (Myers 2011: 173)

The influence went in many directions and the ethnic identities were manifold and opposing each other in intricate patterns, and “[…] Arab-Islamic dominance was not totalizing.” Even if colonial European historians tended to see “direct Arab influence in every aspect of the East African urban culture” (Deckard 2010: 100) the reality is that they were much more hybridized and diverse. Further, the relationship of the Swahili to the people of the coasts and the interior was not one of the unmitigated exploitation, but rather a more fluid negotiation of ethnicity and social positioning. Most Arabs who settled on the coasts gradually adopted Swahili culture and speech. A vertiginous array of markers characterized the social hierarchy of nineteenth-century Swahili culture, where ethnicity became a vehicle for distinguishing between the different groups that composed coastal towns. Established residents, recently settled immigrants, and new arrivals were ranked in terms of how indigenous (wenyeji) or how foreign (wageni) the were perceived to be […] The fluidity of these ethnic categories, whose boundaries were continually in the process of negotiation, sharply contrasts the rigidity of the racial hierarchies constructed by Germans and British in their “divide and rule” policies. (Deckard 2010: 100)

The Zanzibari/Swahili identity has been in constant flux, and political and economical changes are important factors in regulating this fluidity. Regional power structures, growing and declining nation-states, empires, have had great impact. The union and the semi-autonomous status of Zanzibar has been questioned since
the birth of the union, and now in 2014, 50 years later, there are serious political processes to renegotiate the conditions for the union to grant more independence to the two parties of the union. But what is it in all this diversity that UNESCO refers to when they use the term “cultural fusion”? As stated above “culture” for UNESCO refers rather to the built heritage where different styles and elements have merged, in one building or in how houses next to each other “in harmony” reflects “cultural differences”, but the relation to the actual people and their culture that produced this is not really considered.

Unresolved Memories of a Revolution

The fact that 1832 Stone Town became the capital of the sultanate of Oman and one of the leading towns of the Arab world is still a strong narrative. Even if already in 1890 that changed, since Zanzibar became a full British protectorate, the Sultan kept ruling the country but now under British “supervision”, the infamous indirect rule of British colonisation, a construction that remained until independence 1963. Even if that meant big changes there is a tendency to see continuity from at least 1832 (and before) until the union, and to place the big discontinuity to the years following independence.14 During British rule racial segregation in Zanzibar went from an informal to a more formal condition, and Whites, Indians and Arabs in that particular order were favoured. Swahilis with African descent were attributed a stronger connection to mainland Africa and were placed at the bottom of the hierarchy, under the Afro-Shirazi. The years heading up to independence therefore formed a political landscape of two camps: the anti-Sultanate, Africa-oriented, and secular Afro-Shirazi Party (ASP) with a stronghold in the densely populated areas of Unguja; and the pro-Sultanate, Arab World-oriented, and explicitly Islamic Zanzibar Nationalist Party (ZNP) […] At independence, the British handed power to the two parties friendliest to the Sultan and the status quo: the ZNP and [its ally the] ZPPP.15

When Zanzibar became independent the 10th December 1963, the British transferred the power to a party supported by the Sultan. This transfer was provoking to the majority of the Afro-Shirazi, who identified it as a strategy to maintain as much of the stability and continuity as possible into the post-independent era (Burgess 1999). Only one month later, the Sultan was overthrown in a bloody revolution led by the Afro-Shirazi Party (ASP), and the People’s Republic of Zanzibar was proclaimed. The autonomous republic lasted less than four months, and in April 1964 the union of Tanzania, Zanzibar together with Tanganyika, was born. These are the events that keep occurring in conversations on the island.

The Afro-Shirazi Party staged their revolution only one month after the independence of December 10th, the 12th of January, as a reaction to the British effort to make a smooth transition from protectorate to independence, with the goal to maintain good relations to the ruler – who was the same sultan (or his successor)
who had been “leading” the country under British “protection” since 1890, and in succession since 1832. The ambition was to secure continuity, and that must be understood as a part of the making of the new Euroafrika that European leaders had come to realise was the only possible (and desired) way forward, since it had become obvious that colonisation as we knew it had become obsolete (Hansen & Jonsson 2014). The 1964 revolution had stirred worries that Zanzibar should become the (revolutionary) Cuba of Eastern Africa, in Europe as well as in the United States. Zanzibar could become that spark that would ignite the radical fire that would turn the whole African continent communist. Understood in this way the objective with the union was to domesticate the revolutionary Zanzibar and to save Africa from the communist flare which was a substantial (real or imagined) fear of the 1950s and 1960s, and which would have brought an end to the strong bonds between Europe and its former colonies, and therefore undermining the intention to keep up the trade between Africa and Europe (Burgess et al. 2009).

During the revolution, in January 1964, ethnical cleansings, as well as political, took place, and many non-blacks, of Arabic and/or Indian descendent, fled or were killed (between 5,000–10,000). And again, when the union became a fact, many of the revolutionary leaders and intellectuals were also killed, or forced away, to exile in Europe and elsewhere. In spite of colonial ideas about the “white man’s burden”, it is obvious in this case that the British were more interested in securing power than looking out for the poorest in the colony, or in this case, the protectorate. Zanzibar was ruled in a classical divide and rule style, and it was the Arabs that according to the British had the potential to be leaders.

The independence and the turbulent years that followed changed the whole archipelago, but perhaps particularly Stone Town, since it had until then been a place dominated by wealthy Arabs, of whom many were killed or forced into exile. Many of their townhouses were left empty, and little by little they became inhabited by Afro-Shirazis coming from the suburbs, the countryside, or by migrating mainlanders. As late as in the 1990s there were still abandoned empty houses, before heritagization and tourism boomed. Those transitory years in the 1960s are a strong heritage and a strong memory, which is retold by Zanzibaris in many different versions and contexts, and are used as an explanation to many of the experienced changes and shortcomings since then. This is the era referred to when experiences of loss are expressed. In the Women’s heritage group there has been a focus on collecting childhood stories, and of memories of public spaces. These stories contain nostalgic memories that reflects moments that refers to a lost happiness that is told as belonging not only to “childhood” but to a specific childhood where the sultan played the role as the patriarch. For example during one of the meetings I participated in (January 2013), playgrounds as a public space and scene from childhood were discussed, as childhood and public space is one of the topics that they have used when collecting memories among women from Stone Town. The women talked about memories of swinging and the Sultan is under-
stood to have been supplying and maintaining the swings and the playgrounds – in contrast to the current republic government – where no swings are available in public spaces (Boswell 2011b; Boswell 2011a). In anecdotes like these, seemingly without reason, the conversation touches upon the transition from colonial to postcolonial times. More often than I would have thought, colonial times are privileged, and again my preconceptions are provoked, and my ideas on what should and should not be privileged. Postcolonial time ought in my mind be privileged before colonial since it meant independence; republic rule over royal since it meant peoples’ rule instead of monarchy. I cannot say that I really can reconsider that from a general point of view, but I have to accept the fact that independence and the union is not experienced as a success story, and that it has failed in making itself meaningful and relevant to many Zanzibaris, and many Zanzibaris that I spoke to, expressed a wish that the sultan – who is still alive, in exile in UK – should return.

Another example of this ultra modernity in nostalgic dress, relates to the (lack of) infrastructure in the town. Stone Town was once considered among the most modern African cities, the installation of the first elevator in the House of Wonder, being one often referred to example. Typically however, the elevator has not been in use in decades. The streets of Stone Town had electric lighting before the streets of London. Another more crucial thing is water distribution: there are a number of big water distributors in Stone Town, that every household – if they do not have a private well on their property or common backyard – has to connect to, with their own pipes to the street. This creates a chaotic system of pipes (mixed with electric lines) some three meters above the ground all over Stone Town. That is neither practical, nor aesthetically in accordance with what one would expect from a World Heritage site, where the regulations on how one can repair or rebuild one’s house is quite detailed and restricted. But there was a functional water distribution system “before independence”, before the assumed mismanagement of the town, that is described as beginning with the revolution/unionisation and lasting at least until the heritagization process begun in the early 1990s. This fact, that there used to be a more developed water system is integrated in the narratives of loss, and is also typical in the process of islanding. Islands tend to create narratives of a glorious prehistory before the integration into/with the nearest mainland.

Those examples show that the pro-independence years are idealized, and since it is also the time of the sultanate, with its stronger political, cultural and economic bonds to the Arabic peninsula than to the “mainland”, these narratives contribute to the on-going orientalisation of Zanzibar. The independence and the revolutionary years serve as point of nostalgia, both for those generations who remember life in town during the sultanate, and for those who experience the revolution as loss (Bissell 2005; Lowenthal 2013). This loss also entailed loosing a radical well-educated elite, with influences from all over the Indian Ocean Area and East
Africa, and Zanzibar as the intellectual, political, and cultural metropolis of Eastern Africa (Burgess et al. 2009).

**Shifting Frontiers**

There are many contradictions in the political landscape and its uses of identity and belonging, since nowadays it is the “mainland” in itself, as well as the “mainlanders” presence on the island, that is questioned, and work as an agent in the reinvention of Zanzibari identity. During the time of revolution and the fight for independence the antagonisms between Africans and Arabs grew strong as citizenship during the years before full independence was a crucial question, and became quite politicised. As Thomas Burgess argues there was an interest among many of the Arabs, whom mostly belonged to the Zanzibar Nationalist Party (ZNP) to consider their marginal position in terms of numbers. They argued that more “recent African migrants from the mainland” should be excluded from the electoral rolls, whereas the Afro-Shirazi Party (ASP) wanted to include “mainlanders”. Both positions must be related to the fact that “only 17 percent of the total population identifying themselves as ‘Arabs’ in the 1948 census”, and that the question on how to construct the zanzibarian identity was a hugely political one (Burgess 1999: 32). ASP on their part meant that ZNP was put into power maintain Arabic economic and political domination, which could be traced back to the enslavement of Africans in the 19th century. The ZNP argued that they were “the only genuinely anti-colonial, multi-racial, Muslim party”. What was at stake according to Burgess (1999: 32) was the “the very identity of Zanzibar”. ASP claimed the ties to Africa and the continent, whereas ZNP imagined Zanzibar’s future as a “multiracial Muslim state with its strongest cultural and political ties with the Arab Middle East” (Burgess 1999: 32). Translated to the current political landscape the distancing from the mainland has become naturalised, and seem to be shared by most Zanzibaris, and to claim Zanzibari identity as a non-mainland, and even non-African identity, has become mainstream. This opposing identity is explained in cultural as well as in historical terms. As one of my informants stated while discussing the eventuality of a future separation between Tanganyika and Zanzibar:

_We were always mixed, and we are therefore more developed. […] We overthrew the Britons ourselves, we took our freedom, but on the mainland it was given to them._

The statement was uttered as a part of a discussion about the difference between the Zanzibaris and the mainlanders. In it he, a man from Stone Town, in his thirties, who spent almost a decade in Europe, is expressing a similar idea of what is typical for Zanzibar as the one formulated in UNESCOs criteria about the cultural fusion, and he attributes to it a worldliness, an understanding of how to deal with the complexities of the modern and globalised world. Further he implies that Zan-
zibaris has agency (enough to overthrow their oppressors), and knowledge, and contrasts that to mainlanders who are assumed to be backwards, simpleminded, and passive victims, of history and globalisation, due to their lack of long-term interaction with many different modes of thoughts and lifestyles. But the statement also shows discrepancy with historical facts: the independence was “given” equally to both the countries, and a couple of years earlier to Tanganyika than to Zanzibar. Nonetheless it is a revealing utterance of how Zanzibaris/Stone Town inhabitants use history and the past to tell a story about cosmopolitan heritage.

Questions surrounding who the Zanzibaris are and where they came from are deeply problematic. Although the questions originate in a very distant past, it is a past dredged up daily in Zanzibar, articulated with the rise of mass tourism as the mainstay of the city’s, and the island’s, economy, and the consequent commodification of history. It is a past reconstructed regularly across the diaspora as well, across many forms of media and in everyday conversations. (Myers 2011: 172)

Identity and the question of whom is Zanzibari and who is not, is on the table everyday. Yet there seems to be an agreement that a “real” Zanzibari can come in many colours, ranging from very dark to almost white, and can belong to different ethnicities: Afro-Shirazi, Swahili, Indian, or Arabic, as well as of mixes of these. That said, one should not be tempted to believe that there are no frictions to the coexistence of these different identities. But they are all accepted as Zanzibari in contrast to mainlanders or expats. As Myers frames it, Zanzibar is “a fractured homeland and a fractured diaspora.” (2011: 173) And Zanzibar is particularly politicized in its complications. There is a Zanzibar that belongs to the United Republic of Tanzania, and a Zanzibar that belongs to history as many different things. […] Zanzibar is claimed by pan-Africanists and African nationalists and communist revolutionaries and Arab nationalists and Islamists and Pempanists and human rights activists and hip-hop artist. […] What unites Zanzibar, what is held in common as Zanzibar, or who belongs to what Zanzibar, and who gets to decide which Zanzibar is which? (Myers 2011: 173f)

The UNESCO statement “The Stone Town of Zanzibar is an outstanding material manifestation of cultural fusion and harmonization” might be true when it comes to “cultural fusion”, but the “harmonization” is not obvious from all corners – if we are not restricting our conversation only to how “Indian” balconies are harmoniously attached to “Arabic” houses.

Identity is a burning issue almost everywhere, which takes different forms and is used to different ends. The last couple of decades “identity politics” have been widely questioned by many scholars. Yet, identity matters for people, politics, culture, life, and resistance. In most societies politics is mediated through identities, and it is often through identity one is interpellated and affected by social or religious movements, political parties etcetera. From the case of Stone Town, and its “cultural fusion” it is obvious that “ethnic identities […] represent only ‘a small fraction’ of the many identities mobilized in postcolonial Africa” and that
time, and political, social change plays in to how identities develop, or are developed (Myers 2011: 30).

In Zanzibar the concept of indigeneity is not often used, but when it is, it refers to the Afro-Shirazi, who are understood to have been first on the islands, and that is in the political context of the ASP – Afro-Shirazi Party. It seems as if different ideas of mixed or parallel identities is more fitting to understand and describe how Zanzibaris understand identity: creolity, hybridity (Bhabha 1994; Hall 1994; Eriksen 1995). But it might be that ideas of cosmopolitanism is a better way to describe the way people live “side by side” – as Homi Bhabha formulated it recently, also asking for new ways to think urbanity as a cosmopolitanism that is based not in elites, but in all migrants over the world:

What does it mean to be at home in globalization? What forms of solidarity and alliance are made possible by living side by side with difference and alterity? Must we live in the shadow of sovereignty, or can we surpass it, or are we caught in its ambivalence? (Bhabha 2013)

Also Robbie Shilliam suggest that we redefine the concept of cosmopolitanism and bring it out of its Eurocentric worldview that makes us understand it as an impulse emerging from the west, when it can be argued that cosmopolitanism has been growing in many hybridized, creolised societies, far from the western metropolis (Shilliam 2011). This shall not be understood as if cosmopolitanism is the norm elsewhere, but a possible future that is not necessarily Eurocentric. As Burgess argues “Zanzibari revolution […] was a violent rejection of Zanzibar’s cosmopolitan heritage” (Burgess et al. 2009: 1) and that it broke with 150 years of Arabic and south Indian economical and cultural hegemony and aimed at bringing Zanzibar “back” to a more monocultural “African” community. Many hoped for the revolution to heal the wounds and tensions caused by the slave trade and colonisation, which it didn’t. Instead it can be argued that it overshadowed it, and created new tensions and fractures, and the union that followed became another example of how the problems with identity politics, can not be solved either through the installation of a new identity – African instead of Arabic – or by unifying ideas as that of the Tanzanian unions: ujamaa, if the inherent conflicts are not dealt with, and given its proper space in the collective memory. But the Swahili identity shows its resilience, and its capacity to, as all creolised cultures, survive in new circumstances, as itself, but different.

**Epilogue**

As I do the final editing on this article I am back in Zanzibar, and Stone Town is, in July 2014, getting closer to be put on the list of danger, due mainly to two interventions, one that has been a concern since I came here for the first time in 2011, and one new: the first being the big new hotel at the seafront on a former public space. The second threat is the planning of a new or extended harbour that
will eat into the northern part of the seafront (as well as of the mangrove forest north of town). Is that something spoken of? Not really. When I try to ask about it, people are unaware of the significance and when I explain they agree that it is not a good thing... but still, development is more important. The on-going discussions about changing the constitution for the union stirs up much stronger sentiments, than any threat against the World Heritage status. To not getting more autonomy in the union is considered a definite threat.

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### Notes

1. I want to thank Dr. Anna Bohlin at School of Global Studies, University of Gothenburg, and the seminar at Centre for Africa Studies, University of Cape Town, for reading and commenting on an earlier version of this article.
3. When I in this article refer to Zanzibar it is Unguja that is implied.
4. Bagamoyo used to be the capital but when the harbour of Dar es Salaam grew Bagamoyo declined, but now Chinese investors is building a new harbour. In the old days it used to ship out slaves and ivory, whereas the future gods will be crops, petrol, gas and minerals. [http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/173](http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/173) (retrieved 24 July 2014).
5. Many locals and scholars dismiss this as an authentic slave market, and the caves that are narrated by guides as spaces to accommodate slaves, probably contained food and other supplies, rather than people. The actual slave market was held in the open, close to the waterfront in the area of Shangani.
6. World heritage is as much a national business as it is international. The original intention was to protect objects that were of universal interest, but it has become a way to promote national status and it is the nation-state that nominates and who is responsible for the world heritage sites. In this case it is important that the nation-state is not Zanzibar but Tanzania, and that there is no public interest to highlight the memories that people are most occupied with. I cannot go further into this political aspect of the heritagization of Zanzibar here but I think it is relevant for anyone who wants to understand the heritagization, that there are many layers in every site and what is possible or desirable to heritage might not be what actually matters to people. One must also take into account that (intangible) memories are often considered as of lesser political as well as scholarly value than (tangible) heritage.

[1316]
In the first issue of *Island Studies Journal* it is stated that “Islands are platforms for the emergence of national identity and for the affirmation of cultural specificity: critical resources, especially in a context of sweeping globalization and the death of cultures and languages. As prototypical ethno-scapes, islands have spearheaded the study of the production of locality”. Baldacchino, Godfrey (2006): “Islands, Island Studies, Island Studies Journal”, *Island Studies Journal*, 1, 3–18.

In interviews with two engineers employed at STCDA that was conducted in July 2013.


One example is how the story of the 19th century Omani Princess Salme is exploited, in the advertisement by one boutique hotel: http://www.thezhotel.com/on-the- footsteps-of-princess-salme-of-zanzibar/ (retrieved 24 July 2014). Recently also the famous Emerson on Hurumzi exhibit a Princess Salme show.

Reclaim women’s heritage space is an NGO founded in cooperation with former Swedish Gender Studies of the university college of Gotland, and earlier funded by SIDA but nowadays on their own, trying to survive both as a supporting group for women’s business, and as a stakeholder of the world heritage. http://reclaiinzanzibar.blogspot.com/

Compare the discussion Jean-Loup Amselle has in *Mestizo Logics*, where he claims that people in West Africa before colonisation tended to use the “tribal” belongings quite fluidly, depending on which belonging was most beneficial at a certain time and place. Amselle, Jean-Loup (1998): *Mestizo logics: anthropology of identity in Africa and elsewhere*, Stanford: Stanford University Press.


See Reclaim (2009): Reclaim Journal. (Re)claim Women’s Space in World Heritage 2004–2009. Genderinstitut Gotland, Reclaim Women’s Space in World Heritage Association, p 65–86. But it was also something they told me about at one of their Saturday meetings that I attended, and they showed me some samples of drawings that were produced during these memory workshops.

References


Concurrences in Contemporary Travel Writing: Postcolonial Critique and Colonial Sentiments in Sven Lindqvist’s *Exterminate all the Brutes* and *Terra Nullius*

By Piia K. Posti

**Abstract**

Recent research highlights contemporary travel writing’s complicity in global politics, and the genre is claimed to reproduce the discourses that constitute our understanding of the world. It has also been argued that the genre holds a possibility to help us gain further knowledge about contemporary global politics, as it may work as an arena where global politics is commented on, intervened with and reshaped. With this double view, current research exemplifies how scholars today grapple with the challenge of accounting for simultaneous and sometimes conflicting histories and conditions that are altered and affected by colonial contacts, practices and ideologies, and by recent globalisation. This article explores this double characteristic of the travelogue through the concept of concurrence, and discusses how this concept is useful as a tool for a new understanding of the genre. How can this concept be employed in an analysis of travel writing that is deeply engaged in a critique of colonialism and its legacy in today’s globalism but is simultaneously enmeshed in and complicit with the legacy that is critiques? “Concurrence” is introduced as a concept for such analysis since it contains both the notion of simultaneity and competition. It is suggested that “concurrence” provides a conceptual framework that allows us to account for controversies, intersections and inequities without reinscribing them into a reconciled and universalizing perspective. In exploring the concept of concurrence, this article provides an initial analysis of two contemporary Swedish travel narratives by Sven Lindqvist. The analysis is focused on the genre’s tension between fact and fiction, its discursive entanglement in colonialism, and the problem and possibility of writing postcolonial critique by use of this genre.

**Keywords:** Concurrence, complicity, decolonisation, Sven Lindqvist, postcolonial critique, travel writing, universalism
Introduction

“Are we there yet?” Debbie Lisle asks at the end of The Global Politics of Contemporary Travel Writing (Lisle 2011: 276). Echoing the traveller’s curiosity, impatience, and urgency of arrival, Lisle’s question refers to her call for a new form of travel writing that would “resuscitate” the genre as “a crucial site for political debate and resistance” (Lisle 2011: 276). While arguing that “travel writing is a form of global politics”, as it “reproduces the same discourses of difference that hold our prevailing understanding of the world in place”, Lisle also suggests that the genre holds the possibility to “help us understand the discursive terrain of global politics” (Lisle 2011: 277). In addition, she argues that because of its involvement in the reproduction of difference, its occasional participation in debates about global politics, and it being widely read, travel writing as such carries within it “the opportunity to comment on, shape and intervene in the ‘serious’ events of global politics” (Lisle 2011: 1, 276-7).

However, in her wider analysis of contemporary travel writing, Lisle identifies a number of issues that need to be addressed if the genre is to realize this opportunity. Pointing to the genre’s historical affiliation with the colonial project as being a fundamental problem that travel writers consistently fail to address, and showing that the encounter with and construction of difference are both the driving force and predicament of travel writing, she concludes that the genre is still “a profoundly uncritical literary formation”; it lacks a level of “meta-conversation” and self-reflexive questioning about the prevailing popularity of the genre and what role it plays in shaping and disseminating contemporary views of globalisation (Lisle 2011: 261-67, original emphases). It may not come as a surprise then that her answer to the question of arrival is negative. Despite the promise contemporary travel writing holds, the possibility of debate and resistance is yet to be fulfilled. Notwithstanding these points, and this is the strength and originality of her study, Lisle still refuses to forward a final analysis of the genre as “corrupt”. Nor does she provide a formula for evaluating or judging travel writing. Instead, she emphasises the “profound opportunity” to push at the boundaries that contemporary travel writing provides, and contends that the genre holds “the potential to re-imagine the world in ways that do not simply regurgitate the status quo or repeat a nostalgic longing for Empire” (Lisle 2011: xi).¹

Such re-imagination seems to be the objective of Swedish writer, literary scholar, and political debater Sven Lindqvist who in Exterminate all the Brutes and Terra Nullius: Journey through No Man’s Land makes use of the travel narrative as a frame for what is principally a history and searing critique of the colonial project, and its legacy of racism and genocide.² Both narratives were clearly written with the intent to contribute to a discussion of global politics. In Exterminate all the Brutes, Lindqvist sets off on a journey through history, scientific tracts, literature, 19th century imperialism, and the “deadest area of the Sahara” in order
to uncover the origins of Kurtz’ chilling words “exterminate all the brutes” in Conrad’s Heart of Darkness (Lindqvist 2007a: 2). In Terra Nullius, he travels through central and western Australia, telling yet another story of colonial brutality and genocide while visiting significant places in the history of white Australia’s mistreatment of the Aboriginal peoples. The point of Exterminate is clearly stated, we already have the knowledge, “[w]hat is missing is the courage to understand what we know and to draw conclusions” (Lindqvist 2007a: 2). Lindqvist’s narrative is meant to provide that courage. Likewise the story about the mistreatment of the Aboriginal peoples is well known; what Lindqvist hopes to achieve is to encourage a confession of the crime so that it can “be changed”, rethought and reconciled, be given a “new setting and a new significance” (Lindqvist 2007b: 213). With such objectives, Lindqvist’s travelogues may indeed belong with the travel narratives that Lisle envisions capable of commenting on, shaping and intervening in global politics.

However, Lindqvist’s two travel narratives are not included in the travel writing that Lisle discusses in The Global Politics. Translated into English in 2007, Terra Nullius was not available to an English readership until the year after the publication of her study. However, Exterminate all the Brutes was translated in 1996, and it is unfortunate, though perhaps not surprising, that Lisle seems to have missed it despite the fact that it was widely acclaimed, was chosen as one of the best books by the New Internationalist in 1998 and described as a “beautifully written integration of criticism, cultural history and travel writing, underpinned by a passion for social justice” (New Internationalist 1999: par 5). The travelogues span the same period of the 1990s and the first years of the 21st century that Lisle studies and would have complemented the analysis. Like the travel narratives by Jennie Diski, Amitav Ghosh and Harry Ritchie, which Lisle argues are more critically aware and thus come closer to providing a site for debate, Exterminate and Terra Nullius clearly “acknowledge … the constraints of traditional history telling” (Lisle 2011: 259), as Lindqvist combines historiography and travelogue in order to provoke his readers to acknowledge what they “already know” and “draw conclusions” about the legacy of colonialism.

Convening thus at the intersection of European imperialism, political debate, global politics and travel writing, Lisle’s study and Lindqvist’s travelogues provoke further discussion about the challenges of writing postcolonial critique. They provide a site for re-addressing significant questions about the possibilities and constraints of writing postcolonial critique, questions which writers, scholars and critics as diverse as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Ngugi wa Thiong’o and Walter D. Mignolo already discussed in the early 1990s but which still remain topical in the field of postcolonial studies today. At the core of the discussion is, what Mignolo calls, “the locus of enunciation constructed by the speaker or writer” or the “what where and why” (Mignolo 1993: 122). Thus, what these critics brought to early attention is that geographic location, cultural entanglements, and epistemo-

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logical privilege (or disprivilege) need also to be considered intrinsic parts of the act and praxis of postcolonial critique.

This article aims to re-examine the complexity of writing postcolonial critique through a close reading of Sven Lindqvist’s two travelogues, set in relief against Debbie Lisle’s study. Beside the reviews from the time of their publication, there is very little research or published criticism on *Exterminate* and *Terra Nullius*. While adding to the scholarship on Lindqvist’s travelogues, this article does not provide room for presenting an outline of Lindqvist’s literary and scholarly production, or for providing an in-depth analysis of the narratives as such. Instead, the main objective is to let the comments on the narratives function as stepping-stones to a more general discussion of the challenges of voicing postcolonial critique through the particular genre of travel writing.

The impetus of this study is the basic question: How is it that Sven Lindqvist’s postcolonial critique has elicited such ambivalent response by its reviewers? The question may also be formulated as how is it that Lindqvist’s critique can be so compelling to the reader while at the same time the mode in which it is written is considered so disturbing? The thesis of the study is that this ambivalence is neither a weakness nor a flaw of the narratives, but a necessary effect of Lindqvist’s chosen genre of writing and a prerequisite for his postcolonial critique.

Implicit in this article is a theory of concurrences that takes globalisation, anxiety about the genre of travel writing and the tension between fiction and non-fiction as significant and interconnected discursive fields. I will explore how their interconnectedness becomes a constitutive feature of the postcolonial critique that Sven Lindqvist articulates in *Exterminate* and *Terra Nullius*.

**The Global Present of the Colonial Legacy**

The narratives of *Exterminate all the Brutes* and *Terra Nullius* were written with the ambition to contribute to a discussion of global politics. Their historiography does not merely constitute a digest and explanation of patterns in the colonial past, it also forms the claim that these patterns are still at work in the present. Moreover, this present is a global present. At the end of *Terra Nullius*, it is implied that white Australia needs to understand that its historic debt to the Aboriginal peoples is not solely a local and past matter but part of a current global condition. Hence, the reader is prompted to draw the conclusion that Lindqvist’s critique in *Terra Nullius* should not be read as simply a critique of white Australia’s inability to deal with their local history but also as a critique of the global now. Similarly, the concluding points in *Exterminate* maintain that we must not read the different instances of oppressive colonial regimes as “unique” and “one-of-a-kind phenomena”, nor continue to deny that these regimes were part and symptoms of a massive colonial ideology and practice that had and continues to have global ramifications (Lindqvist 2007a: 171 and ch. 166-168).
Lindqvist’s Affinities with Postcolonial Criticism

With this insistence upon a global now of the colonial legacy, Lindqvist’s travel narratives promote a perspective on the contemporary world order that is similar to the revisions of colonial historiography that emerged in the 1990s and redefined the “post” in postcolonialism. No longer understood or used as a periodising term, “‘post-’ in ‘postcolonial criticism’”, to borrow a definition from Neil Lazarus, became “directed against the assumptions of the ‘ideological discourses of modernity’” instead of denoting “a ‘cut’ or break in time, such that one could speak of a colonial ‘before’ and a postcolonial ‘after’” (Lazarus 2012: 12). Thus, by maintaining in the preface to the English translation of Exterminate as well as in the travelogue itself that there are decisive links between the colonial project of “European world expansion” and “new outrages” such as the Holocaust (ix), Lindqvist displays his affinities with the postcolonial criticism that is formulated in the 1990s by scholars such as Homi Bhabha, who at the time described the postcolonial perspective as “formulate[ing] critical revisions” of the historical narratives and as bearing “witness to the unequal and uneven forces of cultural representation involved in the contest for political and social authority within the modern world order” (Bhabha 1994 : 171). Thus, following Lazarus’ analysis, “postcolonial”, as employed by Bhabha, “is a fighting term, a theoretical weapon that ‘intervenes’ in existing debates and ‘resists’ certain political and philosophical constructions” (Lazarus 2012: 12).

Although Lindqvist does not explicitly claim to be a postcolonial scholar or historian, Exterminate and Terra Nullius undoubtedly carry the ambition to “intervene” and “‘resist’ … political and philosophical constructions” when Lindqvist rewrites European histories of genocide as deeply enmeshed in colonialism, and Australian settler colonialism as genocide. Moreover, Bhabha’s notion of postcolonialism as a “fighting term” is also appropriate for describing the fighting stance of Lindqvist’s texts, which make use of scenes and imagery of combat when describing his research and travels, so that “fighting” becomes a trope in the texts.

The Battle of Research, Travel and Truth

What kind of a traveller is Sven Lindqvist; why does he travel? To Lindqvist, travel is always secondary. First and foremost, he is a reader and a researcher. Travel is, however, integral to his writing, and Lindqvist’s method of writing has been described as a two-step process: first he reads in the library, second he travels to find out whether the books told the truth or not (Lundqvist 2004: 7). His travels thus take place either to authenticate or to challenge what he has discovered in between the covers of the books, and on the shelves and in the boxes of the archives.
Lindqvist is also a writer who is resolute about finding and telling the truth, which many bear witness to and his own writing takes as a central theme. In Röster om Sven Lindqvist (Voices on Sven Lindqvist), a collection of papers and conversations from a symposium in 2002 about Lindqvist and his authorship, several of the contributors present Lindqvist as a seeker of the truth. For instance, literary scholar Horace Engdahl takes the matter of truth as the topic for his paper as he argues that Lindqvist not only seeks to find and report on the truth, he also wishes to bear witness to it. Engdahl then continues to point out that Lindqvist’s “truth” in *Exterminate* oscillates between two irreconcilable kinds of truth: the researcher’s “be convinced” and the traveller’s “believe me” (Engdahl 2004: 30, my translation). Research, travel and truth are thus interlinked in Lindqvist’s writing.

Furthermore, Lindqvist himself emphasises this interlinking as he often frames his search for truth as an intellectual as well as physical battle and uncovering that takes place at the moment of travel itself. Already at the outset of *Exterminate*, reaching truth is described as a struggle that takes place in a colonial-postcolonial site that is simultaneously material and ideational, as the traveller-researcher has to fight Algerian soldiers for a seat on the bus whilst being encumbered by the embodiment of his collected colonial history, his computer:

> You fight your way to a seat in competition with a dozen or so soldiers in crude army boots who have learned their queuing technique in the close-combat school of the Algerian army in Sidi-bel-Abbès. Anyone carrying under one arm the core of European thought stored on an old-fashioned computer is obviously handicapped. (Lindqvist 2007a: 2).

What may at first read like the everyday bustle on crowded desert buses turns out to be a metaphor for both Lindqvist’s research and postcolonial critique in general. The traveller-researcher must not only fight for a seat on the bus; but also, that fight is directly related to the legacy of colonialism, which is literally his luggage. Fighting his way among the soldiers whilst carrying “the core of European thought”, Lindqvist’s fight for a seat is also a fight with and against the political and philosophical constructions of which he has set out to explore and learn the truth.

In *Terra Nullius*, the struggle to unravel the ramifications of European thought takes place as a fight against Australia’s collective amnesia about the treatment of the Aboriginal peoples. And, as in *Exterminate*, it is a struggle that takes place on site. Here, the narrative opens with a short note on the meaning of *terra nullius* and how it was “used to justify European occupation of large parts of the global land surface” and in Australia “legitimiz[ed] the British invasion” (Lindqvist 2007b: 4). This section is then followed by the story of the writer’s attempt at finding Moorundie, the “site of the first fighting between whites and blacks in South Australia”. However, the site turns out to be very difficult to find, and by juxtaposing the concept of *terra nullius* with the story of finding the site, Lind-
qvist establishes the association that the contemporary struggle is a direct consequence of the colonial mindset that dispossessed the Aboriginal peoples of their land in the first place. The difficulty to uncover the site becomes emblematic for Australia’s forgetfulness, something that sorely needs to be fought against and rectified by the writer, since Moorundie is marked on no “maps or itineraries”, and neither the South Australian Museum (which we are told offers an Indigenous Australians exhibition), two tourist offices, nor “the RAC in Adelaide . . . know anything about it” (Lindqvist 2007b: 4).

The Rhetoric of Peril and Discomfort
Opening both narratives with images of struggle, Lindqvist thus links his writing to the notions of fight and intervention in postcolonial criticism and signals that he is engaged in a critical pursuit in more that one way. The pursuit is critical as he writes a critique of the global condition. In addition, it is critical, as in being dangerous and life threatening, as he inscribes his traveller-researcher into the rhetoric of peril, of the dangers of exploration and hardship of travel, which is so often found in travel writing.

Images of fear and perilous adventure appear frequently in Exterminate. Stepping off the bus in the middle of the night near the desert town of In Salah and unsure of which direction to take, Lindqvist remembers that it was in this very place that “the Scottish explorer Alexander Gordon Laing was attacked and robbed”, and expounds in great detail on the brutality and “dreadful gash[es]” of the “five saber cuts” the explorer suffered, effectively linking his own exposed situation as a lone stranger lost in the dark desert to the plight of his predecessor (Lindqvist 2007a: 3-4). And in the subsequent chapter, the topic is fear in Conrad and Hobbes, which leads on to Lindqvist pondering on his own fear of travel (Lindqvist 2007a: 5). In addition, on his way to Arlit, Lindqvist suffers a sand storm that makes him fear for his life: “Suddenly, I realize this is my very last moment. That this is where I have come to die” (Lindqvist 2007a: 95).

As Carl Thompson points out in Travel Writing, a recent introductory guide to the genre and current debates in the field, this rhetoric of peril is not only common in travel writing, it has a function of lending authenticity to the narrative:

[A]n air of conspicuous hardship and peril will also frequently serve a useful rhetorical purpose for travellers and travel writers. By this means, a journey may be presented as a genuine challenge, and so as a genuine learning experience, for the travelling self. This in turn allows the journey to be presented as a form of pilgrimage or exploration, rather than some sort of self-indulgent jaunt. One might suggest, therefore, that dangers and discomforts often function principally as the markers of the supposedly “authentic” travel experience, and that they are therefore sometimes deliberately sought out so as to strengthen the traveller’s claim to have acquired a more authentic and insightful knowledge of both self and Other. (Thompson 2011: 124, original emphasis)
Thus, the hardships and dangers that Lindqvist’s traveller-researcher recounts in *Exterminate* lend authenticity to the narrative on two levels. The descriptions of the physical hardship of the travels bestow credibility on his intellectual pursuit as well as authenticity on his analysis of the “core of European thought”. The “learning” that has taken place is “genuine”.

A similar rhetorical strategy is at work in *Terra Nullius*. However, in this travelogue, the rhetoric of peril from *Exterminate* has been superseded by a rhetoric of discomfort. Yet, this rhetoric does not fully convince, which I believe is one of the reasons that the critique in *Terra Nullius* is also put into question by several of its readers. In fact, Peter Conrad even chides Lindqvist for it, arguing in his review that the hardship Lindqvist suffers is inauthentic and paints a stark contrast to the suffering on which he is reporting:

>[Lindqvist] relishes the discomforts of the journey: he is a liberal performing a penitential rite, volunteering to suffer in commiseration with his afflicted subjects. But how profound is his empathetic pain? A hotel near Moorundie, he reports, is “shockingly overpriced” with “hollow, sagging beds”. Outside Kalgoorlie, he breakfasts in another hotel where “the smell of the food is so greasy you could fry eggs in it”. Somehow, I don’t think that lumpy beds and fatty fry-ups qualify as a course of self-mortification. (Conrad 2007: par 8)

Here we can see that the rhetoric of discomfort is in place; the reviewer clearly identifies it but in this example it is judged bathetic and unqualified.

Besides lending the narrative a mark of authenticity, as Thompson points out, I would further emphasise that the rhetoric of peril and discomfort has the function of providing the narrator with discursive authority; the knowledge the narrator purports is accepted more readily by the reader because he has risked his life or comforts to gain it. The risks “strengthen the traveller’s claim to have acquired a more authentic and insightful knowledge” (Thompson 2011: 124). This function of the rhetoric becomes highly visible in the passage where the traveller-researcher of *Terra Nullius* finds himself at “the end of the road”, having endured the discomforts of the “coldest night of the year in Kalgoorlie”, and as a result discovers that documentation and real experience correspond: “Just seeing a place like that on a map gives me an adrenaline rush. And to actually be here, to see map and reality coincide for a moment – what does it matter that the room is shabby, the lights dim, the food inedible? It matters not at all. I’m happy” (Lindqvist 2007b: 144-6). Discomfort strengthens the significance of the insight gained through experience.

Yet, the problem with *Terra Nullius*, which Conrad’s review brings out, is that Lindqvist’s discomforts do not match the gravity of his historiography, nor his “Olympian judgements about Australia” (Conrad 2007: par 10). The claims of the historiography apparently do not match the expectations placed on the genre of travel writing.
Discursive Authority and Conflictual Entanglements

It seems there is an inherent conflict and imbalance in the travelogue that arises from Lindqvist’s combination of narrative forms. Both historiography and travel writing are invested in discursive authority and conveying “facts” about the world. Yet, this authority is also set against the inherent tension in the genre of travel writing and its affinity with story telling and fiction. Arguably, this is also the challenge of writing postcolonial critique in the form of travel writing, and something that contemporary travel writers must address more explicitly: the conflict and imbalances between fact and fiction, and between history and story. Yet, I do not argue that this is an imbalance that needs to be settled. On the contrary, I maintain along with Lisle, that the “genre’s precarious positions – between fact and fiction, identity and difference, local and global, and past and present” is what makes travel writing “a crucial site for political debate and resistance”, and that the real challenge is to grapple with the imbalances and “draw significance” from this position “without re-installing hegemonic discourses of difference” (Lisle 2007: 276).

In both narratives, it is quickly established that Lindqvist as traveller and writer is quite similar to the travel writers of the typical travelogue: “they seek after ‘truths’ they imagine they already have in their possession” (Holland & Huggan 2000: 11). In the Sahara, Lindqvist already possesses the truth he is to uncover during his travels through the desert; as we have seen, he literally carries it with him. In Australia, he knows more about the history and geography of the place than the expert locals – the museum personnel, the tourist offices and the RAC. Hence, Exterminate and Terra Nullius can be said to “occupy” the same “space of discursive conflict” that Holland and Huggan argue is characteristic of contemporary travel writing as they too “claim validity – or make as if to claim it – by referring to actual events and places, but then assimilate those places to a highly personal vision” (Holland & Huggan 2000: 10). The reported moments on site are quickly interpreted as “evidence” of what Lindqvist set out to unveil in the first place.

Holland and Huggan further claim that the discursive conflict arises as travel writing “negotiates the slippage between … two modes” of writing, namely “subjective inquiry and objective documentation”, and point out that this negotiation in fact becomes a means to “maximize the writer’s discursive authority” (Holland & Huggan 2000:11). Indeed, this maximization of discursive authority becomes particularly prominent in Lindqvist’s narratives since the gap between objective documentation and subjective experiences on site is wider than in most travelogues. The historical documentation is meticulously presented in both narratives in a notes section at the end; in Terra Nullius, the heavy annotation is further complemented with a chronology of historical events and a bibliography. Compared to other travel writing, the subjective experiences of the actual travelling are signifi-
significantly less reported on. In fact, it is quite surprising that none of the reviewers, writers and scholars that have written about the narratives questions the reason for Lindqvist’s travels, nor do they comment on the fact that the historiography on imperialism and genocide in both narratives could just as well have worked on its own without the interspersed anecdotes of travel. Perhaps the reason for this lies in the genre of travel writing itself; the discursive conflict is already taken for granted and accepted, and since both narratives include enough signals to place them safely in the genre despite the unusual amount of historical documentation there is no need to pose the questions. Both narratives display phrases that connote travel on the cover, “one man’s odyssey” and “journey through no one’s land”; they open with section headings indicating a geographic destination, “To In Salah” and “To Moorundie”; and in Terra Nullius there are maps of Lindqvist’s itineraries at the beginning of each section.

However, by combining historiography with the subjective experiences of travel the maximization that Holland and Huggan point to also runs the risk of a minimization of discursive authority since it opens the narrative to travel writing’s fictional character. Because with this combination, Lindqvist inscribes his historiography in a discursive setting that is characterised by dubious claims of truth and truthfulness. When the researcher’s epistemological “odyssey” and “journey” is thus interlinked with actual travel reportage, the historical narrative simultaneously gains and loses discursive authority. Precisely because of the stress on the writer’s actual presence on site and having witnessed what he reports on, travel writing is a genre where authorial reliability and unreliability is highlighted. As Carl Thompson points out, the genre’s appeal to the authority of the eye-witness, however, is not without its problems for travellers and travel writers. If on the one hand it lends the traveller’s report an authoritative status, on the other it may also render the traveller an object of suspicion. Rooted as it is in personal experience, the traveller’s account will often contain details that cannot be confirmed by any other witness, and that cannot receive external verification. The audience to any traveller’s tale must therefore frequently defer to the traveller, taking on trust his or her report. This requirement to trust the traveller, however, may engender scepticism rather than belief. (Thompson 2011: 65).

Losing Discursive Authority and Problematic Representations

Writing postcolonial critique through such a fraught genre may thus seem to risk discursive authority to such a degree that the critique loses its efficacy. Indeed, this also happens in some of the reviews of Terra Nullius, where Lindqvist is criticised for writing Aboriginal history yet in his narrative never speaks to a single Aborigine. Robert Manne, for example, writes in The Monthly: “It is a very telling weakness of Terra Nullius that, during his travels, he appears to have taken almost no interest in contemporary Aboriginal societies” (Manne 2007: par 9). Likewise, Sean Gorman of The Age is mystified by the absence of Australian indigenous
people in the narrative: “there is not a single sentence of conversation with a blackfella. Where have they gone?” (Gorman 2007: 24). This lack of contact with indigenous Australians has also been noted by Swedish reviewers and there is no denying that it is a curious absence in a text that has such a clear objective to report on and to critique not only past crimes against the indigenous population but also contemporary Australia’s failure to properly address the guilt and legacy of the colonial project.

However, the absence of the Aboriginal peoples in *Terra Nullius* is not absolute. There is one single scene of “encounter” in the travelogue, which occurs when the traveller-researcher visits a bar in a town at the rim of the Great Victoria Desert. The encounter is described in one short paragraph:

> Whites are drinking with whites in the bar, blacks with blacks. They pretend not to notice each other. The black people are watching dog and horse racing on television, faithfully stakes their money in a betting machine before the start of every new race. By about six, Thursday evening in Laverton has begun. Only the hotel, the liquor store and the police station are still open. (Lindqvist 2007b: 146)

The paragraph is short but charged, and can be interpreted in different ways. On the one hand, it can be read as an illustration of what Lindqvist is trying to “fight” by writing his historiography and travel narrative: the fact that the Aboriginal peoples are present but are still “made null” in white Australian society. They are “unseen” by the whites and respond by not “looking back” as the two groups “pretend not to notice each other”. The passage could thus function as an example of how white and (colloquially referred to) black existence still takes place in coinciding yet separate spheres and that the structures of colonialism are still at work. On the other hand, since this is the only appearance of contemporary indigenous persons in the narrative, the way they are represented in this passage becomes counter-productive to the objective of the narrative, since it threatens to inscribe contemporary Aboriginal people into the same narrative of victimhood and loss as the one that his historiography describes. There is a note of misery here, of drinking, betting and possible clashes with the police, that caters to a one-sided view of contemporary Aboriginal life as marked by alcoholism, addiction to gambling, and recurring problems with the law.

Due to the fact that Lindqvist’s narrative is not counter-balanced by further encounters, includes no other images and representations of the many different lives that the Aboriginal peoples lead today, and it only recounts the story of their past, the narrative becomes entangled in the old colonial imagery in which indigenous peoples are “symbolically displaced onto”, what Anne McClintock has called, “anachronistic space” (McClintock 1995:30, original emphasis). In *Imperial Leather*, McClintock discusses how the “myth of the empty land” available for colonisation entailed the notion that “indigenous people …. do not inhabit history proper but exist in a permanently anterior time within the geographic space of the modern empire as anachronistic humans … bereft of human agency – the living
embodiment of the archaic ‘primitive”’ (McClintock 1995: 30). With his historiography, Lindqvist tries to counteract this colonial trope as he shows us that the Aboriginal peoples do have a long history both before and during colonisation. Nonetheless, his narrative cannot fully escape placing the contemporary Aboriginal peoples in a similar anachronistic space. Lindqvist critiques the fact that white Australia has not acknowledged its past crimes and thus perpetuates the past; yet here, he simultaneously places the Aboriginal people outside contemporary Australia. Even though they figure briefly in this passage, the contemporary “blacks” in Lindqvist’s narrative do not really share the space and time from which the traveller-researcher tells their story; their space and time is rather that of the Aboriginal peoples whose past fate is the topic of the narrative.

It could of course be argued that the passage shows an equally miserable and problematic view of the white Australians in the bar. However, taking into consideration that there are other encounters with white Australians in the narrative, and that together they give a diverse representation of the whites, the argument does not hold. For one thing, Lindqvist’s traveller-researcher speaks with the white Australians that he meets on his journey, and reports on their conversations. But we never get to read a word uttered by a living indigenous Australian along the road. The different encounters and reported conversations with white Australians thus make it possible to recognise them as encounters with individuals, whereas the singular appearance of contemporary indigenous Australians in the bar scene shifts the image of them toward a universalising, essentialist representation of a timeless people.

Hence, another problem with Lindqvist’s historiographical travel narrative is that he has taken upon himself to interpret and speak for Australian indigenous people without ever having spoken with them. He tells their history, but that history is based on sources from predominantly Western “archives”: the narratives of colonists, anthropologist, scientists, and missionaries. The history that we get to partake of is a colonial history into which the Aboriginal peoples have already been assimilated.

The Challenge of the Postcolonial Critic and Lindqvist’s Method of Writing

With the imbalance in encounters with contemporary whites and blacks, lack of direct contact with contemporary indigenous people, and tendency toward an essentialist representation of them, Terra Nullius reprises the same problem of the indigenous and colonized subjects’ historical representability that Spivak brings attention to in “Can the Subaltern Speak?”. In this seminal essay on the problems and challenges of Subaltern Studies, Spivak dismantles and warns against the tendency of the “benevolent Western intellectual[s]” to speak for the oppressed as an authoritative representative without considering their own entanglement in the
epistemic systems that have constructed the subaltern subject in the first place (Spivak 1994: 87-9, original emphasis). In her analysis, the way many postcolonial scholars have been speaking for indigenous and colonized subjects has instead had the effect of “muting” them. She argues that “the substantive concern for the politics of the oppressed … can hide a privileging of the intellectual and of the ‘concrete’ subject of oppression” (Spivak 1994: 87). The challenge for the postcolonial critic and consequently for a writer like Lindqvist, “who feel that the [indigenous and colonial] ‘subject’ has a history”, is to “resist and critique ‘recognition’ of the Third World through ‘assimilation’” (Spivak 1994: 88). And by “assimilation”, Spivak means the propensity in Western epistemology for the “ethnocentric Subject” – the Western critic – to “establish… itself by selectively defining an Other” (i.e. constructing the colonial subject as that which the Western Subject is not) and for “the complicity of the investigating subject … to disguise itself in transparency” when establishing this self; both of which have the effect of either making the subaltern disappear into silence or function symbolically as an “invocation” of “the authenticity of the Other”, as well as repeating the epistemic violence of imperialism and making its circuit invisible once again (Spivak 1994: 87-90, original emphasis).

Spivak’s argument in “Can the Subaltern Speak?” is complex. It builds on both Marxist and poststructuralist theories of power and knowledge, and it resists brief summary. However, the crucial point that I wish to highlight here is the problem of transparency. What Spivak points to regarding “transparency” is the long history of Western epistemology that renders the place of the investigating intellectual as being objective and free of complicity and ideological entanglements. The methodological challenge for the postcolonial critic is thus to find a way of acknowledging and understanding the ramifications of this position of alleged transparency. It is a “sanctioned ignorance that every critic of imperialism must chart” (Spivak 1994: 86). At the same time, Spivak implies that this work can never be completed; assuming a resolution would be to reassimilate one’s position into that ideational transparency once more.

Although Spivak’s critique in the essay is specifically directed at the work of the Subaltern Studies group and focuses on Western feminists’ construction of the subaltern woman, her problematization of the position of the postcolonial critic is equally applicable to contemporary travel writing with ambitions to comment on global politics. The position of the travel writer is seldom reflected upon in contemporary travel writing, and this is also what Debbie Lisle argues needs to be addressed if the genre is to fulfil its promise “to encourage a radically diverse global community unconstrained by Enlightenment notions of civilisation and progress” (Lisle 2006: 6). However, according to her study, much contemporary travel writing “continues in the colonial tradition: it reproduces a dominant Western civilisation from which travel writers emerge to document other states, cultures and peoples. In this sense, travel writers continue to secure their privileged
position by categorising, critiquing and passing judgement on less-civilised areas of the world” (Lisle 2006: 3).

What is interesting about Lindqvist’s travelogues is that in *Exterminate* and *Terra Nullius* the privileged positions of the postcolonial critic and the contemporary travel writer concur. Moreover, Lindqvist’s method of writing, of combining historiography and travelogue, not only highlights the position, it also includes an awareness, albeit limited, of both the constructed notion of and the impossibility of achieving such a transparent position. This, I would argue, is yet another reason why his narratives, and *Terra Nullius* in particular, have received such ambivalent response by the reviewers. Lindqvist’s chosen form of combining two different genres of writing poses new challenges for the reader whose expectations of the narrative as travelogue are suddenly confronted and jeopardized. The comfort of reading within the boundaries of genre is disturbed and we shall see presently how this troubles one reviewer in particular.

Both travelogues have on the whole been quite well received both in Sweden and by the English-speaking readership. A quick sampling of the reviews shows that even though some find the conclusions quite a mouthful and overreaching, the texts are considered timely, thought provoking, and an important contribution to contemporary debate. In fact, two reviewers even recommend *Exterminate* as “school curriculum material” (Baird 1998: 34), and as being “appropriate for upper division and graduate courses as the starting point for a discussion of European imperialism or intellectual history” (Melancon 1998: 686).

At the same time, as noted in earlier examples, several reviewers express different levels of unease about the way Lindqvist voices his critique and draw attention to incongruities in the narratives as, for example, the fact that Lindqvist in *Terra Nullius* complains about the discomforts on the road and poor standard rooms while travelling in the footsteps of genocide (Conrad), and that he purports to tell the history of Aboriginal experience and Australian guilt without talking to any Aboriginal people (Conrad, Ehrnrooth, Gorman, Hallgren, Manne, Sandström). Furthermore, Swedish reviewer Hanna Hallgren has brought attention to questions that Lindqvist does not discuss, such as how his position as a white man affects the narrative perspective (Hallgren 2005: par 6).

However, there is one review that I wish to draw particular attention to since it addresses the topic of this article, namely the effect Lindqvist’s choice to combine historiography with travel writing has on his postcolonial critique. In the *New Humanist*, Daniel Miller ends his review of *Terra Nullius* with a comment on why he thinks the book is highly flawed and “comes to feel hollow and false” (Miller 2007: par. 8). I will quote this at length because the “problem” that Miller identifies runs against the grain of what Debbie Lisle, Patrick Holland, and Graham Huggan consider a possibility of contemporary travel writing today, namely, the transgressive blurring of generic boundaries which may open up a space for political commentary:
The fundamental problem with *Terra Nullius*, the one from which all its other problems derive, is stylistic. It tries to be too many different things at the same time. … On the one hand, it understands itself as a travelogue, refusing to explain, refusing to offer a rational critique, and thus cheerfully abdicates all claims to real political seriousness. On the other hand, it tries to be a political history, and thus wants [to] be taken extremely seriously, and so swerves into rhetoric, a domineering tone and a sarcastic manner, in a vain effort to achieve this on the cheap. The overall effect is unhappy, and at several points grotesque – most notably … where Lindqvist takes a series of ill-tempered pot-shots at the Western philosophical canon, and the numerous moments throughout where he swerves into staggeringly glib Neo-Orientalist fantasy. For all of Lindqvist’s high moral purpose, this book is frankly disastrous. (Miller 2007: par 9)

Apparently, Miller is disturbed by the fact that the narrative seems to be neither-nor genrewise. Structured as a travelogue, it cannot be taken seriously as it does not “offer a rational critique”, at the same time the objective of writing serious “political history” is not achieved due to the level of rhetoric. The comment on “Neo-Orientalist fantasy” also signals that the narrative may still, to borrow a pertinent phrase from Lisle, “operate” in an “uncertain political terrain that is haunted by the logic of Empire” (Lisle 2011: 5). In Miller’s reading then, *Terra Nullius* falls short of its aim to offer a tenable critique of the postcolonial condition in Australia because of its stylistic transgressions.

On several points, Miller’s criticism is quite accurate. Other reviewers have made similar comments about tone and manner. On other points, his comments are less precise. The case here, however, is not to contest Miller’s impressions. Instead, I would like to explore what would happen if we were to read the stylistic choices as deliberate rather than unfortunate, as a considered method of writing critique that Lindqvist has developed over years of writing cultural debate. Lindqvist is quite a self-reflexive writer, and the problem of writing critique is actually addressed in *Exterminate all the Brutes*. Here he is very much aware of the problem of the position of the critic, and the impossibility to remove oneself entirely from the discursive entanglements and practices of the topic at hand. By addressing this problem, Lindqvist shows that he is attentive to the same questions about writing critique and the problem of transparency that were discussed by postcolonial researchers at the time that he was writing *Exterminate*.

In the middle of the narrative, there is a scene in which the traveller-researcher sits in his hotel room. He is writing what will become *Exterminate* when he “suddenly catch[es] sight of a man carrying an empty picture frame” (Lindqvist 2007a: 103). The way the man carries the frame makes it look as if he is within the frame, separated and elevated from the rest of the environment. Then when he shifts from carrying the frame on one shoulder to carrying it on the other, Lindqvist remarks that it is as if he steps out of the frame and ends the description of the sight with: “It looks as if that were the simplest thing in the world” (Lindqvist 2007a: 104).
This scene introduces an interesting discussion about the impossibility for the writer to do the same:

Even in the most authentic documentary there is always a fictional person – the person telling the story. I have never created a more fictional character than the researching “I” in my doctorate, a self that begins in pretended ignorance and then slowly arrives at knowledge, not at all in the fitful, chancy way I myself arrived at it, but step by step, prof’by proof, according to the rules. (Lindqvist 2007a: 104)

He then asserts that it is the scientific demand to omit “all that is personal” that creates this fiction and concludes: “The reality ‘I’ experience in the desert is authentic, however condensed. I really am in Arlit. I can see the black man with the gold frame. But I can never, by the very nature of things, step out of the frame” (Lindqvist 2007a: 104).

With this passage Lindqvist addresses the position of both researcher and traveller, illustrating the impossibility of a transparent position even at the moment of “authentic” experience during travel. He further demonstrates that the transparent position of the researcher and scholar is a construction, “a fictional character” that acts its part in the fiction of steady and orderly epistemic progress.

A similar scene is also included in Terra Nullius. However, in this narrative the problem of transparency in not as clearly spelt out as in Exterminate. In Terra Nullius, the principal form of travel is by car, which means that throughout his journey, the traveller-researcher is close to the ground. One part of the journey, however, he travels by plane, and it is in this part that the narrative illustrates a similar problematisation of the transparency of the traveller-researcher’s position and its fictionality. The scene of flying over the same roads and landscape that the writer has already travelled is used to introduce a discussion of “vantage point” and what it might entail: “I’m aboard a taxi plane, taking the short-cut across the Great Victoria Desert from Ceduna to Alice Springs. It saves me three days covering a route I’ve already driven. Above all, it gives me a new vantage point” (Lindqvist 2007b: 161-2). The narrative continues with a detailed description of the ground beneath him, which includes an image of “traces of water events that used to happen once but aren’t happening any more” (Lindqvist 2007b: 162). Yet the traces are there for the researcher to read and interpret, and at the centre of the passage the traveller-researcher compares himself to Sherlock Holmes, the Victorian master of deduction and empirical observation: “You feel you could read the ground as Sherlock Holmes reads the scene of a crime” (Lindqvist 2007b: 162). At this point, Lindqvist’s traveller-researcher seems to have achieved a vantage point that allows him to read the traces of the land as clearly and unencumbered as that master detective whose success as a criminal investigator stems from his ability to look at any event from an unprejudiced and wholly rational vantage point, that is, an ultimate position of transparency. But this position turns out to be temporary, and it is quickly suspended by Lindqvist as the passage ends with images of the difficulty to discern the border between sky and
desert and the comment that “the clarity of focus only lasts a moment” (Lindqvist 2007b: 162).

Even though Lindqvist does not explicitly discuss the fiction of this epistemic vantage point in the passage, as he does in the example from Exterminate, the comments on the difficulty to pinpoint the horizon and the fleeting character of the moment of clarity are enough to trouble the position of the master interpreter and of the traveller-researcher by extension. Moreover, the troubling is reinforced in the subsequent chapters, in which Lindqvist expands on the issue of the vantage point. Only this time, he turns to the detrimental vantage point of “white research” (Lindqvist 2007b: 164).

The topic of the chapters is how white research is complicit with the “presumption that Australia at the time of the British invasion had been ‘no one’s land’ and therefore “missed the significance of place” for the indigenous inhabitants. (Lindqvist 2007b: 164-5). Referencing the early anthropological studies of Alfred Radcliffe-Brown (1881-1955), and Baldwin Spencer (1860-1929) with Francis James Gillen (1855-1912), Lindqvist argues that the fact that they studied the family ties and relationship with animals on Aboriginal subjects already removed from their homelands caused them to overlook “the relationship between the people and their land”, and that this neglect is connected to the colonial trope of terra nullius, concluding that “[t]he vantage point they had selected made place invisible” (Lindqvist 2007b: 165). As a consequence, Lindqvist effectively links the problem of the researcher’s position with the position of the colonising subject and shows that they in fact intersect. He demonstrates how in this context “white research” is far from transparent and instead highly complicit with and entangled in the colonial project.

As we can see from these examples, Lindqvist is not as unaware of the problems entailing the traveller-researcher’s vantage point and position as a first reading might lead us to assume. However, it may be that Lindqvist’s method of writing, of combining the genres of historiography and travelogue, obscures rather than clarifies this. For the reader who expects “rational critique”, the metaphorical dimension of such passages requires perhaps too much interpretation where the analysis is already assumed to have taken place and should just be related. For the reader who expects a traveller’s tale, the self-reflexive dimension of such passages does not fit the familiar structures of the genre and may be overlooked or disregarded as fictional embellishment instead of epistemic critique.

Conflicting Epistemic Practices: The Problem of the Global and the Universal

Paradoxically then, Lindqvist’s method of combining the genres of historiography and travelogue has the effect of simultaneously unveiling and maintaining the very aspects of colonial and epistemic practice that it critiques. To recap, the trav-
elogue is still troubled by the genre’s entanglement in colonial and Western epistememic structures, which makes it an uncertain form for postcolonial critique. Moreover, its history of association with the tall tale and its inherent tension between fact and fiction easily jeopardize the discursive authority of the critic as regards the experience of travel and the historical analysis. At the same time, the dimension of empirical investigation through travel and the genre’s rhetoric of peril and discomfort effectuate a maximization of discursive authority that surpasses the strictures of the genre of historiography as they convey a sense of experienced “authenticity” and “truth”. In addition, Lindqvist’s combination of genres not only illustrates how the position of the travel writer and the position of the researcher are equally troubled by the question of transparency; it also provides a form through which this position of transparency can be dismantled and examined.

With these coinciding and conflicting aspects of Lindqvist’s critique and mode of writing, it is no surprise that his narratives have been both commended and sharply criticised by his reviewers. The diverging responses that Exterminate and Terra Nullius elicit seem thus related to Lindqvist’s mode of writing, a mode that is riddled by paradox and self-contradiction. Because to a certain extent, Lindqvist’s critique is enmeshed in and complicit with the colonial legacy it intends to expose.

But do “paradox” and “self-contradiction” really provide us with sufficient tools for dealing with diverging and even conflicting narratives such as Exterminate and Terra Nullius? Or do they in fact belong in the same category of epistemic construction as the transparent “I” of Western science and the “grand narratives” that postmodernist and postcolonial theories alike have put under scrutiny? Are not these concepts already inscribed in an epistemic system that aims to transcend human situatedness and epistemological diversity by appeal to such ideas as unity, transparency and universality?

We are here confronted with two different ways of thinking. On the one hand, we could disregard Lindqvist’s narratives as flawed because of their self-contradictory aspects, using the principles of universalist epistemology as our standard. On the other hand, we could interpret the contradictory aspects of the narratives as signs that a universalist epistemological perspective proves insufficient for understanding and capturing the complex realities of global events and conditions like colonialism and its legacy, and that what is required is a “thinking otherwise”.

Postmodernist and postcolonial criticism have for quite some time been engaged in such “thinking otherwise”, which can be described as a thinking with the objective to dismantle and rewrite the tenets of Western modernity and make room for the “counter-narrative of the colonised” as well as the counter-narratives of other subordinated groups. However, this “thinking” is still under development and at the moment there is an important shift taking place in the field of
postcolonial theory. This shift has to do with the shortcomings of the conceptual frameworks and methodological tools hitherto used predominantly within the field. In conflicts over issues such as land rights, religion, and marriage and sexual custom, where Western and other legal and epistemic systems and practices clash, it has become evident that many established frameworks and tools in the field cannot meet the challenge of explaining and confronting processes on a global scale and on equal terms. Instead, good intentions aside, these frameworks interrogate the colonial project and current global contention and conditions from within a Western universalist system of thought that allows no room for cosmological and epistemological diversity.

The challenge and shift seems thus to originate in the tension between “the global” and “the universal”. How are we to deal with global perspectives and events that include different and sometimes irreconcilable analyses, narratives and experiences without conflating them in a universalising interpretation? How to avoid making the same mistake as many other projects before, as for example Marxism, and refrain from, in the words of Rámon Grosfoguel, “export[ing] to the rest of the world … universal abstract[s]” such as communism “as ‘the solution’ to global problems” (Grosfoguel 2012: 94)? Herein lies also the challenge for contemporary travel writing if it is to achieve that re-imagination of the world without replicating the structures and violence of colonialism and its legacy.

Yet what if the problem does not really stem from the tension between the global and the universal but in the impasse that is created by an epistemic assumption that we must consider this in terms of an either/or? That the available course in approaching the global must either lead to a universalizing grand narrative or result in an inadequate assemblage of fragmented and incongruent narratives, and piecemeal, scattered knowledges?

What if instead we were to consider this seemingly inevitable choice to be yet another “mythology”, another grand narrative of Western thought? What if we were to “decolonise” this choice between the “either” and the “or”, similar to Robert J. C. Young who in White Mythologies considered ways of decolonising the concept of history? 11

**Concurrence as a Conceptual Framework**

I would argue that one way of decolonising this either/or choice would be to re-conceptualise and remotivate postcolonial critique and the postcolonial project. This is where the concept of concurrence comes in as a methodological tool and theoretical perspective.12 In the dictionary definition, “concurrence” is synonymous with “simultaneous”, as “occurring together in time”. It may also signify “confluence”, a “combination in effecting any purpose or end”, the “co-operation of agents or causes”, as well as “agreement” and “consent”.13 With these multiple yet related meanings, “concurrence” captures and encompasses several of the top-
ics and challenges of difference, entanglement and complicity that postcolonial studies has brought to light and grappled with in the last decades, since they deal with different instances of simultaneity. Among these topics and challenges we find colonialism’s simultaneous construction of the colonised subject as an incomprehensible “Other” as well as something that can be known through Western means of investigation; the notion that “colonialism” is a confluence of entangled ideologies and practices; and further, that colonialism is not a singular force but includes a co-operation between agents and causes complicit with the colonial project. Within these particular instances of postcolonial theory, we can see that there has indeed taken place a partial decolonisation of the either/or since these are instances of thinking otherwise that acknowledges processes that are both/and: the colonised subject is both known and unknown.

However, there is another meaning of “concurrence” by which we may also identify what remains to be decolonised as regards the choice between either/or. Concurrence, in its more archaic form, also signifies “rivalry” and “competition”. This draws attention to the contestations over epistemic entitlement, competing (and sometimes conflicting) narratives of (post)colonial encounters and experiences, and territorial claims, with which studies with a global perspective invariably must grapple. The remaining challenge for postcolonial theory and critique is thus to find strategies to account for competing and rivaling knowledge systems, narratives and claims without incorporating them in a universalising system of either/or.

Concurrence could thus serve as a methodological tool for identifying areas of competing claims and instances of entanglement as remotivating nodes for study. Concurrence could also serve as a theoretical perspective since it signals an assumption about the global reality that underlies the questions about simultaneity, conflict and complicity that have emerged recently within the humanities and the social sciences. Hence, concurrence may be described as an alternative mode of thinking, with new epistemic potential, that is characterised by a higher level of flexibility as regards universalism.

**Concurrence of Concrete and Abstract Universalism**

Returning to the matter of writing postcolonial critique in the form of a travel narrative, I will now explore how the concept of concurrence can work as a tool for further unravelling the question of why Lindqvist’s travelogue-cum-historiography about the impact of colonialism prompts such ambiguous response. I will therefore briefly revisit a couple of nodes of epistemic conflict within the narratives where universalism is simultaneously at work and under erasure. I will suggest that even though Lindqvist’s two travelogues purport to operate within a legacy of Western universalism; they do so in a narrative field where universalism is simultaneously at work and deconstructed.
As noted earlier, *Exterminate* and *Terra Nullius* make strong claims about the need to “draw conclusions” and to confess the crimes. By doing so, Lindqvist arguably exports Western universal abstracts of “reason” and “confession” as the solution to the global problem of white Western atrocities against the “other races”. The underlying assumption of the narratives is that by providing a reasonable and truthful account of the atrocities, and by adopting a convincing scientific stance of analysis, further verified by empirical field work (travel), the problem will be solved as long as we “draw conclusions”, that is, if we employ Western reason. Likewise, in *Terra Nullius*, Lindqvist exports the universal abstract of “confession” as the solution to the problem, since the central claim in the narrative is that reconciliation can only happen when white Australia owns up to its crimes.

I am here borrowing the concept “universal abstract” from Ramón Grosfoguel who in a recent article, ”Decolonizing Western Uni-versalism”, discusses forms of decolonising that do not discard universalist thinking per se but aims for a dialogue between the universal and the particular. Western universalism, he explains, is characterised by abstraction and vertical relations, whereas decolonised universalism tends towards the concrete and the horizontal (Grosfoguel 2012). I find Grosfoguel’s approach to be quite similar to a framework of concurrence, because it too opens towards a more flexible and elastic approach to ethico-political diversity that is including and dialogic, rather than perpetuating the excluding and monologic stance of Western universalism. Furthermore, Grosfoguel’s differentiation between abstract and concrete universalism makes a useful distinction for my analysis of Lindqvist’s ethico-political claims and method of critique in *Extermi-nate* and *Terra Nullius*. Because this differentiation captures both the challenge of writing postcolonial critique and the reason why Lindqvist’s narratives are so disturbing. Therefore, I will briefly recap Grosfoguel’s main two examples of decolonised universalism at work. The ambivalent nature of Lindqvist’s postcolonial critique arguably stems from a conflict between his abstract universalist stance as a historiographer and his traveller’s aim to narrate the particular. A comparison with Grosfoguel’s examples will make this conflict more tangibly clarified.

In the article, Grosfoguel explores Aimé Césaire’s call for “a universal rich with all that is particular, rich with all particulars, the deepening and coexistence of all particulars”, from his mid-1950s letter of resignation to the French Communist Party, as an early example of thinking otherwise regarding universality, arguing that Césarie makes here an important move from Western abstract universalism to a concrete universalism (Grosfoguel 2012: 95-96).16 He also discusses the Zapatistas’ way of doing politics as a decolonised form of universalism. Comparing the Zapatistas’ method of “walking while asking questions” with the method of “walking while preaching”, which he claims is a universalist practice within the “Judeo-Christian, Western cosmology” that is based on abstraction and that has been “reproduced in equal measure by Marxist, conservatives, and liberals”, Grosfoguel argues that the Zapatistas’ method is in accordance with concrete uni-
universalism rather than abstract since it is “constructed as a result … of a critical transmodern dialogue which includes within itself the epistemic diversality and the particular demands of all the oppressed people of Mexico” (Grosfoguel 2012: 99). Here, we can see that decolonising universalism, according to Grosfoguel, is a matter of concurrence, of conceptualising an alternate universalism directed at a Césairean coexistence of particulars and a Zapatista intersection of diverse epistemes rather than “set[ting] out from an abstract universal (socialism, communism, democracy, the nation, as floating or empty signifiers) in order to preach to and convince all Mexicans [or Others] of the correctness of this view” (Grosfoguel 2012: 99).

In the light of this suggested decolonised universalism, it becomes possible to discern that Lindqvist’s method of writing postcolonial critique is tending towards a concrete universalism while simultaneously being enmeshed in abstract universalism. This is made visible when considering once more his choice to combine travel and historiography. Because on the one hand, Lindqvist’s method of writing his critique while travelling, seems at first rather close to the Zapatistas’ method of “walking while asking questions”. As in all travel narrative, the reason for travel is to either literally or metaphorically “walk” to the place in question and take part of the local sights and customs, of engaging in some form of “asking” about the particular place. And when Lindqvist travels, he travels to “ask” about the “truth” of the colonial project on site. On the other hand, it is an “asking” that does not fully come to fruition since, as we have seen, he does not engage in any form of dialogue with contemporary Australian indigenous peoples. Lindqvist is, as we have seen in the analysis, like many other travel writers, a traveller who already knows the truth his journey is meant to verify. Hence, it could be argued that the impetus for his writing postcolonial critique is not “walking while asking”, but rather a “walking while preaching”. The dominant mode of investigation and “instruction” in the narratives is abstract rather than concrete since its epistemic project, to map the impact of colonialism, is founded on, to borrow from Grosfoguel, the Western “epistemological myth” of “a self-generated subject with access to a universal truth beyond space and time by means of a monologue” (Grosfoguel 2012: 89).

Lindqvist’s traveller-researcher, despite his travelling to ask for the truth on site, never manages to fully discard the myth of this subject with “access to a universal truth beyond space and time”. One telling sign is that the traveller-researcher does not leave the library and the archive behind when he takes off on his journey. In Exterminate, Lindqvist not only totes a computer with him, but also, and more interestingly, he is scrupulous about letting his reader know about the extreme volume of knowledge that is at his disposal at every moment on his trip:

The disks are no larger than postcards. I have a hundred of them, in airtight packs, a whole library that together weighs no more than a single book.
At any time I can go anywhere in history, from the dawn of paleontology, when Thomas Jefferson still found it unfathomable that one single species could disappear out of the economy of nature, to today’s realization that 99.99 percent of all species have died out, most of them in a few mass exterminations that came close to wiping out all life. (Lindqvist 2007a: 7)

With these sentences, Lindqvist’s traveller informs his reader of two things at once. One, that he writes from a privileged position of epistemic abundance and two, that this abundance is at his complete command no matter what his geographical position is. Furthermore, the topic of his narrative, the extermination of the brutes, turns out to be just a small part of the immense overview; here, we are told that he can access the topic of extermination on a global scale, as regards all brutes, not just the human ones.

**Concurrence and Contemporary Travel Writing**

Whether this image of the traveller’s access to an all-encompassing epistemic treasure trove is to be understood as a methodological statement, or is included to function as a means for balancing the discursive authority that travel writing’s association with the “tall tale” might undermine is difficult to decide since, as the analysis has shown, there are instances in both narratives where the transparent position of the traveller-researcher is either pursued, taken for granted, or questioned. And claiming either interpretation is neither the objective of my analysis nor of this article. Doing so would be counter-productive as it would strive for textual reconciliation and push the analysis towards yet another universalizing perspective. Instead, I have aimed to show that Lindqvist’s narrative technique and postcolonial critique are characterized by simultaneity and conflict on multiple levels, that is, by concurrence. As we have seen, fact and fiction, story and history, discursive authority, and the position of the traveller-researcher, all of these are simultaneously employed and put into doubt through Lindqvist’s combination of travel narrative and historiography.

But what is even more interesting is that the two narratives’ critique is articulated in a field of conflicting universality, where concrete and abstract universality concur. Lindqvist’s method of writing while travelling seems to promise an engagement with the concrete and local effects of what is also a global condition. Yet, this promise is counteracted and contested by the travelogues’ entanglement in narrative and epistemic structures that are cathected by colonial sentiments and abstract universalism.

Hence, what my analysis of Lindqvist’s postcolonial critique ultimately wants to draw attention to is the fundamental issue that still remains to be problematized further in contemporary travel writing with a global perspective, namely, the concurrence of the global and the universal. Like the critique of many others within the postcolonial field today, Lindqvist’s narratives still re-enact the epistemic myth that a global point of view equals a universal one; the accepted “given” in
Western thought that Ania Loomba et. al. also call into question in Postcolonial Studies and Beyond: “the way that the very vantage point necessary to enunciate the global implies an allegory of universal knowledge” (Loomba 2005: 9). Yet, as my discussion of Grosfoguel’s notion of decolonizing universalism shows, this confluence of the global with the universal can be repealed as there are alternative ways of engaging with universalism and global perspectives that include rather than cancel out the local and the particular, and thus takes experiential and epistemic diversality into consideration. Emphasising dialogue and walking, Grosfoguel identifies a combination of methods that could be productive in making room for the diversity and situatedness of human experience within the vast scopes of the global condition. This is also where I find the possibility for intervention and critique in contemporary travel writing on a global scale. In the genre’s combination of travel and narrative, the method of “walking while asking” is already in place. Moreover, due to its long history of an already accepted tension between fact and fiction, empirical documentation and story telling, the genre itself makes an example of a form of writing that not only includes and conveys concurrences, but also, as such, gains its vitality and defining feature from concurrence.

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Notes

1 A similar positive view of the possibilities of travel writing and travel has been forwarded by Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan who in Tourists with Typewriters claim that “[t]ravel has recently emerged as a crucial epistemological category for the displacement of normative values and homogenizing, essentialist views” while also arguing against the “utopian impulse” that seems to go with contemporary “hypertheorization of travel-as-displacement” (Holland & Huggan 2000: viii–ix). Like Lisle, they approach the genre with the aim to find out whether it “is still primarily a legacy of imperial modes of vision and thought” or if it could “rather be seen as transgressive, an instrument of self-critique” (Holland & Huggan 2000: x). For another recent study that also tries to counteract the “demonized” view of travel writing in postcolonial studies and instead “examine how postcolonial travel texts resist the
gravitational pull of metropolitan centrality and cosmopolitanism by articulating experiences and ontologies that are often removed from dominant European and North American productions of knowledge”, see Edwards & Graulund 2011: 1-2.

2 **Exterminate all the Brutes** was first published in Swedish in 1992 and **Terra Nullius** in 2005. I have consistently used the English translations of Lindqvist’s texts unless otherwise stated. The English translation of **Exterminate all the Brutes** is based on the Swedish pocket version from 1993, which notes a few changes from the first edition. The scope of this study does not permit any further comment on the translation and changes between different editions. However, it should be noted that the changes carry some import, and in my further studies of Lindqvist’s travel narratives, I plan to address the effect of the changes between editions as well as the matter of translation.

3 My note about this omission not being surprising refers to the Anglophone bias in most research on travel writing and which translations into English do not seem to amend: “non-Anglophone travel writing has received comparatively little attention in British and American studies of travel writing” which have been inclined to marginalize narratives from non-English speaking cultures (Thompson 2011: 8).

4 Lindqvist’s stated aim to provoke his readers to remember and to acknowledge what they already know thus also responds to Holland’s and Huggan’s anticipation that travel writing “may yet show its readers the limits of their ambition and remind them of their responsibilities” (Holland & Huggan 2000: xiii).

5 See chapter 111 in which Lindqvist delineates how the “Australian Aborigines’ demands for redress and compensation are part of a global movement” and aligns their demands with similar demands of compensation from American-Japanese prisoners of war, the Sami in Sweden, the Herero people in Namibia as well as African-American and black Brazilian demands of compensation for slavery and discrimination (Lindqvist 2007b: 210-212).

6 Lindqvist completed a PhD in comparative literature in 1966.

7 Interestingly, the traveller’s angst in the sandstorm has been simultaneously enhanced and subdued in the English translation since it omits both the laconic punning (which is admittedly difficult to translate) and Lindqvist’s travesty of the standard melodramatic plea to God found in the Swedish original: ‘God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’, in which “forsaken” has been changed to “exaggerated”, i.e. “övergivit” to “överdrivit” (Lindqvist 1992: 137). Thus, Lindqvist’s use of standard rhetoric from early travel writing – the mixture of angst and heroic stoicism at the moment of possible death – does not carry through as much in the translation.

8 “Subaltern Studies” is an umbrella term for the strand of postcolonial criticism developed in the early 1980s by a collective of intellectuals inspired by Ranajit Guha’s deployment of some of Antonio Gramsci’s ideas to explore the conditions of the colonised subjects in South Asia. The collective is also often referred to as the Subaltern Studies group. For a history of the development of this group and their work, see David Ludden ed. (2002): Reading Subaltern Studies: Critical Histories, Contested Meanings, and the Globalisation of South Asia. New Delhi: Permanent Black Publishers and London: Anthem Press.

9 See for example the reviews by Jay Freeman, Björn Gunnarson, and Robert Manne.

10 I have borrowed the phrases “thinking otherwise” and “counter-narrative of the colonised” from Leela Gandhi and her outline of the relation between postcolonial criticism and postmodern thinking. See chapter 2, ”Thinking Otherwise: A Brief Intellectual History” in Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction (1998).

My thinking about concurrences is indebted to the inspiration provided by the leadership of Professor Gunlög Fur in establishing the Concurrences Centre for Colonial and Postcolonial Studies and in spurring discussions around the potential of this concept among our research team, as well as to the work of my colleagues at the Centre and our Advisory Board. For further reading on the methodological possibilities of the concept in relation to historiography, see Gunlög Fur (2014): "Concurrences," (manuscript submitted and accepted by editors) in Concurrences: Archives and Voices in Postcolonial Places, ed. by Diana Brydon, Peter Forsgren and Gunlög Fur (planned publication 2015).

See "concurrence, n." and "concurrency, n." in OED Online.

A meaning that is still visible in the word for competition in German and the Scandinavian languages: Ge. Konkurrenz, Sw. konkurrens, No. konkurranse and Da. konkurrence.

I am making a deliberate move here from the specifically postcolonial since I think that the urgency to account for simultaneous and conflicting narratives, claims etc. is just as present among scholars in other fields of study whether they subscribe to "the contention that colonialism … is the defining experience of humanity in our epoch" or not (Kaiwar 2007: par 1).

The cited words are from Aimé Césaire, Discurso sobre el colonialismo, Madrid: Akal, 2006 as quoted in Grosfoguel, 95.

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Creating the Authentic? Art Teaching in South Africa as Transcultural Phenomenon

By Melanie Klein

Abstract

The question about what art and craft from Black individuals in South Africa should look like as well as how and for what purposes it could be created was of prominent importance within the contact zone of educational institutions from the 1930s onwards. Art teachers of mostly European origin established provisional art educational venues for African students first, within the curricula of mission schools and then as workshops and art schools in their own right. They transferred modernistic concepts from Europe into the South African context, yet were also confronted with divergent expectations of their students and the overarching policy of Bantu Education that was launched in 1953.

A closer look at selected case studies reveals complex and ambivalent theoretical approaches that were negotiated and discussed in the seemingly autonomous context of art schools and workshops. The teachers’ attitudes seemed to oscillate between the search for an ‘authentic’ African idiom and the claim to partake in global archives or in the making of an art history that was imagined as universally applicable. Art educational institutions perceived as transcultural contact zones exemplify a genesis of modern art from South Africa that was formed by mutually influencing perspectives apart from the restrictions for and the re-tribalisation of Black people imposed by the apartheid regime.

Keywords: Art education, art school, workshop, South Africa, authenticity, originality, transculturality
Travelling Concepts, Migrating Agents. Sketching the Framework

“I refuse to digress from the original design!” In this or a similar way must the South African sculptor, Job Patja Kekana, have answered to his teacher Sister Pauline in 1954. Kekana had been commissioned to carve a ceremonial mace for the Federal Parliament of Northern and Southern Rhodesia and Nyasaland and had executed the object according to a given design when Sister Pauline criticised the artless completion of the knob. Kekana nevertheless made up his mind and created an additional pattern, a “trelliswork with dots in each space” (Miles 1997: 109). The new creation was approved even by the original draughtsman, Kekana had his artistic “breakthrough” (Morton 2013: 53) and “was invited to the opening of the Federal Parliament as a guest of honour” (Miles 1997: 109). This kind of nudged self-empowerment was and is commonly perceived as Kekana’s becoming an artist instead of a craftsman only, and it was also spread by him in an article that he wrote two years after the actual incidence. Shortly thereafter the mace was in fact replaced by a gift of the Commons House of Parliament of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.³ “This honour is bestowed in the full confidence that the great traditions of parliamentary government which we have inherited are in good hands”, says the news presenter about the ceremonial object. It seems as if only the later mace from the colonial motherland could duly ensure the continuance of authorized rule whereas Kekana’s first version of the object served as a provisional place holder. It was the mace from Europe that must have authentically symbolized the ruling power in the House of Commons’ point of view and not the indigenous model carved of wood.

It is not entirely clear what political incidence exactly provoked this change of mind apart from the fact that a gift cannot easily be refused. It can be assumed though that a very specific political conviction made the replacement of Kekana’s work possible and self-evident. The track of his mace has been lost. Yet, this episode exemplifies the relevance of societal frameworks and their hierarchical structures when following an object’s trajectory in both a transcultural constellation in general as well as a colonial constellation in particular. It also illustrates the impact of a diversity of protagonists, their respective way of thinking and their underlying intentions and expectations. In Kekana’s case the contexts and turbulent situations in which his artworks were produced and circulated constituted the fragile practicability of the aesthetic concepts that surrounded him. These concepts linked objects and agents or social dynamics respectively. In the mission of Grace Dieu he was trained to be an artisan.⁴ After adding his own decor to a remittance work for the first time and hence proving his ability for artistic innovation he was discerned as an artist.⁵ And yet on another sociocultural level the art object he produced was obviously not considered appropriate to represent British supremacy any longer and just disappeared. It can only be assumed that Kekana’s mace might have been yet another plaything of the sometimes paradoxical classi-
fications of artistic output from Africa: too eclectic for an ‘authentic’ object, too African to epitomize colonial governance.

“Concepts are flexible”, states Mieke Bal (2002: 22-23) in her theorisation of travelling concepts, “each is a part of a framework, a systematic set of distinctions, not oppositions, that can sometimes be bracketed or even ignored, but that can never be transgressed [...].” As such, concepts are negotiable, polyphonic and transformable as they help structuring aesthetic phenomena within the concrete contact zone of art education and production in South Africa. As Bal notes, they were not dismissed here but actively addressed in sometimes ambivalent and fractious ways.

Apart from the methodological approach to apply to the investigation of travelling concepts a ‘thick’ description of cultural, political or economic circumstances it has to be acknowledged that the followed trajectories are often disrupted, not traceable anymore or that they suddenly reappear somewhere else within the extended borders of contact zones that constantly assemble new relationships and connections, while losing others. It is, after all, specific agents – taking up and mediating concepts – who migrate. In the case of establishing art historical narratives in South Africa, in particular, pursuing an antireductionist research position implies the excavation and connection of punctual evidences to fashion patterns of temporary conceptual stabilisations. In this essay, I am especially interested in following the formation of such stabilisations that constituted art production in South Africa to a significant extent.

Job Kekana was very well aware of the political situation at the time and its implications on creative production. In a letter, for example, he mentioned that “woodcarving was thought to be a white-man’s job” (Miles 1997: 107). And art historian Elizabeth Morton equally confirms Kekana’s assessment in a recently published article and observes that educational authorities refused to licence a handwork programme for Blacks at the same mission school Kekana was working at because “skilled white labor” (Morton 2013) had to be protected from competition. Kekana witnessed the changing policy of education for Africans in South Africa firsthand. Several mission schools that had started their work from the early and mid 19th century onwards were increasingly met with suspicion among Afrikaners, notably members of the National Party that was founded in 1915. They “had looked with dislike at African education as it had developed under the missionaries and the provinces. It gave the pupils wrong ideas, they said of their place in South Africa. [...] The ‘sound policy’ was ‘that the Natives should be educated in their own manner, and should learn to be good Natives as tribal Natives, and should not be imitators of the white man’” (McConkey 1972: 1). With the election victory of the National Party in 1948 and the establishment of a commission that was send out to survey the education system, economic, intellectual and subsequent political tensions between different ethnic groups slowly turned, inter alia, into an ideology of preserving ‘authentic’ ethnic ‘traditions’ that found its way
into the art educational realm. Here, the ethnoculturally motivated aspects of a new educational strategy met concepts that were discussed and conveyed by educators of European origin who – from the 1940s onwards – administered a network to exchange staff and ideas. Being equipped with theories that were rooted in Germany and Austria in the late 19th century’s art education movement as part of the so-called Reformpädagogik, European teachers operated along similar methodological matrices apart from having different agendas. In focusing the research on art education specifically, the aims of educators and aspirations of a Black middle class appear even more complex than following a general history of Bantu Education only. Art education, it seems, ranged from civilizing duties via restrictive and segregating purposes to an experimental pedagogy as playground for concepts of a European zeitgeist yet also as a space for artistic self-affirmation. The investigation of art education in South Africa as transcultural phenomenon first of all seeks to increase the complexity and the impact of differing voices, differing strategies of teaching, mentoring, learning and aspiring as well as the extremely diverse deployment of emerging concepts that accompanied the constitution of new art forms, namely ideas of the ‘authentic’, the ‘African’ or regional genres such as Township Art. Here, misunderstandings, failures and the precariousness of both material and intellectual avenues abound similarly. Artists like Kekana refused to produce certain objects, applied aberrations to original blueprints provided by teachers, repeated appealing and marketable designs or evolved artistically beyond institutional ambits. Educators developed a conglomerate of different pedagogical agendas and had to deal with official policies of the Bantu Education Department along the way. A transcultural approach describes, in this context, the method to engage with ambiguous cultural relationships within a particular contact zone that do not explain cultures from within exclusively (Juneja 2012). Questioning respective concepts that structure such relationships can then expose the dynamics of interplay between participating protagonists, produced objects and the frames of reference that encompass them, between artworks and mediating agents. It thus reveals an alternative art historical narrative in South Africa in which aesthetic concepts are never fixed but mark the struggle for artistic and intellectual self-definition.

Turbulent Itineraries. The Concepts of Originality and Authenticity

Notions of authenticity and originality played an important role in framing art educational institutions as well as their practical and artistic premises in conjunction with religious, economic and, at a later date, political claims. In this regard, concepts of authenticity and originality entailed indeed both discursive as well as factual mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion but at the same time generated assertive or defying manoeuvres of agency. They oscillated between the societal...
meta-structure of apartheid’s segregational system and variable degrees of freedom of individual designations. Next to the varying dimensions that influenced art educational frameworks and thus have to be included into a thorough analysis of the concepts at hand, I am especially interested in the ambivalent and reciprocal fluctuations in the making of art and art historical narratives. With the attempt to reconstruct aesthetic concepts within the historic structures of art educational venues the highly complex processes of their formation as well as underlying asymmetries of power and concomitant ideologies can be uncovered.

When looking at the formation of concepts of authenticity and originality within discourses on aesthetics in Europe it is striking that it displays a process of constant negotiation and readjustment. Although the concepts’ evolution seems to follow a straight line to the point of releasing the aesthetic object as well as the creating and receptive subject from normative controllability while still relating to a social context, they also reveal a turbulent itinerary of upturns, crises and revivals – especially as catchwords of late modernity and modernism.

A genealogy of authenticity’s and originality’s aesthetic dimensions in Europe was prefigured in the 17th century. Originality was interrelated to ideas of othering and innovation as well as to their potential to generate effects of genuineness within different art systems at an early stage (Young 1759, Duff 1767). In European literature, for example, the idea of an original artwork was already associated with something foreign and even exotic. William Duff then directly linked originality and the inventive act to the figure of the artist in his Essay on original genius from 1767. Here, he described creative subjectivity as the initial point of originality. In the artistic context originality thus exhibited a transcendental quality, something inborn that could not be acquired, rather than a learnable one as it was used in philosophical discourses. The emphasis on inner realities eventually led to a disassociation of the term from principles of imitating nature. It was finally presented by Johann Gottlieb Fichte as “ideal individuality” (Ritter and Gründner 1984: 1375) in the 18th century.

The concept of authenticity was introduced into the discourse on aesthetics by authors like Jean Baptiste Du Bos in 1760 who challenged the tradition of classicistic and objectivistic representations in dramatic arts and addressed the interplay between actors and audience. It played a major role in debates on the credibility of art and the subjectification of taste (Ostermann 2002). Here, authenticity was defined by means of its effects on the human psyche and human emotions. Similar to Young’s and Duff’s valorisation of the artist as creator, ‘authentic’ art could be created by the artist’s decision about the orchestration of objects and material. In contrast to originality though, the concept of authenticity attained a much wider dimension and was eventually connected with ethical questions, emotion and empathy by Jean Jacques Rousseau (Ferrara 1985). For Rousseau, authentic behaviour could collide with societal expectations and thus marked the complex relationship between the self and normative parameters of societal structures. Authen-
ticity was conceived to incorporate tensions and the human being’s inherent aberration from the ideal. At the beginning of the 20th century notations of the pristine and ‘primitive’ found their way into art discourses in Europe and were not only searched for in objects that were produced outside the continent but also, for example, in the art of children or blind persons (Bisanz 1985, Löwenfeld 1939, et al.). Eventually, concomitant approaches in art education were adapted and implemented into the contact zones of workshops and art schools in South Africa and elsewhere (e.g. Grossert 1953 and 1968, Meyerowitz 1936).

The perception of the authentic individual as responding to its own inner disposition laid the foundation for following elaborated and adjusted definitions of the artist as genius, as lateral thinker, intellectual rebel or – in the African context – as being equipped with the naïveté and unchangeability of indigenous creativity. However, structural analogies of these concepts cannot obscure the fact that they were used in completely different spatio-temporal and hierarchically organised surroundings. In the colonial and postcolonial era the concept of authenticity within art production from Africa in particular became highly charged because of the aspirations and desires that were projected onto respective objects on the part of a European art system and anthropological classification. Some objects were credited with certain ‘tribes’ while others were marketed as singular objects by an individual, yet still ‘authentic’ African artist depending on demand and marketing strategy (e.g. Bewaji 2003). Art dealers and artists from Africa often participated in this kind of cultural economy and maintained fictions of authenticity with the help of conformed artistic and narrative strategies (e.g. Steiner 1994). ‘Authentic’ stories were invented to trade art and craft (Kasfir 1999: 105). And several scholars have just recently criticised persistent ascriptions of an African authentic to contemporary artists from the continent since they would merely appoint them to a rather passive, reacting position (e.g. Oguibe 2004, Okeke 2001: 30).

In the South African context it is crucial to acknowledge the economic dimension of an art world that was dominated by protagonists of European origin and the fact that the choice to become an artist most often led to existential problems especially for Black people. The actual selling of one’s artworks was essential to make a living. And prior to some scattered first attempts to establish a curriculum that was entirely dedicated to the education of Black artists from the early 1950s onwards the only art education available was that for teachers or artisans. Artistic freedom as well as being original or authentic in a European sense was thus not only limited by material restrictions and the lack of access to cultural and art historical knowledge but also by the appreciation and goodwill of mostly European buyers and collectors.

Job Kekana’s workplace at Grace Dieu were he obtained a regular employment as craftsman can be considered a safe albeit not completely autonomous surrounding since the marketing strategies of the woodcarving department were clearly aligned with a concrete demand for religious craftwork with an African appear-
ance. The mission of *Grace Dieu* in today’s Polokwane only gradually developed first into a teacher training college, then offered an industrial course for Africans and eventually progressed into an art workshop in the late 1920s. The experimental character of this workshop and others was emphasized by several scholars and exemplarily mirrors the various ideas and ideals which informed the pedagogical programmes of such venues. Morton, for example, stresses the educational and professional artistic background of Reverend Edward Paterson who was teaching, advising and designing at *Grace Dieu* and who launched the policy of the *Arts and Crafts Movement* in England. However, he was only partly able to translate the movement’s paradigms into the South African context. Design and execution, Morton writes, were separated along ethnic parameters and not combined within an integral production process. It is not without irony that Paterson’s anti-industrialist ethos mutated into a modified repetition of exactly those industrialist circumstances he wanted to avoid when taking into account that several mission-trained artists later mass-produced objects for the curio trade in what Marshall Ward Mount called the “souvenir style” (Mount 1973: 44). Also, the supposed incapability of Black South Africans to design and invent appropriate religious images later became the argumentative basis for an emphasis on the ‘authentic’ inner voice of African artists in educational contexts with a more secular conception. Design did not have to be provided anymore, but an innate talent had to be awakened. Yet, beyond the mission environment there were a number of artists who likewise launched their own businesses and art careers and started to create works of art apart from the primary scope of production. Some directly satisfied the demand of an emerging art market (Rankin 1992: 41), others tried to establish themselves as internationally acknowledged artists with according residencies abroad. In each case and with every artist and every tutor involved a locally specific framework for the production of a variety of objects was configured that conjured up new art forms and constituted part of South Africa’s recent art history.

**Research on Art Education**

To date art education in South Africa has been described mainly with reference to its material outcome, such as by Elizabeth Rankin in her essays on the Africanisation of Christian imagery (Rankin 2003, 2009, et alii). Only in 1992, though, did she write about the necessity to research venues of art education for Black people other than the *Polly Street Art Centre* or the *Rorke’s Drift Art and Craft Centre* and their impact on the formation of a Black middle class. It is also worth mentioning that art schools did not displace education in the missions but rather flanked them, as for example the *Mariannhill Mission* in Natal which was founded in 1882, offered art classes from 1942 onwards and established the *Mariannhill Art Centre* in 1978.
Another line of scrutiny addresses the ambivalence of educated Africans between modernity and tradition. Lize van Robbroeck, for example, writes that the “distance between the educated [Black] Christian [...] and the ‘ordinary African’ he gazes upon, is indicated by his search for an ‘authentic Bantu’ free of Western influence” (Robbroeck 2008: 224). And Sidney Kasfir and Till Förster acknowledge that “[...] there is a wide variety of possible workshop constellations that crosscuts the divide between tradition and modernity” (Kasfir and Förster 2013: 4) in their recently published book on *African art and agency in the workshop*. “We argue”, they continue, “for a differentiated analysis of the workshop as a particular institution that shapes the reproduction of art in many African societies” (Kasfir and Förster 2013: 4). I would like to add that the very definition of art and artists was vividly negotiated, contested and transformed in specific art institutions. Their connection to and delimitation from politics with its ideological implications moulded them into discursive spaces for art-related concepts such as cultural authenticity or ethnic marketing.

When looking at the educational situation for Black artists in South Africa and elsewhere pedagogical approaches have been highly individual and dependent on respective tutors from the outset. Yet, these attitudes were never set in stone. Teachers influenced each other and were influenced by their students. Concepts of European origin adjusted over time, also in response to restricted material availability. Art education in particular was an experiment. It was an experiment shaped by numerous different factors. One of these elements was the mostly conflicting mindset of both European teachers and African students in the face of questions on coeval art production or how to deal with heritage, of economic necessities or the demand of the art market and of political constraints. However, in contrast to political guidelines that culminated in the 1953 *Bantu Education Act* the art educational environment appears as a rather intricate and relational discursive scope. Art schools and workshops influenced their students and teachers by interaction, experience, ideas, feedbacks and expectations. Kasfir and Förster (2013: 12) define the workshop as “a social space in which individuals cooperate. [...] it is a sphere in which interpretive processes unfold.” I would like to specify this interpretive aspect within art production as having been accompanied by translational efforts that unfolded as various experimental agendas, too.

Another conceptual ambivalence that characterised co-operations in art educational venues evolved from the fact that several art teachers of European background campaigned for the equality of Black students while at the same time categorising them by means of concepts that they brought along and thus claiming specific modes of production as well as omitting others.

In this connection, I would like to take a closer look at one of the most influential educators in the history of art schools in South Africa, John Watt Grossert, who in 1948 founded the *Ndaleni Art Centre*. With this brief case study I would like to indicate that European teachers stretched a complex and ambivalent discursive
sive net that combined definitions of art as a modernising and therapeutic factor with inclusionary attempts in regard to art as a fundamental human activity.

Dedication and Limitation. The *Ndaleni Training College*

An independent Wesleyan mission had already been established in 1847 at Ndaleni near Richmond in KwaZulu-Natal that was later developed into a teacher training college under the administration of the Department of Bantu Education. The *Ndaleni Art Centre* not only provided the possibility for teachers to complete advanced training but also became breeding grounds for later artists or those teachers who wanted to pursue an art career in addition to their regular breadwinning. A specialisation in art and craft also entailed an increase in salary and a higher professional status. “[…] aimed at training prospective art teachers […] it came to be perceived as a significant art school in its own right”, notes art historian Juliette Leeb-Du Toit (1999: 4) in a retrospective catalogue. And Elizabeth Rankin mentions that:

The Ndaleni course was primarily aimed at the training of art teachers, not artists, but in the context of the 1950s it offered probably the most programmed art training available to Black students, who were drawn from all over South Africa. The course was wide-ranging in its scope, including classes in art history, design, picture making, clay modelling, crafts and wood carving. (Rankin 1992: 44)

It also generated other kinds of art entrepreneurs and thus helped disseminating art appreciation among Black South Africans. “The first suggestion that village industries should be officially encouraged were made as early as 1852 by a commission on Native affairs in Natal, which put forward a recommendation for the establishment of training centres for crafts as an integral part of Bantu education”, writes Grossert (1968: 85) himself and emphasises the economic policy behind the idea of providing creative education to Africans. At the time he helped founding the Ndaleni Art Centre and started to offer a special two-year course for art teachers in 1952 Grossert had to be concerned with an increasing competitive dynamic with regard to art market mechanisms yet also concerning aesthetic concepts that were underlying the creative production of different art educational institutions.19 Christian training colleges such as Grace Dieu that were equipped with their own craft departments and were oriented towards economic success as well as the mediation of religious images advertised an approach that Grossert tried to avoid. While he was seeking to implement ideas of artistic achievement mission schools split the creative production process according to an academic and ultimately ethnic background. In contrast, the Ndaleni Training College as one of the major educational institutions in the 1950s was a venue where Black students were confronted with European ideas on the function and production of art that did not refer to religious connotations only. The paradox still remained that in the context of mission schools and most notably in later art educational
venues Black artists were “detribalized” (Koloane 1998: 70) and accepted as part of a South African bourgeoisie while educators were simultaneously searching for the ‘authentic’ idiom of an innate creativity.

**Deviating Conceptualisations. John Grossert’s Art Historical Texts**

“Ndaleni was the ‘dream child’ of Jack Grossert, who had just been appointed *Organizer of Arts and Crafts and Industrial Work* for the Native Schools in Natal”, notes Leeb-du Toit (1999: 6). Grossert was aware of the damaging impact of colonialism and the erosion of cultural practices. “He was convinced”, she further writes, “that the embellishment of surroundings, homes or schools with art, would improve a community’s aesthetic sensibilities and quality of life.” (Leeb-du Toit 1999: 7).

At this point it is revealing how Grossert as a dominating figure in the development of an art educational scheme at Ndaleni specified the function and meaning of art in peoples’ daily lives and how he defined art as such. For him, art had the purpose to shape the intellect and to guarantee partaking in what he called the ‘civilized’ life. In his view, art was a kind of medicine for social and cultural tensions. Through art, he seemed to believe, it was possible to establish an inclusive society in which each and everyone had reached the same civilizing level. Grossert’s attempt to construct an inclusive approach of art theoretical thinking reflected the trend of his time to revaluate crafts and to recognize foreign cultural goods.

In his monograph *Art and crafts for Africans. A manual for art and craft teachers* from 1953 Grossert outlined a seemingly unprejudiced framework of the connection between art education, art and society. “During the centuries”, he writes, “through which our culture has been progressing certain standards of judgement of art have become generally accepted by cultured people” (Grossert 1953: 19). Instead of distinguishing between South Africans from European origin and Black South Africans Grossert elaborated the discrimination between educated and uneducated people, and between people with culture and those without. On the other hand, he did not understand culture as a property that belonged to certain groups of human beings exclusively but rather as an archive that everybody should learn about and that was allowed to be foraged creatively. He notes:

> All cultured people should be familiar with the best works from this treasure house, since it not only enriches their own experience but also forms a basis of good taste. (Grossert 1953: 20)

Grossert then lists rock paintings of the Bushmen, Egyptian sculptures, art works from China, Persia and Europe as corresponding examples. He seemed to unfold art and culture as a commonly available archive with non-linear, eclectic dimen-
sessions. Cultural heritage had to be seen in a global perspective. It had to be used productively to teach the ignoramus.

In his later dissertation from 1968 on *Art education and Zulu crafts* Grossert further devised the question of how to define aesthetic production. In his fairly incoherent text he sketched the turbulent history of art education in Kwa-Zulu Natal and tried to come to grips with an inclusive concept of art. “We may say”, Grossert (1968: 23) explicates, “that before any expression may be called a work of art there must be evidence of creativity and originality in the significant form it assumes. Art is nature seen through the artist’s temperament.” The question of judgment and ascription, of how to analyse creative evidence and of who was actually proficient to analyse, though, is excluded at first. After all, Grossert used the emphasis on the concept of originality as inclusionary instrument. As long as artists produced original artworks they could be included into the art world no matter what aesthetic quality their objects might have had. Originality is in fact valued more by Grossert than aesthetic properties or technique.²⁰ With this approach he embraced into the canon of art all man-made objects but at the same time resorted to the exclusive structures of originality.

Man reveals his higher intellectual ability by constructing, making and planning. […] In doing this he places himself in the position of an innovator and creator, an original thinker and inventor. […] It would be unreasonable, therefore, to exclude any work of man from our category of art unless it is merely a copy or repetition of a skill. (Grossert 1968: 27)

At this text passage at the latest it becomes clear that the dedicated art mentor conceded a potential for original art making and thus the activation of a civilising and modernising process to every individual. Yet, his approach derived from an entirely European vantage point. Here, repetition and copy were no cultural values but a nuisance, the trait of illiterate man. Consequently, the foremost aim concerning his educational approach was a syllabus that would “not only preserve existing Native crafts, but later on make definite additions to Native Craftwork without slavish imitation of European models” (Grossert 1968: 210). At the same time, the modern concept of originality was transferred to individuals who were perceived to be potentially equal, yet were also expected to keep ready genuine ‘African’ characteristics. Grossert thus developed an understanding of originality that would translate as spontaneity and as a vague connection to some kind of immutable ‘tradition’, very different, indeed, from the alternating forces radiating from Europe. As much as his version of originality resembled the idea of the “self as origin” (Krauss 1981: 53) – that Rosalind Krauss much later diagnosed for the European avant-garde following the historiographical development of this concept as ultimate permutation of artistic individuality – Grossert, however, thought of a thoroughly other ‘self’. Here, at Ndaleni, it was not the actual *modus operandi* of the production of so-called art that was questioned by Grossert and his colleagues.
What was at stake was rather the preservation and emergence of an ‘African’ identity as such.

The cachet of emotionality of ‘authentic’ artistic production by Black artists was a leitmotif not only within Grossert’s considerations but also in view of several critical voices of Africans in art. It was selectively employed for feelings of insecurity when coping with the advent of modernity or those that were believed to be connected to inborn dispositions. The anti-modernist stance on an art curriculum that was developed by Edward Paterson at Grace Dieu was also implemented by Grossert:

The art of the rising artists among the Bantu of South Africa differs from both the old traditional styles and also from the contemporary art of whites in this country, Europe and America, since in its upsurge it shows a profound interest in humanity and the portrayal of the full range of man’s emotions. This humanistic trend at a time when the art of the white races has shown a tendency towards becoming more abstract and dehumanised, evinces a commendable independence in the Bantu and also their ability to strike new roots to provide supports in the place of the traditional ones which have been cut away. (Grossert 1968: 42-43)

It is not without irony that it was actually Grossert’s and other educators’ ways of searching for alternatives aside ‘dehumanising’ European trends in art which can be designated as emotional. Art had to provide the possibility to reconcile one’s own emotions with an unsettled society. Parameters of art as civilizing factor, of art as an instrument of empowerment and art as therapeutic tool were intermingled with the belief in fundamental cultural differences.

Inclusionary Conceptualisations. Grossert’s Account of African Voices

An important element in Grossert’s considerations was his effort to implement into them voices and thoughts of African origin. He enclosed into his elaborations on the original production and ‘authentic’ configuration of new art by Black artists concepts that he borrowed, for example, from aesthetic appreciation of the Zulu. “[…] the Zulus”, he wrote, “also distinguished from the general group of craftsmen the man whom they called utschwephesha, a man who mystifies by the inborn talent which he possesses and which he cannot transmit to others. […] From this title is derived the word for a work of art. It is called an ubuchwephesha,” (Grossert 1968: 41) Grossert – far from being a trained anthropologist and executing respective methods – might have very well translated the term according to his own particular theorisation as it highlights striking parallels to the European conceptualisation of the artist as genius. Again, pivotal differences between Black and European artists were obviously not perceived to become manifest in conceptual structures. Also, Grossert referred to old, ‘traditional’ works of art made by the Zulu but did not investigate how the concept of ubuchwephesha was
used amongst then contemporary artists and craftsmen. Yet, whereas he commented on the loss of traditional structures and African patrons in a relatively neutral and unemotional way, the bequeathed Zulu notion seemed to offer him an adequate support to create a theoretical matrix for both the significance and orientation of art education in South Africa that should be informed neither by traditional forms of artistic production nor by European models but rather evoke a new intuitive version of native ‘African’ creativity that was seen as beneficial in changing social tides.

In addition, Grossert was obviously engaged and familiar – to some extent at least – with debates on art and art history among Black intellectuals. In his dissertation, for example, he quotes the artist Selby Mvusi and thus acknowledges the condescending attitude towards art from Africa on the part of Western protagonists. Selby ironically commented on the paternalistic view on art from Africans: “African art […] enjoys special dispensation from the mental rigour we are accustomed to encountering in Western art appreciation and criticism. […] The basis of analysis becomes not Art, but the African.” (Grossert 1968: 43-44) What – within Grossert’s text – was a clear critique on the modalities of art production in Africa nonetheless met his own inclusionary approach in theory and practice. He was in search for a new artistic language. The role of the schools was seen in supporting the “phase of transition” (Grossert 1968: 44) in which African people should become part of a modern society. “[…] we want to help negotiate the meeting point of African and outside cultures”, he explicates, “and we want to contain the shock which the confrontation with these other cultures entail.” (Grossert 1968: 44) Art and its educational institutions became spaces of negotiation to address cultural and societal tensions. Grossert formulated the idea of a collaborative effort to meet the changes that colonisation and most notably the era of apartheid brought about. In this collaborative space art should serve as a mediator between individual and society. From such a perspective, Grossert promoted the development of authentic behaviour in Rousseau’s sense. While he set the concept of originality in the process of art making in analogy with the individual’s inner ‘African’ condition, Grossert subsequently aimed at helping to establish an ‘authentic’ and autonomous African bourgeoisie. His motivation was informed by new theories in art education, the obviously honest belief in the power of art and culture as well as by positions that at the same time demarcate an ‘African’ cultural idiom.

Black South Africans displayed a much more prosaic attitude to the issue of art education within the regular curriculum at times. The Transkeian General Council, a group of “chiefs, government nominees and […] elected representatives” (Mbeki 1957: 16) that was also included in Grossert’s text, formulated their viewpoint as such:

[…] if the handicrafts ever existed on any large scale among the Natives […] we are convinced that their day has long gone by […] And so far as the training of hand and eye is concerned, the slight benefit the Native pupil might derive is in no way com-
Grossert’s account of Bantu Education exhibits a variety of voices concerning the development of an appropriate and effective syllabus in art. He altogether objected to political trends at a time when education for Black South Africans was drastically curtailed, turned explicitly against political policies (1968: 56 and 60) that were aiming at separate laws and customs from the mid 19th century onwards and instead advocated the educating efforts of the missions. The Black intellectual had to achieve equal status and to take responsibility. This status, though, could only develop next to European culture, not within it. “Culture in a new form will emerge” (Grossert 1968: 234), he eventually concluded. And he was explicitly thinking of Black culture.

Grossert’s hypothetical thoughts between crossing frontiers of and demarcating (Mersmann 2004) cultures and art mirror the complexities and changing meanings of cultural concepts especially when being transferred to and permeated by new cultural contexts. The voices of Black cultural workers and politicians accompanied, questioned and transformed such concepts. Both positions countered political restrictions in South Africa in an ambivalent endeavour to search for new identities and art forms.

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Notes

1 The demarcation of Black and White protagonists in South Africa is due to the segregation policy of the apartheid era that determines discourses on presentations of artworks produced by the respective other down to the present day. The capitalisation of the adjectives designates their sociocultural dimension and thus implicates common experiences of discrimination or privilege.

2 Exchange and clashes between educators and students from diverse cultural and social backgrounds took place on various different levels, namely within a single venue, in encountering other art educational venues with differing agendas or in coming to terms with educational policies of the apartheid administration.

4 Kekana first completed his primary school education at the Diocesan Training College before he was trained to become a wood carver for three years. The Christian artefacts and furniture of the college’s workshop were produced according to given designs mostly developed by Father Edward Paterson who led the Native Mission at Potchefstroom in the historical province of Transvaal and was himself a trained artist. Similar to Renaissance workshops in Europe students at Grace Dieu executed objects after Paterson’s samples. They became requested as religious craftwork especially in Great Britain and the United States.

5 Six years after his invitation to the Federal Parliament Kekana moved to London with his wife to study art at the Sir John Cass School of Art and the Camberwell College of Art for three years. Here, his artistic approach towards an otherwise repetitive handling of the stylistic features of Christian iconography became more sophisticated. In the sculpture of a Madonna and child, for example, he entwined Christian European imagery with codes of African identity.

6 Mary Louise Pratt’s (1991) contouring of the contact zone seems to describe exactly the situation in South African art schools. Here, protagonists engage with concepts of otherness and identity, “they involve in a selective collaboration with an appropriation of idioms of the metropolis” (Pratt 1991: 35). And taking into account asymmetries of power within these social spaces the question still arises, how emanating aesthetic concepts are adapted or denied as well as how they are customized through these very manoeuvres.

7 I borrow the term from Kwame Anthony Appiah’s essay “Thick translation” (1993) in which he differs between producing meaning through the translation of a text and the more beneficial approach of facilitating its understanding that would include the necessity to amply contextualise the initial text.

8 Afrikaners are a South African ethnic group that originates from Dutch settlers as well as from other groups of mostly European origin.

9 The complexity of sociocultural structures in South Africa becomes apparent when looking at the politics of settlers from European origin - the Afrikaners - and the politics of British occupation. By the end of the 19th century Southern Africa was separated into four territories: two of them were under British rule, the other two under the rule of Afrikaners. The following decades marked a period of ongoing struggles for territory as well as for ideological assertion. The Emancipation Act of 1834, for example, abolished slavery in South Africa. The legal equalization of Black and White residents was perceived as betrayal by Afrikaners. Yet, “for the English”, Melissa Steyn (2001: 26) writes, “backed as they were by empire, their sense of superiority to the native inhabitants was utterly above question. They did not regard the more rural and often illiterate Afrikaner folk as the same order of civilization.” On the other hand, the Afrikaners’ predominant differentiation from indigenous peoples at this point in time rested on a feeling of religious rather than racial superiority (Schmidt 1996). An educated African bourgeoisie that emanated from the missions schools - mostly under British custody - was perceived as an economic as well as ideological threat by an Afrikaner working class from often humble backgrounds. Henry Kenney (1991: 36), for example, writes: "The new government consisted exclusively of Afrikaners […] Afrikaner workers would shrug off the chains of poverty and receive protection from the unfair competition of Blacks […] Afrikaner business would acquire its rightful place in an economy too long dominated by Jews and English-speakers."

10 The commission under the chairmanship of Werner W. M. Eiselen that was responsible for the constitutive Eiselen Report especially addressed the problem of the so-called “intellectual
“proletariat” (Kros 2002: 61), Black educated people that would never be able to fully participate in the South African society adequate to their schooling. Nevertheless, Eiselen himself disallowed theories based on racial classification and discrimination and instead aimed at reconciling mission-bred intellectuals with their communities. In this sense, “‘Bantu’ was held to allude to a cultural (or social) environment that predisposed its subjects to learn in particular ways and from which they should not be alienated. The ‘unhappy’ condition of many African intellectuals was explained by the fact that mission education had alienated them from their cultural roots” (Kros 2002: 66-67).

The aim in Europe was to comprehensively educate society through art, music and literature. The art education movement targeted the establishment of an integral human being as opposed to the individual’s alienation through the disrupting tendencies of industrialisation. Eiselen’s benevolent approach of propitiating African intellectuals with their ‘roots’ seems to align with exactly these concepts that sought for cultural veracity and anti-modernist stances.

The English poet Edward Young, who mentioned the original in the context of art for the first time, writes: “Our spirits rouze at an Original; that is a perfect stranger, and all throng to learn what news from a foreign land: And tho’ it comes, like an Indian prince, adorned with feathers only, having little of weight; yet of our attention it will rob the more Solid, if not equally New.”

Ferrara (1985: 281-282) notes that “authenticity is the quality of the moral actor who courageously takes this step and faces the risk of acting immorally. An ethic of authenticity is then a post-conventional ethic which emphasizes this quality and encourages its cultivation [...]."

Christopher Steiner, for example, investigates the circulation of objects and their transcultural entanglements in the history of West African art trade and states that: “Because the merchandise that the traders buy and sell is defined, classified, and evaluated largely in terms of Western concepts such as ‘art’ and ‘authenticity’, the traders are not only moving a set of objects through the world economic system, they are also exchanging information - mediating, modifying, and commenting on a broad spectrum of cultural knowledge.” (Steiner 1994: 2)

The foundation of the Polly Street Art Centre in 1952 with Cecil Skotnes, Cultural Recreation Officer at that time, offering informal art classes was such an attempt.

Kekana himself, for example, was self-employed for about five years after he moved to Johannesburg and sold his sculptures to private households. Only in 1944 he continued to collaborate with his former teacher, Sister Pauline, in the St. Faith’s Mission in Zimbabwe although she had already started to work there from 1938 onwards.

One of Sister Pauline’s most famous students, Ernest Mancoba, for example, left South Africa for Paris with a scholarship in 1938 where he received further education at the École des Arts Décoratifs after already having gained a degree from Fort Hare University.

“As a practicing Catholic Grossert was [...] well aware of the acceleration in art training ventures undertaken by the Church of Africa in fostering an indigenous sacred art, as well as the international interest and exposure that such work elicited in exhibitions worldwide.” (Leeb-du Toit 1999: 7)

“In art and crafts originality is generally considered of equal importance to technique, but when teaching painting, modelling and carving we endeavour first to develop originality and allow technique to follow.” (Grossert 1953: 17)
21 Grossert (1968: 233) states: “It is strongly believed that it is the responsibility of education to equip the Bantu with the intellectual and psychological resources necessary to make the social and cultural adjustments which the changing situations demand. […] Even when that unity [of a culture] is seriously disrupted by the impact of powerful outside influences, these basic forces strive to achieve a new pattern with its own unity.”

22 The Zulu are an ethnic group of Bantu-speaking peoples mainly living in the South African province of KwaZulu-Natal where the Ndalen Art Centre was located. Today, they are the largest ethnic group in South Africa with more than eleven million people.

23 In the glossary of the African Studies Center in Boston ubuchwephesha is translated with “skill”. To be retrieved at http://www.bu.edu/africa/files/2012/04/Xhosa-3-Glossary.pdf.

24 Mvusi enrolled for the course in art education at the Ndalen Teacher’s Training College in the early 1950s and was there trained by the painter Alfred Ewan and his colleague Peter Atkins, a sculptor.

25 While Grossert believed in art as civilising factor and was thus offering an unofficial alternative to apartheid policy and Bantu Education, Isaac Bangani Tabata, South African politician and president of the Non European Unity Movement, sketched a more drastic picture of the educational situation for Black people in general. “Today”, he (Tabata 1974: 64) writes, “unlike our forefathers, we know that it is their [the Afrikaners’] deliberate policy not to let the African become civilised and to deny him education; […] In short it is their deliberate policy to debar him from civilisation and then shout: ‘He is not yet ripe for civilisation!’ All this while they were destroying his customs, traditions and way of life, ruthlessly destroying his economy, his family and his moral codes, shattering them by the impact of a capitalist economy and capitalist greed for profit and power.” In an earlier book from 1959 that Tabata wrote in direct reaction to the new, restricting laws of the Bantu Education Act he actually questions the Afrikaners’ status of civilisation. Since the time they had left Europe in the 17th century they would not have progressed, he states. Instead, the merits of enlightenment would have passed the Afrikaners: “This was a Europe, then, unknown to the forebears of the present day Afrikaner. They did not inherit this new outlook on man and society. Humanism, that stream of the Renaissance which has been described as the parent of all modern development, whether intellectual, scientific or social, that great movement of thought which began to spread throughout Western Europe in the fifteenth century, and which was essentially an intellectual revolt against ecclesiastical tyranny, had still to come to fruition when these people left Europe.” (Tabata 1959: 27) In the following, Tabata continues with imagining the Afrikaners as uneducated peasants. The stereotype of the uncivilised African is thwarted by the stereotype of the uncivilised Afrikaner. Here, civilisation becomes the contested concept with different strategic alignments and ascriptions.

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The Fictitious World Traveller: 
*The Swede on Timor* and the Noble Savage Imagery

By Hans Hägerdal

Abstract
Travel writing soared in the Western world in the early-modern era with the widening geographical knowledge. This was accompanied by a genre of travel fiction. The present study analyses a short Swedish novella from 1815, *Swensken på Timor* (The Swede on Timor), “translated” by Christina Cronhjelm from a purported English account. It is a romantic tale of a Swedish sailor who is shipwrecked and is adopted by an indigenous group on the Southeast Asian island Timor, marrying a local woman and converting to Islam. The novella is remarkable for the positive portrayal of indigenous society and to some extent Islam. The article discusses the literary tropes influencing the account, and the partly accurate ethnographic and historical details.

Keywords: Travel fiction, Timor, noble savage, Islam, Christina Cronhjelm
Travel writings experienced a great upsurge in early-modern Europe, for obvious reasons. With the maritime expansion to the Americas, Africa and Asia, and the rapid dissemination of printing technique, an increasing supply of travel accounts found its way to an increasingly literate public. If you survived your tenure as sailor, soldier or scribe at a colonial outpost and made it back to Europe, a well-told account of your adventures could earn you fame and money. A look at the multi-volume work of Donald Lach, *Asia in the making of Europe* (1965-93) gives an idea about the rich and varied outpour in the centuries after 1500. Sea captains, Jesuit priests, employees of trading companies, soldiers of fortune – all had their story to tell of distant, exotic places which they had often just barely left alive.

On the following pages I will scrutinize the alleged life-story of a castaway Swedish sailor in Asia, published in 1815. The example is interesting since Sweden was not known as a travelling nation, and it therefore becomes essential to investigate how it relates to the European discourse of the tropical or Asian Other in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The complexity of the text in terms of metaphors and balance between authenticity and fiction will be highlighted.

In this context one should note the problems of using travel writings as testimonies of foreign cultures. In recent decades this has been increasingly pointed out by historians and literary scholars: the European traveller (and, for that matter, any traveller) tends to reproduce ideas of cultural otherness of the places that he or she visits. Usually unable to fully grasp the local culture, the external observer will construct an image of the Other that becomes an implicit mirror of the culture of the metropolitan homeland. This, of course, can be done in positive as well as negative ways although the latter have tended to dominate through five centuries of European travel writing. In the postcolonial tradition of Said et al. this refers to a discourse where Western representatives strive to master and in effect dominate non-Western areas (Said 1978; Nyman 2013). But it can also be seen as a ubiquitous human impulse to relate impressions of foreign milieux to one’s own place in this world.

To the problem of bias must be added general issues of reliability. Wherever we can compare the travel accounts with external data (local chronicles, archival data, concurring travel reports, etc.) they display an enormous range of truthfulness and care. And it is not certain that the more modern accounts are the more reliable. The enormously popular work *Revolt in paradise* by Muriel Pearson alias K’tut Tantri (1960) depicts the American author’s life in colonial and revolutionary Indonesia in the 1930s and 1940s in terms that are largely gainsaid by other information (Lindsey 1997). Some older works such as Fernão Mendes Pinto’s *Peregrinação* (1614), which describes the vicissitudes of a Portuguese adventurer in maritime Asia, defy any distinction between fact and fiction (Catz 1989). The
temptation to add hearsay accounts and mere invention to a putative autobiographic travel story can presumably be strong when the details cannot be controlled by the audience.

But there is also a genre of travel fiction, that can be either realistic (Robinson Crusoe) or fantastic (Gulliver’s travels). This genre was popular in West Europe from the early seventeenth to the early nineteenth century, frequently depicting adventurous journeys to real but little-known lands at the edges of geographical knowledge. The heyday of travel fiction coincided with the rapid expansion of European knowledge of foreign continents in the second half of the eighteenth century (Arthur 2011: xx). This might have bearing on the example that will be studied in the present essay.

**The Swede on Timor**

Swedish expansion in the early-modern period was seldom directed to other continents, in spite of short-lived enterprises in Delaware and West Africa. Consequently, Swedish travel accounts of non-Western areas are rare up to the eighteenth century. With the activities of the Swedish East India Company (1731-1813) and the peregrinations of the disciples of Linnaeus (1707-1778) a spate of published travel accounts surfaced, notably Carl Thunberg’s account of his visit to Japan (1775-1776). At least some of these writings display a positive curiosity about the lands and peoples they visited. It should be recalled that this was at the height of the Enlightenment, with universalistic ideas about the fate of mankind and sentimental interest for the noble savage (often, though less correctly, associated with Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s writings).

In 1815, two years after the dissolving of the East India Company and a year after Norway’s forced union with Sweden, a short text of 15 pages appeared at Marquardska Tryckeriet, a well-known publishing house in Stockholm. The title was laconic but suggestive: **Swensken på Timor** (The Swede on Timor). Timor was known to the avid reader of travel literature at the time as the destination of Captain William Bligh after his remarkable sea travel in 1789, following the much-publicized mutiny of the Bounty (Bligh 1969). Otherwise, apart from passages in a few published travelogues, the sizeable island was something of a terra incognita. Although the Portuguese and Dutch were positioned there since the seventeenth century, Timor was an inaccessible and supposedly primitive place that lay at the margins of the European spheres of interest.

No author is given on the title page, which only states that the story is an “account [translated] from English”. From other sources, however, we do know the name of the person who committed the tropical adventures of the Swede to paper. Her name was Christina Cronhjelm (1784-1852), the daughter of an officer and soon to become the wife of Major Johan Gustav Berger. The short story under scrutiny lies at the very beginning of a long writing career. She wrote a series of
short romantic novels, translated literary texts from French and English, and contributed to various journals and newspapers. Her literary exploits were not praised by posterity, which found her style stymied by romanticist overtones and conventions. Nevertheless, some of her work enjoyed much popularity and she wrote lyrics to which her husband composed music (Ekelund 1886: 65-71).

The preface of *The Swede on Timor* adds to the expectations of an exotic adventure. Cronhjelm relates that she made the acquaintance of an English sea captain in Gothenburg whose father, a Captain Richardson, bequeathed a diary relating a sea travel to the Indian Ocean in 1783. The diary was remarkable for one particular incident which caught the interest of Cronhjelm, who gained permission to borrow the manuscript and copy excerpts from it. “Certainly”, she writes, “it is sometimes somewhat similar to romance. However, one may not assume that a man who has neither written to win honours or money, but only annotated what he has heard since it has interested him, has wished to deceive. If one gains the endorsement of the reader, then one is rewarded for the small effort that has been spent” (Cronhjelm 1815b: 2).

**From Norrland to the East Indies**

The short text is framed by the passage to the East Indies by Captain Richardson with the ship *Triton* in 1783. Visiting Timor for trade, the sea captain is amazed by encountering a European who speaks good English and provides substantial assistance to the Britons through his knowledge of the local language and customs. He stays with his “Malay” wife and four handsome children in a house situated a mile from the coast which is surrounded by pretty gardens and built according to mathematical principles. Being no common beachcomber, he evokes the curiosity of the crew. After the conclusion of the more important commitments, the stranger invites the Britons to his home for a meal and there relates the story of his life.

As it turns out his name is Carl Enander, a vicar’s son from the vicinity of Gävle in northern Sweden (Norrland). When he grows up he is captivated by the exotic travel accounts found in his parental home. When 14 years of age he is sent to Gävle for education, but the pedantic style of tuition does not appeal to Enander who dreams of a life at sea. In spite of the refusal of his father to allow this, he takes hire on a Danish ship bound for Dublin at the age of 15. As the ship lifts anchor and departs, Enander is overcome by regret and vainly asks the captain to put him ashore again. He nevertheless has to endure a troubled sea trip to Ireland where the captain dismisses him. The young Swede has a rudimentary knowledge of English and takes up work at a factory for iron manufacture. He is doing well and might have settled down on Ireland for good if not for an incident that changes his plans at the age of 19. A love affair with the daughter of a rich tenant farmer ends abruptly when her furious father surprises them with threatening ges-
tures. Enander hastily abandons work and sweetheart and goes to Dublin where he is hired by a ship leaving for Java – from the internal chronology of the story this would have been about 1770 (Cronhjelm 1815b: 3-6).

Carl Enander’s passage to Asian waters marks a change of the narrative to that of wild adventure. The merchantman makes it to Batavia, the hub of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) where the unspecified cargo is sold. Instead the captain purchases merchandise which can be sold to the inhabitants east of Java. The general idea is to return to Java after two months and then bring a suitable cargo back to Europe. However, the ship does not make it that far; due to a violent gale the crew loses control over the ship which is driven against the Island of Banka by the winds.

Our old captain regarded our salvation as impossible and admonished us to meet death with constancy. I asked him not to abandon all hope – I believed I could save him if the ship would be calamitously destroyed. I asked him to put the most necessary objects in the bladder of an ox: some money, a chart, a compass and some gunpowder; and to largely undress since it was not cold. However, we were sometimes rooked towards the abyss, sometimes lifted towards the sky. We tried to cast anchor a few hundred fathoms from shore, but the anchor ropes were torn apart by the raging storm. A moment later the ship collided with a rock. Water poured in from all sides, the ship creaked horribly. I ran to the captain. He stood in just his shirt with the required objects in hand. I had a cutlass and a pistol bound at my hip. I bound the ox bladder around my neck. Crying ‘God be with us’ I threw myself into the sea. The captain followed me. He could swim but his powers were soon exhausted. He was about to sink. I asked him to grab my long hair. I used all my powers, which were not small, to reach the shore. I finally reached it but was so exhausted that I fell down unconscious (Cronhjelm 1815b: 7-8).5

Enander, the captain and four others survive the shipwreck. Having doubts about the inhabitants of the island the Britons steal a canoe and resolve to reach Batavia. However, the winds inevitably push them in south-easterly direction, and they then decide to search for the Dutch colony on Timor instead. On their way the six vagrants land at a minor island where they rob a local family of some Indian cotton cloths and jars, admittedly after handing them 4 guineas. After three weeks of sailing and rowing they eventually reach Timor. It turns out that the Dutch stay at another section of the coast, but the inhabitants turn out to be good-hearted and helpful. “They were Malays6 who had occupied the coasts of this island and pushed the old natives to the interior… The religion of these Malays is the Mohammedan one, but it is mostly limited to the simple teachings of natural religions. They live in prosperity, partly as a consequence of the splendid land, and partly due to the trade that they carry on with Asians as well as Europeans. They also have European weapons such as shotguns and cutlasses, but they handle the first-mentioned rather ineptly; and they have no sense of fighting in order, without which wild courage cannot commit anything” (Cronhjelm 1815b: 9).
A Castaway on the Islands

The captain dies a couple of days after reaching Timor. The others, being housed in the household of an amicable and well-regarded man, are soon invited to participate in a war against the tribes of the interior which have raided their Malay neighbours. Much is expected from their European fighting tactics. The five Europeans gladly accept to fight under the banner of the Prophet and depart along with the able-bodied levies. On the fourth day they make contact with the enemy which roam around the hills and plains in scattered detachments, and a memorable encounter ensues:

This tribe had a muscular constitution, brown of colour, being completely naked apart from a piece of cloth around the waist. They had long spears, bows and arrows and a kind of small, round shield. As soon as they detected us they split up in four orderly troops in order to attack in that peculiar manner; but we formed a large square and calmly awaited their attack. They stopped at 30 paces distance in order to shot their arrows, but we anticipated them and triggered a general well-aimed salvo that killed several. Their commander, distinguished by a high feather headdress, rushed against the side where I stood. I let him come at 10 paces distance to be the more confident. Then I triggered my pistol. He fell and a terrible slaughter ensued around his corpse which his men wanted to defend. From this moment the victory was not in doubt since all sense of order was gone among the enemy. Escape and defeat was now general. Many prisoners fell in our hands; they were humanly treated although they became slaves. Three of our Englishmen were so badly injured that they died before we came home (Cronhjelm 1815b: 9-10).

Carl Enander is likewise wounded by a spear but is nursed to life by the 16 years old daughter of his Malay host, Alzima. Her beauty is comparable with the prettiest girls of Dublin, and her tenderness does not fail to make an impression on the Swede, who is now the only survivor left from the shipwreck together with an old sailor. After the victory celebrations he stays with his host and cultivates his fertile land, meanwhile making gardens and flower plantations after the European manner. A hot romance develops between Enander and Alzima:

[When I had picked some fresh flowers and put them in the billowing bosom of the enchanting girl, and she rewarded me with a grateful smile, then I would have forsaken a throne. My masculine power had disappeared entirely; I was as weak as a woman. My happiness increased daily, especially when I had acquired proficiency in the language, and she could show me her bright intellect and splendid heart, which had not been formed by moral teachings but by the influence of a beneficial nature (Cronhjelm 1815b: 11).]

His host is a venerable old man who likes to tell of warlike exploits against the natives whose islands his tribesmen have assaulted. After some time his powers abate and it is obvious that his end is near. On his death-bed he speaks to Enander and Alzima: during a long life he has experienced happiness as well as calamities, but declares to be content to pass away to unite with his late wife. He has no worries for his daughter since the Swede will be her friend and protector. “You have the same worship of God; yes, we all have. Do we not all believe in a being who rewards the virtuous, punishes the scoundrel, and links our destiny in such way
that we must finally admit that all that has happened to us in this world has been for our best, and that we will understand the reason for everything when we unite with our friends in blissful Paradise?” (Cronhjelm 1815b: 12-3).

After the death of the father, trouble ensues. A young man of fierce character, Elifu, has long desired Alzima but been repeatedly turned away by her father. With the old man gone he decides to act. When Carl Enander goes to the forest one morning, Elifu and his accomplices enter their home and capture Alzima. She is brought to a boat waiting on the shore and taken in the direction of a nearby island. When Enander comes back he is informed by an old man what has passed. A gale is raging and it is impossible to follow the captors, but the Swede can discern a boat far away that capsizes in the waves. He fears that Alzima might be on board. His neighbours offer assistance, and when the gale has passed they set out for the nearby island. There they find Alzima bound and guarded by two men. Enander rushes forward and cuts one dead while the other begs for his life and tells that Elifu has returned to the larger island to deal terminally with the Swede. It is now clear that it was Elifu who was drowned when the boat capsized. United again once and for all, Enander and Alzima marry after the Swede has been formally converted to Islam:

Before that I had to undergo a ceremony that the law of Muhammad has prescribed for every Muslim, and I then became the happiest of husbands and have been a happy father for ten years. Meanwhile several Dutchmen have visited me. I have not found them worthy of my confidence, but I have told you noble Britons everything that has happened to me. This story may be useful for your young fellow countrymen. It should teach them not to follow the darting passion but rather the voice of cool reason. Many people thoughtlessly abandon their homeland to make a quick fortune in foreign land, but mostly find nothing more than poverty and misery. For a seaman to succeed he should be taught such matters that belong to his profession, and not throw himself out on the tempestuous world ocean, where his lot is mostly to see his expectations crushed and find death, missed by nobody, cursed by the parents since he has spent his powers, which could have tended them in their darker days, in hazardous adventures.

Richardson and his men heard this account with astonishment. He offered the narrator to bring him and his family back to Europe. However, Carl, whose youthful impetuosity had now cooled down, did not wish to abandon a beloved tranquillity and engage in new dangers. “I hope that my father, before his demise, has forgiven me my thoughtlessness; here in the bosom of nature and friendship, I wish to abide the moment when our shadows shall meet on an unknown shore” (Cronhjelm 1815b: 14-5).

**Historical and Ethnographic Considerations**

If genuine, this short account would be of considerable value. Timor and the adjacent islands (Rote, Savu, the Solor and Alor Islands) were roughly divided in a Dutch and a Portuguese sphere of interest in the period when Carl Enander supposedly flourished. We have tens of thousands of archival folio pages dealing with the Timor area in the early-modern period, but it is usually written from a
strictly official point of view. As I have shown elsewhere the Dutch archival material from Timor is detailed enough to enable us to pinpoint social structures and European-indigenous hybridity in the seventeenth century and onwards (Hägerdal 2012). However, reflective “inside stories” of cultural encounters are not to be expected in this period. The closest we come is probably Ernst Christoph Barchewitz’s lengthy account of his stay on Leti, an island off Timor, in the early eighteenth century (Barchewitz 1730).

The strongly romantic overtones of the account may cast some suspicion. It should be recalled that this is the age of romanticism with an avid literary interest in the distant and exotic (Schwab 1984). However, it may be worth the effort to check the story of Carl Enander against other available sources. A number of difficulties immediately surface. The name of the father of the narrator is given as Gabriel Enander; however, the Swedish church records do not disclose a person with that name, either close to Gävle or elsewhere. Even more curiously, the British merchantman where Enander serves makes a stopover in Batavia and then heads in the direction towards Timor. Richardson’s vessel Triton is said to have visited Timor peacefully in 1783, at a time when the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War was still raging. Even in peacetime a British vessel would likely not have been allowed to pass Batavia for trade with the VOC-affiliated islands, though it could have visited the Portuguese harbours (Batugade, Dili). It is known, on the other side that British merchantmen turned up in increasing numbers on the islands to the east of Java in the 1760s and later, in obvious defiance of the monopolistic ambitions of the declining VOC (Bijvanck 1894: 153-5). There are also inconsistencies in the story. Banka is an island outside Sumatra which seems illogical if Enander’s ship went towards eastern Indonesia. Admittedly it could allude to Banggai outside Sulawesi; that would fit with the south-eastern course taken by the survivors of the shipwreck.

Let us now turn to Timor itself. The VOC records from Kupang, the Dutch port in the area, provide us with events and ship movements year after year. Unfortunately the material becomes less detailed towards the late eighteenth century. Even so we should expect the presence of shipwrecked Britons to have been anxiously observed by the servants of the monopolistic Company – for example, there is a long report about Captain Bligh’s arrival to Kupang in June 1789 after his remarkable sea trip following the Bounty mutiny. A search in the records of the 1760s, 1770s and 1780s yields elusive results at best. In 1769 a report came to the ears of the Dutch that an English ship had arrived to Sikka on Flores, north-west of Timor, and that the crew began to construct a stronghold there. Flores was more or less outside the control of the VOC at that time but had certain products of economic interest, in particular cinnamon (Schooneveld-Oosterling 2007: 307-12). Sikka was nominally a principality under Portugal; part of the population was Catholic in name but a section of the north coast was (at least by the first half of the nineteenth century) dominated by Muslims from Sulawesi. An officially
sanctioned British foray might have been hard to stop since the Kupang post had nothing to say in Sikka, but would have been utterly unlikely given the still peaceful relations between Great Britain, Portugal and the Netherlands. Could these people have been the survivors of the shipwreck? A following VOC report from the same year opined that the rumour about the Englishmen after all seemed unfounded. With a no-smoke-without-fire logic we may acknowledge the possibility that a few British castaways had actually surfaced on the islands, giving rise to the rumour. At any rate it remains to be confirmed.

The ethnographic details are intriguing. The Timor Islands (Timor-eilanden) consist of the mainland (often called Groot-Timor, Grand Timor, in the documents) and a number of adjacent islands. As well known the name merely means “the East” (Malay, timur). The Timorese mainland was not characterized by a Muslim coastal population; actually the Timorese feared the sea and were no sailors. However, the situation was different on the islands to the north of Timor: the Alor and Solor Islands, and some sections of Flores. Some of the populations were oriented towards the sea and were nominally Muslim since about the sixteenth century. Nevertheless their religion was heavily blended with beliefs in spirits (nitu). Among the means of livelihood among the coastal groups were whaling, fishing and trade while agriculture played a subordinated role. In particular the Solorese and Endenese (on Flores) were known as good sailors. The population had contacts with a number of external groups such as the Makassarese and Butonese from Sulawesi, the sea migrants known as Bajaus, Ternateans from the Moluccas, and last not least the Europeans (Barnes 1987). The Dutch were stationed in Kupang while Portuguese (or mestizo) settlements were found in Dili, Batugade, Oecussi, and Larantuka on Flores (Hägerdal 2012). By the eighteenth century the contacts had led to a dissemination of firearms on Timor and adjacent islands, at least among the coastal communities. Even before that a number of American-derived crops such as maize changed the economic preconditions and allowed for denser populations.

A leading theme in the Solor and Alor Islands, and on part of Flores, was the troubled relationship between the coastal dwellers, who were often Muslim or Catholic, and the tribes of the mountainous interior who mostly held on to their ancestral beliefs. Such ethno-religious highland-lowland dichotomies are known from many places in Indonesia and could be economically complementary, but on the islands north of Timor they were frequently hostile. Raids were followed by counter-raids and the adversaries would sometimes call in assistance from external powers. The lack of executive power on the part of the Dutch and Portuguese colonizers meant that the local polities were free to act on their own accord as long as they did not counter the interests of the European power to whom they were nominally affiliated. Some groups did not have the least political contact with Europeans. The taking of slaves was an inevitable part of this. Captured highlanders were frequently sold off as slaves to Europeans or to other Indonesian
As can be seen from this, there are some elements in *The Swede on Timor* which indeed fit well with what is known of the islands to the north of the Timorese mainland. The hip-cloths, the high feather adornments of the principal warriors, and the small round shields are found at various places in the region, while long lances, bows and arrows were used by the highlanders in places like Solor and Alor. Of the two indigenous personal names given in the story, Elifu could represent the Solorese name Liwu while the vaguely Arab-sounding Alzima is less conclusive.

### A Literary Perspective

All this has to be juxtaposed with the background of the so-called translator of the text, Christina Cronhjelm, and the literary tropes of exoticism common in a second-rank European nation in the wake of the Napoleonic era. Does *The Swede on Timor* stand alone in the literary output of the time, or are there similar published stories? And what other kinds of literary works emanated from Cronhjelm’s pen?

The trope of a morally upright castaway surviving in an exotic milieu is clearly reminiscent of Daniel Defoe’s immensely successful *Robinson Crusoe* (1719). The book gave rise to a genre of novels with castaway themes during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Like *Robinson Crusoe*, *The Swede on Timor* conveys a rather optimistic view of human capabilities to make the best out of a foreign environment. To this is added the romanticist impulse that surfaced towards the late eighteenth century and held sway until at least the mid-nineteenth. Being a reaction against rationalism and old societal hierarchy, romanticist writers frequently emphasized the benefits of closeness to nature. One may compare the novel *Panjumouf* (1817) by the well-known Swedish writer Carl Jonas Love Almquist which contains similar elements as *The Swede on Timor* – a journey to New Holland (Australia) where the protagonists meet a local girl of extraordinary beauty belonging to an unknown tribe.

The positive image of the native population in *The Swede on Timor* is apparent. In spite of scenes of blood and gore, the coastal dwellers among whom Carl Enander settles repeatedly convey philosophical wisdoms through their words and customs. The old Muslim man expresses inclusive interdenominational ideas on his death bed; in general Islam is portrayed in neutral or even positive terms, as Carl Enander has no qualms of embracing the creed and to undergo circumcision prior to his marriage. This is combined with the image of the locals as children of nature, not restricted and stymied by the regulations of the Western world. The concept of the noble savage was current in European intellectual culture since the days of John Dryden (1672). Although Jean-Jacques Rousseau did not use the concept, he put forward similar ideas: “Nothing is milder than him [man] in his primitive state, placed by nature between the stupidity of the brutes and the deceitful enlightenment of civil man” (Rousseau 1835: 354). Meanwhile the “discover-
ies” of James Cook and other explorers in the Pacific region opened up a public interest for indigenous peoples living in an unspoilt state, far from social rigidity and hypocrisy. The gaps of concrete knowledge of these “new” areas made them tempting for travel fiction or semi-fiction: “The antipodes offered one of the last places on earth where one could dream of a different, better world that has not yet been entirely ruled out as a possibility” (Arthur 2011: xx). As pointed out by Frederick Quinn, the Western image of Islam in the early-modern period was complex and not always negative. Travellers to Islamic countries could even be complimentary towards the lands they visited. A much-read historian such as Edward Gibbon (1737-94) stated Islam to be compatible with reason to an extent, while purportedly Turkish and Persian milieus were used by a philosopher such as Montesquieu and a composer such as Mozart. As more detailed information of the Muslim world reached the Western audience, sympathetic and curious attitudes flourished alongside negative stereotypes (Quinn 2008: 59-60, 71-2, 91-2). However, the production of romantic Orientalist writings mainly belongs to a period subsequent to Cronhjelm’s story (Said 1978; Schwab 1984).

Christina Cronhjelm, later Christina Berger, is not a well-known name in the annals of Swedish literature. Moreover her early works were published anonymously, not uncommonly at the time. The Swede on Timor was among her first publications, but during a long life she authored numerous novels and poems which were highly appreciated by her contemporaries but have never been reprinted and are entirely forgotten today. The novels tended towards the fantastic (J.G.C. 1858-59: 1-2). For example, Trollgrottan i San Miniatos dal (The magic cave in the valley of San Miniato, 1816) was a colourful adventure in a diffuse Italian medieval or Renaissance milieu where mystery, love, warlike exploits, and strong emotions played a role. Another novella, De franska krigsfångarna i Sverige (The French prisoners of war in Sweden, 1815) was supposedly based on a true story and told of an old French father who, braving any dangers and obstacles, found his son who was a prisoner of war in a Swedish town. It was an idyllic interpretation of history that also included lively but not always accurate images of the French nature and society. Here, Cronhjelm does not disclose any intimate knowledge of the ethnography or geography of foreign lands.

**Truth or Fiction – or Both?**

As our investigation has shown, the many obvious anachronisms in the story make it impossible to accept it at face value. The castaway trope emanating from Defoe, travel accounts from the South Sea by James Cook and William Bligh, appreciation of nature and primitive cultures by Enlightenment authors, and the discourses of romanticism of the time, did not fail to reach the cultural circles in Sweden, a land without a pronounced tradition of overseas travel. The travels of the disciples of Linnaeus and the activities of the East India Company could have
further spiced a public interest in Asian lands. Much of the content of *The Swede on Timor* could therefore be the product of Cronhjelm’s lively imagination.⁰⁰ Captain Richardson’s diary is quite possibly a literary device to enable a story related in first person singular, Robinson Crusoe-style. Seen in that way the travelogue of Carl Enander has a metaphoric side to it; it is a tale of abandonment of the near and dear in a futile quest for adventure and fortune, and in the end the recovery of familial happiness through the twists of fate. This is paired with a display of exoticism for a Swedish audience that had seldom seen a non-European, let alone travelled to foreign continents. The non-white protagonists are not merely exotic objects though, but on the contrary stand out as subjects whose words and attitudes convey (European Enlightenment-type) ideas of natural life and love.

But the matter is not that simple. There was very little published literature about Timor at the time, and Cronhjelm could not have drawn the local setting merely from the short notes in William Bligh’s published account, which are only concerned with the Dutch hub in Kupang.²¹ A number of ethnographic features in the story fit very well with what we know about parts of the Timor Islands from archival data and studies which were only published long after Cronhjelm’s novella. It is therefore not improbable that she had seen an unpublished account containing data about local society, and used it as basis for an otherwise fictitious short story. The nature of such an account, and whether it actually mentioned a ship-wrecked Swede, cannot be known unless some letter or other private document surfaces. What is important is that a confluence of several literary and cultural tropes about the Other produced a vision of a society at the margins of Asia which did not conform to the discourse of race and evolution that was taking shape in the West around this time. Conversion to Islam formed a *rite de passage* which sealed the Swedish world traveller’s inclusion in a state of natural way of living. Closeness to nature and adherence to a foreign creed were seen as commendable and capable of absorbing an open-minded Westerner.

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**Notes**

1. A list of Swedish travel literature before 1800 is found in Hedenquist & Stenbacka 2000: 75-6, 82-3, 90-2, 95, 98, 101-3, 105, 109, 112-4, 116.
2. The modern spelling would be *Svensken på Timor*, there being no difference in pronunciation between the letters v and w.
General surveys of the colonial history of Timor before 1800 may be found in Matos 1974; Hägerdal 2012.

Though strictly speaking being situated in central Sweden, Gävle is traditionally counted to Norrland (“Land/region of the North”).

All translations from the Swedish text are by the present author.

The ethnic denomination Malay at this time did not just allude to Malay speakers, but denoted all kinds of Austronesian peoples on the islands.

This conclusion is based on a study of the various herdaminnen (registers of clerics in various Swedish provinces) which have been published.

European power on the Timor Islands was vaguely defined at this time. It rested on a few coastal strongholds and alliances with various local “kingdoms”. See for all this Hägerdal 2012; Matos 1974.

The British had a trading post at Bencoolen on Sumatra’s west coast, and British ships anchored at Lombok which was not under VOC suzerainty. The Dutch had no means of stopping British ships from visiting the islands east of Java during the Anglo-Dutch War (Cool 1896: 235).

It is known, for example, that a certain Makassarese Muslim seafarer called Daeng Muna forcibly established a position on the north coast in 1847 (Kartodirdjo 1973: 424). An Islamic coastal area called Geliting existed in the Sikka area in the nineteenth century (Steenbrink 2013: 105). For Sikka in general, see Lewis 2010.

There was a strain of Anglophobia in the VOC possessions in the second half of the eighteenth century which may easily have led to inflated rumours.

Cf. the account of Jean-Baptiste Pelon from 1778: “The islanders who inhabit the shores are almost all Mohammedans, although they are not very knowledgeable about that religion. Those who live in the mountains do not have any [world religion]. It is the same on the neighbouring islands” (Pelon 2002: 64).

Steenbrink 2013: 104-5. On the complementary relations between coastal (hilir) and highland (hulu) groups on Sumatra, see Andaya 1992: 13-20.

For an early picture of Solorese people in waist-cloth, and a depiction of the elaborate head adornment of a Solorese warrior, see De Roever 2002. 88-9. Bound-up hair with feather adornments can be seen on early nineteenth-century depictions of Alorese people; see Hägerdal 2010: 219,241. Small round shields from eighteenth-century Timor are seen in Šá 1949, appendix; and from Solor in the sixteenth century in Subrahmanyam 2009: 41. On the Solor and Alor Islands the shields were otherwise often rectangular or oblong (see image from 1818 in Hägerdal 2010: 219).

A rare case of upper-class conversion, which might have been known to Cronhjelm, was that of the French General Jacques-François Menu, who commanded the French forces in Egypt in 1800-1801. He married an Egyptian woman and converted to Islam under the name Ali Abdallah Menou; see Soboul 1989: 734-5.

Reviewed in Allmännna journalen, 4 October 1816: 1-2.

Cf. Teodor Ekelund’s characterization: “This learned woman was by nature endowed with a lively opinion and an always playful imagination“ (Ekelund 1886: 65).

The cartography and published travel accounts about the Timor area have been discussed and quoted in some detail by Frédéric Durand 2006 (for the European accounts prior to 1815, see pp. 43-196).
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