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Mobilizing Hegemonic Practices in Trajectories of Conspicuous Resistance

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A version of this paper has now been accepted for publication in
European Journal of Marketing

Mobilizing Hegemonic Practices in Trajectories of Conspicuous Resistance

Abstract

Purpose – Focusing on a community organization, the purpose of this paper is to unravel the process through which infringing contested practices that threaten or compromise the community's sense of distinction come to be transformed into acceptable symbolic markers.

Design/Methodology/Approach – An ethnographic study comprising of participant observation, in-depth interviews and secondary data was conducted in the context of a non-profit community cinema.

Findings – Taking a longitudinal approach and drawing from practice theory, we outline how member driven, customer driven and necessity imposed infringing practices settle in new contexts. We demonstrate that such practices are filtered in terms of their ideological “fit” with the organization and are as a result rejected, recontextualised, or replaced with do-it-yourself alternatives. In this process, authority shifts from the contested practice, to community members and eventually to the space as a whole, ensuring the singularization of the cinema-going experience.

Originality/Value – While the appropriation practices that communities employ to ensure distinction are well documented, there is little understanding of the journey that negatively contested practices undergo in their purification to more community friendly forms. We theorize this journey by outlining how the objects, meanings and doings that comprise hegemonic practices are transformed *by* and transforming *of* resisting organizations.

Practical Implications – We address how the integration of hegemonic practices to an off-the-mainstream experience can provide a differentiation tool, aiding resisting organizations to compensate for their lack of resources.

Keywords: distaste, appropriation, distinction, communities, symbolic boundaries, anti-choice, anti-consumption, conspicuous resistance, trajectories, practice theory

Article Classification: Research Paper

Introduction

Previous studies on community demonstrate how social groups attain distinction by symbolically demarcating their ingroup from dissociative others in an “us versus them” fashion (Arsel and Thompson, 2011; Kozinets, 2001; Muniz and Hamer, 2001; Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001; Schouten and McAlexander, 1995; Ustuner and Holt, 2010). Such rivalries are underlined by negative symbolic consumption tactics since distaste and rejection can more effectively impose social distinctions (Wilk, 1997). At the same time, the symbolic status of groups is not solely dependent on a game of choosing or rejecting distinct products that are appropriate to the community form but on members’ mastering of subtler strategies of proclaiming an identity and avoiding stigmatization (Arsel and Thompson, 2011). These strategies largely rely on appropriation acts that transform the meanings of products, brands or habits by integrating them in distinct practices (Holt, 1998).

While the study of how consumer groups skilfully attain distinction through appropriation processes has been well documented by studies employing a consumer culture lens (Arsel and Thompson, 2011; Holt, 1998; Schouten and McAlexander, 1995; Martin, Schouten and McAlexander, 2006; Ustuner and Holt, 2010), the trajectory of negatively contested practices from their hegemonic state to community-friendly forms and the mechanisms that underlie this process evade prior theorizations. Focusing on a community cinema with an anti-establishment ethos, we explore the journey that infringing, ill-suited practices from the entertainment field undergo until their eventual abandonment or purification and integration in a resisting space. We further theorize how resisting spaces are themselves transformed through the integration of hegemonic practices. Our theoretical framework draws from two overlapping streams of literature; negative symbolic consumption and anti-consumption acts that serve identity goals, while our analytical lens employs principles of practice theory to uncover how the objects, meanings and doings comprising

hegemonic practices are transformed during the appropriation journey. By unravelling the journey of these practices we theoretically contribute to literature concerned with how distinction is negatively asserted in countercultural consumption contexts (Arsel and Thompson, 2011; Hietanen and Rokka, 2015; Kozinets, 2002; Kozinets and Handelman, 2004; Martin et al., 2006; Schouten and McAlexander, 1995) and provide practical implications for how resisting organizations with low resources can attract and maintain loyal audiences of enthusiasts in competitive domains.

Negatively Driven Distinction

Consumer research has well established that social groups develop consciousness of kind and a distinct sense of collective identity through the sharing and co-creation of consumption habits and tastes (Arsel and Thompson, 2011; Bourdieu, 1984; Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001; Schouten and McAlexander, 1995). Negative symbolic consumption, however, is a more effective means of signalling identity, for it expresses a level of commitment to one’s ingroup far stronger to what can be achieved simply by exhibiting similar tastes (Wilk, 1994). Rejection behaviour enables collectives who do not wish to be associated with dissociative user groups or ideologies to protect themselves (Bourdieu, 1984; Simmel, 1955; Hogg, 1998; Hogg, Banister and Stephenson, 2009). Negatively driven distinction ensures that the group rightfully communicates its status position in social space in relation to external, often competitive actors (Berger and Heath, 2008). In this section we review prior literature on negative symbolic consumption starting from more delineate theorizations of “us versus them” relationships and subsequently providing an overview of the more complex appropriation strategies that sustain negatively asserted status positions.

Negative symbolic consumption is divided into non-choice (due to affordability, availability or accessibility reasons) and anti-choice (commonly related to abandonment,

avoidance or aversion behaviour) (Hogg, 1998; Hogg et al., 2009; Wilk, 1997). Given the inconsistency between the inconspicuous motives of non-choice and our interest in contested habits that serve as identity markers, we focus exclusively on the characteristics and properties of anti-choice, which in our interpretation constitutes purposeful rejection. Anti-choice suggests that members of opposing groups will behave in competition to each other (Tajfel and Turner, 1979, 1986), exhibiting avoidance behaviours to ensure that their non-membership in adversary groups is visible (Escalas and Bettman, 2005). Specifically, dissociative reference groups influence negative consumption (Berger and Heath, 2008; White and Dhal, 2007) by providing the coordinates for which consumption habits should be rejected and which are deemed as appropriate (Hogg, 1998; Hogg et al., 2009; Simmel, 1955). From this standpoint, distinction is achieved through the rejection or abandonment of whole product categories or specific brands with the purpose of avoiding ‘undesired identities’ (Banister and Hogg, 2004; Hogg, 1998; Hogg and Banister, 2001; Wilk, 1994, 1997).

Despite the simplicity of the anti-choice premise, distinctions between “their tastes” and “ours” are not always comprehensive. Moving away from the discourse of negatively-driven distinction as rejection of objects, consumer research has described complex status “wars” in which consumers who wish to distance themselves from dissociative outgroups are unable or unwilling to avoid particular tainted practices. For example, through their inquiry into field-dependent identities Arsel and Thompson (2011) posit that while indie consumers view hipsters as adversaries, they insist on consuming similar music and fashion brands, differentiating however their manner of consumption as well as the meanings that they attach to the concerned practices. Similarly, Ustuner and Holt (2010) demonstrate how orthodox western consumption practices influence diverse middle class lifestyles in the east. Intra-class status wars occur between those class fractions that are comprehensively adopting western

habits and those who, lacking the necessary cultural capital, reside in consuming western brands disintegrated to their eastern lifestyle. In both these studies, negatively driven distinction is not witnessed in anti-choice, the abandonment of contested practices because these are adopted by a dissimilar other, but in appropriated positive consumption choices (Thompson and Haytko, 1997).

Moving away from an object signification approach, consumption practices, such as manner of consumption (Holt, 1998), taste regimes (Arsel and Bean, 2013) and meanings that underlie acts of consuming, have more explanatory power when it comes to understanding identities. For example, the distinctive pattern of luxury fashion house Burberry dressing a young working class individual bears a radically different status to how the label exhibits it on celebrity models or actors in its communication campaigns. Similarly, wearing fur is a practice associated both with luxury fashion, depicting the image of a high-end consumer as well as with the strikingly opposite grunge scene (mostly faux-fur in the latter case) where the wearer may be more interested in displaying an overdramatized identity. As these cases demonstrate, given the dearth of space for individuals to pursue authenticity (Holt, 1998), critical consumers are more likely to employ their cultural capital, including their intellectual capabilities and socially acquired knowledge (Holt, 1997), to achieve differentiation in subtle ways. These are inaccessible to those not possessing the necessary “code” (Bourdieu, 1984) or that are oblivious to the pertinent normative systems underlying practice (Arsel and Bean, 2013).

Appropriation strategies are thus central to maintaining distinct identities which proclaim sovereignty to outsiders. Distinction achieved as a result of anti-choice is a comparatively passive strategy of rejection, given that negatively contested practices emerge in a “ready-made fashion” due to their association with avoidance groups. In contrast, maintaining a symbolic distance despite the adoption of hegemonic practices requires members’ intensive

engagement with normative systems and collective co-construction of meaning subversions, making this type of active rejection an elaborate, multifaceted distinction mechanism whose understanding would benefit consumer research.

Conspicuous Resistance

Identity motives are often underlying anti-consumption behaviour (Cherrier, 2009; Cherrier et al., 2011; Hogg et al., 2009; Zavestoski, 2002). When used in that sense, conspicuous resistance denotes rejection of consumption in general (Zavestoski, 2002) and mass produced commodities in particular (Penaloza and Price, 2003). Comparing to universal attempts at social distinction, communities of alternative consumption focus their rejection not just towards dissociative, but also hegemonic practices. In other words, rather than symbolically competing with cultural adversaries, anti-communities seek to reject the culture of consumption as a whole (Kozinets and Handelman, 2004). The form of such social groups ranges significantly from macro collectives, like social movements, to more micro expressions including activist groups and anti-brand communities. Dissociative actors constitute of “corporate elites”, hegemonic brands and practices (Hollenbeck and Zinkham, 2010; Cova and White, 2010; Cromie and Ewing, 2009), as well as mainstream consumers (Kozinets and Handelman 2004). “Us and Them” distinctions occur as lifestyle differences where the contested habits of one group are juxtaposed to the ill-suited practices of outgroups:

“With their tales of conversion, epiphany, righteousness, abstinence, damnation, prophesy, and empowerment, consumer activists set themselves apart from consumers to such an extent that the two groups almost seem to be living in different worlds. One world is luxurious, solipsistic, evil, and unreal. The other

world is spartan, self-sacrificing, good, and real” (Kozinets and Handelman, 2004, 702)

Similarly to what anti-choice denotes, the dominant anti-consumption discourses designate some form of avoidance, ranging from minimazing consumption (e.g. the voluntary simplicity movement), to more active rejection behaviours like boycotting (Fournier, 1998). However, resisting consumers cannot operate autonomously from field-dominant practices since escaping the market is a utopian pursuit (Kozinets, 2002). As a result, identity projects rely on consumers’ ability to *constructively* resist (Moraes, Szmigin and Carrigan, 2010). Appropriation is central to such endeavours as a way of maintaining symbolic distinctions while moving beyond dualistic resistance theorizations (Moraes et al., 2010). In the same way that “reasons against may include more than the logical opposites of reasons for” (Chatzidakis and Lee, 2013, 9), distaste expressed by resisting communities can be larger than just anti-choice or the opposite of mainstream market tastes.

To that end, literature further explores how resistance based identity projects can be realised without necessarily giving up on a particular product or service, largely through appropriation acts with specific anti-consumption connotations. In such cases, members go beyond abandonment and tend to be “production engaged” as a way of performing their resistance (Moraes et al., 2010). Such collaborative projects of identity enactment include, for example, Freegan consumers who express distaste against the mainstream consumer culture by *sharing* resources, as opposed to abandoning particular practices (Pentina and Amos, 2011). Resistance can also be achieved through custodian practices that rely on maintaining, rather than getting rid of, material goods (Cherrier, 2010), as well as through practices of producerly consumption (Holt, 2002) which allow consumers to engineer new meanings for brands in a more creative and/or reflexive mode. Building on that perspective and focusing on how community members collectively seek to produce their own culture as a way of

expressing dislike towards the mainstream alternatives, our study seeks to unravel the process through which hegemonic consumption practices come to carry subtle counter meanings. The next section deconstructs the concept of appropriation employed in conspicuous resistance projects and concludes with our research questions.

Appropriation as Distinction Mechanism

Appropriation is often discussed in the context of art movements and art forms (for an overview see Evans, 2009), but appropriation processes are not absent from some of the most mundane aspects of daily life. In art history, appropriation has been defined as “the direct duplication, copying or incorporation of an image (painting, photograph, etc.) by another artist who represents it in a different context, thus completely altering its meaning and questioning notions of originality and authenticity” (Stangos, 1994, 19). In daily life, it has been argued that technology constitutes a dominant mode of appropriation. For example, through sound recording, technology allows for the appropriation of music in raw material form, ready to be bought and used by humans (Boon, 2007). Similarly, appropriation could instigate changes in the status or interpretation of a product or activity. For example, sports are perceived as “hard work” by Moroccans but have “recreational” meanings for the French (Stewart and Lacassagne, 2005). This discrepancy in the appropriation of the values attached to a specific activity can help differentiate the two societies (Stewart and Lacassagne, 2005). Specifically in consumer studies appropriation is not solely observed in status wars that involve alterations in manner of consumption (Holt, 1998), but also meaning making through combination of narratives (Thompson and Haytko, 1997), paradoxical embracement of anti-consumption ideology in advertising (Zhao and Belk, 2008), the use of material elements

across cultural boundaries (Howes, 1996; Schneider, 2003; Ziff and Rao, 1997) and romanticising of “the past” as a commercial strategy of relating to contemporary audiences (Penaloza, 2000; 2001).

We observe how these studies share a number of recurrent themes. Firstly, they all imply taking something and using it *differently* to its dominant manner of use, essentially resignifying it. This gives rise to the second and most important characteristic of appropriation, namely ownership. By altering the use and meaning of a particular practice, the appropriator is gaining ownership of its new mode of existence. In relation to negatively driven distinction, modes of appropriation often refer to aesthetic redefinitions of objects (Holt, 1998). In this case, the embedded cultural value of objects is of less significance compared to the symbolic value accrued through the mode of appropriation. Meanings attached to products or services by different cultural groups through appropriation can be crucial in the drawing of symbolic boundaries, without necessarily implying that one group is forced to give up on a particular practice. For example, looking closely at the women biker’s subculture, Martin et al. (2006) describe how female riders craft a consciousness of kind for their subculture both through rejection – e.g. by avoiding rides that entail breaking traffic law- as well as by appropriating hegemonic male bikers’ habits through the adoption of a hyper masculine vernacular. In this case, the seemingly contradictory adoption of such vernacular to feminine subjectivities, allows female riders to make riding habits “their own” and to successfully integrate contested practices in the context of their subculture along with the goals entailed by appropriation.

While our understanding of the importance of appropriation for achieving identity projects has been well established by such prior works, the process through which practices that are ideologically incongruent with a given context come to be aligned with it by assuming more community friendly forms and the potential effects of such appropriated practices to the

context within which they come to be integrated are not documented. As such, the research questions that this paper addresses are: how are negatively contested practices mobilized in new trajectories, and, how do hegemonic practices reconstitute resistant contexts? Building on theorizations of how consumer groups attain distinction by acting on and appropriating practices (Arsel and Bean, 2013; Arsel and Thompson, 2011; Holt, 1998; Schouten and McAlexander, 1995; Martin, Schouten and McAlexander, 2006; Ustuner and Holt, 2010), our study tells the story of appropriation from the perspective of the hegemonic practice itself. This approach allows us to investigate not only the skills and processes that members employ to justify their engagement with contested practices and align them with the ingroup's culture, but in addition the manner in which such practices are gradually reconfigured and reinvented as well as the different actors involved in that process. Focusing on practices themselves also allows us to emphasize the authority that hegemonic practices exercise back over resisting communities. This gap is theoretically important because by tracing the trajectories of hegemonic practices we can acquire a better understanding of how consumers, who are unable to escape the market, construct semi-autonomous spaces which facilitate conspicuous performances of resistance.

Methodology

Research Settings

An ethnographic study was conducted in the context of a non-profit community cinema in the United Kingdom, managed by a pool of volunteers. Participants are responsible for all aspects of running the community, from daily duties like bartending and projecting movies to undertaking creative roles including programming or curating exhibitions and more administrative tasks like managing finances or the IT systems that are in place to facilitate the group. In line with the principles of productive consumption and the practices of prosuming

communities (e.g. Giesler, 2006; Weinberger and Wallendorf, 2012), group members act not only as producers of the offering but also as consumers, being able to enjoy performances free of charge. Members of the public are also able to attend the venue in exchange for a very low fee that goes towards the maintenance of the community and its rented building.

The community organizes an eclectic program comprising of movies (primarily independent productions, political documentaries, world cinema and art house), live music performances of experimental or ethnic genres and occasionally theatre. Members operate in a run-down building where the combination of DIY decorations, worn walls, stale smell and low lights contributes to the overall underground aesthetic. The aspects of the context that enable theoretical payoff (Arnould, Price and Moisio, 2006) are the oppositional identity of the community and its positioning as an alternative space for the enjoyment of the arts that “aims to make a difference” as stated on the website. In these settings, members’ sense of collective identity is constructed relationally to dissociative others and expressed through an anti-establishment ethos that prioritises experimental art forms over mainstream ones and is people-centered, as opposed to profit-driven. Mainstream leisure venues like multiplex chain cinemas as well as highbrow arts institutions like art galleries and symphony halls constitute adversaries that are criticised for their embeddedness in neo-liberal economic systems. Status competitions with these groups are expressed through narrative juxtapositions that praise the autonomous and experimental practices of the ingroup and demarcate it from the profit-driven and robotic practices of the marketplace (Hietanen and Rokka, 2015). For example, in discussing the motivations of the group’s activities one member exclaims: “As a consumer of big corporations myself, I don’t feel that there is any care given to my experience. They just want my money. Which is the total opposite of what we are about.” In these settings, the avoidance of practices that “don’t fit” with the group’s idiosyncrasies is conspicuously

manifested, making the community a prominent site to study rejection trajectories in their different journeys.

Data Collection Methods and Analytical Approach

Data collection methods comprise of one year participant observation (Spradley, 1980) and 15 long interviews (McCracken, 1988) along with secondary data acquired through observations of the discussions taking place in the volunteers' mailing list. The first author enquired for a volunteer position in the community which gained us entry to backstage action. The ethnographer first spent time solely volunteering at the venue, familiarizing herself both with the members and their practices. The role of the researcher was overt, which allowed the collection of unsolicited accounts from multiple members that the ethnographer cooperated with on a weekly basis. Observation was the first step in order to gain a general understanding of the symbolic world to be studied (Elliott and Jankel-Elliott, 2003), familiarize the researcher with everyday operations, understand the community's rules, language and meaning system (Sanders, 1987) and attract interview respondents. During the participant observations, Spradley's (1980, 82-83) descriptive question matrix was used as an initial guide. After spending the first two months on more descriptive observations, attention was focused on specific domains of interest, particularly actors -and their interrelations with goals, activities, acts and events-, and activities -and their interrelation with objects, actors, space, acts and goals. Field notes in the form of mental and jotted notes while at the venue were being kept at all times and these were subsequently turned to full notes.

Interviews were conducted with 15 members of different lengths of volunteering in the community (ranging from 12 years to 4 months). These lasted from 60 to 90 minutes and took place in cafes that the respondents chose. The interview questions were semi-structured and organised around grand tour questions and prompts (McCracken, 1988), which partly drew upon the ethnographer's observations and/or stories and narratives provided by other

respondents, in order to gain a holistic understanding of how different participants perceived a particular practice or phenomenon in the community. Interviewees were firstly asked to talk about their background and personal interest in the arts to help achieve a first impression of their cultural capital and competences (Bourdieu, 1984; Holt, 1997). Subsequently they were questioned on their motivation to engage with their group and the roles they are required to carry out to help out with the running of the venue. Community practices were discussed in relation to the anti-establishment sentiment that the group puts forward while participants were also encouraged to reflect on how their decision making processes reflect the values, ethos and common purpose of the group. Finally, the ways in which the community differentiates itself from other art venues or collectives in the city were discussed. Verification questions were used to ensure that understandings of the respondents' stories was accurate, while contrast questions (Spradley, 1979) were useful in identifying juxtapositions between the community and its dissimilar others. We analysed transcripts and field notes using QRS NVivo, looking for patterns that enforced distinctions of an "us versus them" fashion. We constructed our thematic scheme by employing abstraction, comparison and integration (McCracken, 1988) and going back and forth between the data and existing literature.

In mapping practice trajectories, we employ practice theory as an analytical lens. We draw from Arsel and Bean's (2013) application of Magaudda's (2011) practice theory approach to the study of taste and accordingly we conceptualise practices as comprising of interactive elements – material objects, ways of using them and meanings underlying them (Magaudda, 2011), coordinated by the rules of the context in which the practice occurs (Warde, 2005). Specifically we emphasize the process through which hegemonic practices are de-routinized through changes in their different elements. This serves as a "claim to particular resources", and primarily cultural capital, that "act as currency" (Holt, 1998, 4) in

members' efforts to demarcate from dissociative others. A practice theory lens further facilitates the analysis of the relationship between practice elements and what is socially acceptable within a given context (Warde, 2005). Literature proposes that integrative practices align with the ethos, values and regime that govern a given community or context (Arsel and Bean, 2013; Schatzki, 1996). Accordingly our analysis focuses on how different practice elements that evolve in their purification to more community friendly forms interact with and alter their contextual surroundings as part of their trajectories.

Findings

We explore how expressions of rejection evolve along with the trajectories of negatively contested practices. We theorise these trajectories as a process in which different stages serve diverse stakes and during which authority shifts between different agents, from practices to members and finally to the space as a whole (table 1). Trajectories start with a trigger, a temptation to align community practices with hegemonic field practices. During stage two, resistance from members filters practice elements through discourses of symbolic demarcation that aim to safeguard the organization's status position. At this phase, those practices that fail to destruct from their contested meanings get rejected. By contrast, practices that comprise of objects, doings and meanings that are more dispersed get purified and remain in new forms, successfully contributing to the anti-establishment sentiment of the space. During the final stage, appropriated and new practices facilitate the reclaiming of the cinema-going experience. To demonstrate this process, our findings trace the trajectory of practices in three areas of commerce that comprise entertainment venues: the showcase of cultural products, the offering of an augmented service in the form of bar practices and administration or practices of managing the space.

Table 1: The Trajectories of Hegemonic Practices

Infringing Hegemonic Field Practices

In line with the community's ethos, members attempt to create a cultural space from which overwhelming, excessive consumerism has been filtered out (Rumbo, 2002) by excluding field-dominant objects and ways of working, deeming them "distasteful". However, practices that constitute distaste do not emerge in a ready-made fashion as binary opposites of what dissociative organizations are known for (Hogg, 1998; Hogg et al., 2009; Wilk, 1997). On the contrary, members are tempted with the adoption of exo-cultural practices that comprise hegemonic rituals. Such rituals are defined by the capitalist order of multiplex chain movie theatres that have, in the last two decades, crafted an experience around blockbuster films, state of the art movie halls and extensive consumption of bar offerings. We conceptualise such practices as "infringing" due to their ideological mismatch with an anti-establishment community cinema.

Infringing practices can be member-driven, when individual participants are allured to adopt habitual mainstream cinema practices that they have acquired through prior socialisation and that they emotionally associate with an enhanced cinema-going experience. One member, reluctantly, initiated a potentially inappropriate proposal in the community's mailing list:

This may not please people but how about some old school popcorn machine with some nice paper bags for the popcorn to go in. That whiff of popcorn is a cinema

experience alone. Feel free to put me in my place. (Account from mailing list, February 2012)

The infringing practice in this case is the result of temptation to replicate a valued aspect of the cinema experience. The plaintiff emphasizes the more affectual meanings of the practice, such as the smell and pleasure of consuming pop-corn, but simultaneously maintains a defensive tone, aware that his suggestion entails a threat of commercialisation. The proposal focuses on an “old school” machine and “paper bags” in an attempt purify the infringing object by cultivating a more emotional engagement with the meaning of the practice that could sustain symbolic boundaries to the mainstream venues. Selling popcorn by masking the practice (Canniford and Shankar, 2013) as an aesthetic intervention that can generate a vintage feel in the space justifies the proposal of adopting the exo-cultural practice, masking its meaning as an aesthetic opportunity that allows the maintenance of symbolic distance (Biehl-Missal, 2013).

Customers may also pave the way for commercial objects to infringe, due to inability or unwillingness to escape prior socialization. Rayanne’s account provides another example of a potential infringement in the bar practices:

We have always had a problem with Coke because volunteers didn’t want to buy that [the Coca-Cola brand], but then people come in and they wanted Rum and Coke. (Rayanne)

Volunteers’ expressions of anti-consumption in the cinema bar include fair-trade beverages and confectionary, as well as less-known craft beers. Such practices highlight an ethical discordance with bigger brand vendors’ practices (Cromie and Ewing, 2009). In this context, an arising customer demand for a hegemonic brand like Coca-Cola constitutes an unwanted development.

Finally, infringing practices may be necessity-driven, arising out of practical concerns or lack of resources. For example, the organization has an in-house server which hosts the website, email service and various applications which are pivotal to the running of the venue like account management, stocking etc. Keeping the server in house is an unorthodox practice for small organizations which tend to outsource server management and web hosting, both for cost and reliability reasons. The intentional anti-choice of a propriety server constitutes an identity project for the organization (Cherrier et al., 2011), with the in-house server being, in the words of one of the volunteers, “the beating heart of the community”. The server, that has been attributed a “pet name” by members, is made visible to the public by prominently featuring the practice on the organization’s website and even giving the server a sub-domain of its own¹. Through the sub-domain patrons can access a large part of the server’s contents as well as request free space to host private projects of their own. Beyond juxtapositions with arts institutions, the democratic management of, and access to the server allows for symbolic comparisons with corporations and neoliberal ways of organizing outside the arts field. As a practice of resistance keeping the server in-house emotionally engages members by constituting a source of pride, similarly to that underlying any kind of conspicuous consumption (Veblen, 1988), facilitating status comparisons. The in-house server is also an example of how productive resistance in low-resource contexts (Chalamon, 2011) largely makes use of members’ skills and capabilities to sustain symbolic demarcation, as opposed to distinction gained through investment of economic resources (Bourdieu 1984). Given the server’s status, reflecting on the possibility of outsourcing it one volunteer remarks: “There is this idea that by not having the server in the building we are somehow jettisoning a kind of core community principle”. Yet, practical problems that arise out of reliance on an in-house server allure members to adopt field-dominant practices. When the old server was to be

¹ A web address used by organizations to “brand” a particular department or function by using the name of the department or function intact in the web address

replaced by a new one, debates on which practice would be most appropriate arose. One member rationalises the contested outsourcing practice:

It should be in the bloody data centre where servers are meant to be. To have the server in the building... it is sort of daft for a lot of reasons like we were offline for half the weekend cause the connection was down, no email, no website. So sometimes it is like we are cutting our own nose to spite our face. It means we cannot host any heavy duty media because the links are not good enough. So we have actually got [filesharing platform address] which is in a server which *is* in the data centre which is sort of, you know, a weird compromise which has been accepted.

In Mark's opinion the practical downsides of this do-it-yourself practice overtake any identity benefits of the anti-consumption act which is obstructing a smooth flow of operations. As a result, the pragmatic benefits secured by the infringing practice of outsourcing overpower his need for symbolic meaning. Corroborating evidence from the previous accounts and in line with prior literature that recognises agency in objects (Bourdieu, 1977; Latour, 2005) we see that negatively contested objects can, at least temporarily, impose themselves on the organization. Emotional engagement to prior socialisations as well as the practical benefits of orthodox practices allure members, making the cinema a semi-autonomous space that cannot successfully evade field dominant practices (Arsel and Thompson, 2011). Members employ affectual justifications or reason to support the allurements given that their identity stakes are in discordance with their desires, customer wants and practicalities.

Filtering and Symbolic Demarcation

In the second stage of their trajectories negatively contested practices that face backlash from ideologically committed members get debated in terms of their “fit” with the organization and degree of association with dissociative communities (Berger and Heath, 2008; White and Dhal, 2007). Similarly to Canniford and Shankar (2012) we find that in negotiating infringing practices members distinguish between unacceptable and acceptable betrayals. Those practices that appear to be too contradictory for the space and irreconcilable with its ethos remain avoided or get abandoned along with what distaste as anti-choice dictates (Hogg, 1998; Hogg et al., 2009; Wilk, 1997). Acceptable betrayals on the other hand comprise of practices in which objects, doings and meanings are more dispersed, allowing members greater space to experiment with their enactment. In our theorization of acceptable betrayals we borrow from Schatzki’s (1996) definition of dispersed practices. In our adaptation, we propose that acceptable infringing practices comprise of elements that are easier to abstract from the overall practice, destructing from its prior meanings and facilitating its reconfiguration to a form that is constitutive of its resisting context. The tactics employed to purify more dispersed, negatively contested practices include producing DIY (do-it-yourself) alternatives and recontextualisation. The effect of these tactics on the different elements of the infringing hegemonic practice are summarised in table 2.

Table 2: Tactics of Filtering Hegemonic Practices

The infringing pop-corn suggestion constitutes an example of a practice that members deem cannot destruct from its contested nature:

I fully support this proposal [of getting a pop-corn machine], providing that popcorn purchasers are required to stay behind and clear up the mess, and that those of us who can't abide the smell are provided with surgical breathing masks. Oh yes and we'd also need a special noise filter built into the sound system to drown out that infernal crunching while the audience is watching, say, Tarkovsky's *Stalker*. (Angela)

While another member jokes:

Popcorn and a Bergman would not go together well. (Nick)

Employing an elitist, ironic narrative, Angela and Nick state the inconsistency between the contested practice and watching the artistic productions of renowned film makers. Members are subtly stereotyping the audience of mainstream movie theatres as intellectually inferior puppeteers. Mainstream consumers are in this case ideological opponents (Kozinets and Handelman, 2004) while pop-corn's function is representing their inaccessibility to the subtlety of complex works and seek for escapism. In this case the materiality of pop-corn, as well as the act of consuming it, are inseparable from the escapism meanings associated with mainstream theatre halls, making it impossible for members to act on the practice and residing in abandoning it to protect cinema-going as a skilful, highbrow activity.

Within the bar area another practice with clear anti-commercialist connotations is the distinct anti-choice of the "original" Coca-Cola and its replacement, due to audience demand, by a DIY cola drink named "Club Cola". In this anti-consumption practice, the filtering and persistent avoidance of the infringing brand constitutes a "Prêt-à-Porter" sociability which showcases the group's identity to members and audience alike (Binkley 2008). Discussing the avoidance of the Coca-Cola brand Rayanne explains:

We didn't decide against it [stocking Coca-Cola], it was never really an option. I see it [the organization] as a beacon of alternativeness to neoliberal life. It is not like a commercial situation. Instead we have trained volunteers over the years on how to make [cola] syrup which is quite hard to get. And it now actually runs on its own, the syrup production, and it took forever to get everyone into it... People understand that it is homemade, anyone who understands the open source, probably not so many people, but people who get the open source connection, not the idea that it is open source. (Rayanne)

By contrast to the pop-corn example, the materiality of the cola drink is separable to its underlying meanings because of the mediation of the contested Coca-Cola brand. The domestic production of a Doppelgänger brand as a way of performing rejection (Hennion, 2001) provides a solution that caters to audience demands while at the same time maintains the necessary distance from exploitative organizations (Thompson, Rindfleisch and Arsel, 2006). Similarly to the in-house server example, the production of a homemade cola drink serves to exemplify an ethos of autonomy that rejects reliance on contested suppliers.

Aside from refining bar practices, programming constitutes another major area that undergoes filtering, arising out of individual members' allurements towards more commercial forms of entertainment. Such cultural offerings on a first instance seem like an alien choice for the community, but are negotiated through recontextualisation tactics that ensure an aesthetic discrimination (Arsel and Thompson, 2011) is in place. As Jordan explains:

You can show something that is incredibly commercial but there needs to be a good reason that backs it up. And that reason may be a sort of take on it, that transforms what it is into something else. So it essentially isn't the thing that it was. (...) It [showing commercial films] seems inappropriate to me unless there is a swing on it or a reason. It is something that you can see elsewhere, a big

commercial film that is available elsewhere and if you are just showing it as a film, that is a waste and damaging I would say. Unless you adapt it in some way.

(Jordan)

Jordan expresses his frustration with the choice to put on popular films that may be widely available in cinemas throughout the country and stresses the potential negative effects of such practices. In this case, members move beyond symbolic demarcation to negotiating a more skilful aesthetic discrimination that frames the contested object as an only “surface similarity” and thus “disavowing the attributes of outgroups while consuming the same things” (Arsel and Thompson, 2011, p. 799). A recurring event of that sort is the monthly comedy combo night. Born out of some volunteers’ passion for repertory cinema and classic Hollywood movies from the industry’s golden era, the “Hollywood” label was still a negative association for the group and thus faced backlash. In unsolicited conversations participants state that the genre was initially opposed for lacking experimentation and criticality, while some members suggested that repertory cinema was “available elsewhere”, “predictable” and “boring” and not in line with what the space offers. Eventually, and with the insistence of those in favour of rep cinema, the showcasing of the genre was combined with an open invitation for standup comedians, to create the comedy combo events: one hour of open mic and a classic comedy film. Patti explains:

I have always been very passionate about films, particularly kind of golden age Hollywood films (...) They (some members) said it is not very exciting and that we needed to add something to it, there needed to be something extra about it. So I thought all right then, let me show some comedies and my extra will be stand up.

And so now we have a regular comedy combo event. (Patti)

Members are problematizing the integration of contested Hollywood films to the regimes governing the community looking for a “focused intention” for the practice (Arsel and Bean,

2013) that is coherent with a more skilled audience of avant-garde comedy enthusiasts. By contrast to producing DIY alternatives, tactics of recontextualisation maintain hegemonic objects intact. This is achieved by isolating dispersed objects from their contested practice and elaborating them into events. Unlike the appropriated hegemonic practices that result from producing DIY alternatives, the elaboration of recontextualised objects produces entirely new practices. The contested object only plays a supportive role in the new practice as it is a secondary element integrated in an active performance. The participatory character of the new practice brings to the forefront the expertise of members and enthusiasts, providing those involved with opportunities to exhibit their cultural capital, put their skills in action and even accrue new skills (for example members as well as audiences can take part in the stand-up). This is contrasted with the practice of consuming similar films in mainstream theatre halls which allow an only passive engagement with the object of practice.

Reconstituting Space: Singularising the Cinema-Going Experience

The last stage of practice trajectories demonstrates how the space in which members operate is reconstituting of hegemonic practices in that it is reconstituted *by* purified infringing practices and reconstituting *of* them, thus acquiring an authority of its own. Rejected, appropriated and, new practices serve as “place markers”, turning the *space* into a distinct *place* where resistant identities are produced (Visconti, Sherry, Borghini and Anderson, 2010) and where the cinema-going experience is singularized (Miller, 1987).

Unacceptable betrayals, comprising of hegemonic practices which are deemed incommensurable with the organization, restate the space’s purpose due to the unexpectedness of the rejection. As Rickie explains:

We don’t have popcorn. That came up again recently. I remember thinking that was weird. Because it’s a cinema, cinema should have popcorn. But then you have

it because the biggest cinemas define that as what cinemas do. And by not doing it you are kind of redefining what that space offers people. (Rickie)

The signifier value of the absence of pop-corn, joined with other practices of similar ilk observed in the space (i.e. the worn walls, the programming, Club Cola etc), is its ability to bring into focus the ontology from which the distinctly absent practice originates (Holden, 2001). Scott (1992, 597) argues that meanings are always deferred to a chain of signifiers and that “each fragment is defined by virtue of association with other fragments”. From this standpoint, the conspicuous absence of practices that are dominant in the community’s domain of operation constitutes an act of appropriation of the field of cinema-going itself, reclaiming a highbrowed experience.

At the same time, the repeated re-contextualisation of mainstream objects establishes scripts that dictate how hegemonic practices can be stirred to new trajectories. For example, the repackaging of old Hollywood comedies in the comedy combo event does not constitute a one-off occurrence of recontextualisation. Contemporary mainstream movies are often showcased as part of an event that negotiates their “intent”. In contrast to independent productions that are significant enough to be presented as movie-only nights, mainstream films are never a sole offering for the evening but merely a component in a “movie plus” type of script. Brian explains:

We have shown *Batman*, not the one now but the previous together with a comic book event. And it is by Nolan who is a really good director. It is a piece of cinema, not a piece of pop-corn toss. (Brian)

The skill of socially re-producing such films, the lifting of mainstream movies from their original context, a commercial multiplex, and insertion in an avant-garde space as a supporting artefact to a main event, is an integrative practice that is collectively nurtured and valorized through repetition. Tactics of recontextualisation serve as apprenticeships (Schau,

Muniz and Arnould, 2009) in that members learn how to use resources to best engage with the hegemonic object. In that sense, trajectories for acceptable betrayals, once successful, become standardised. Similarly to Arsel and Bean (2013), we find that the construction of the space and its underlining ethos provide resources that isolate contested objects from their dispersed practices and elaborates them to rituals. For when jointed with the space and the goal of the event (e.g. to produce comedy, to educated about comic book culture) the film serves as a comment on the nature of its previous context in relation to its new (Holden, 2001) in the sense that if *Batman* is treated as a piece of “pop-corn toss” in the multiplex, it is respected as a form of art within this cinema.

The successful integration of hegemonic objects in new practices through a change of the metaphysical context in which these films appear demonstrates the transformatory properties of the space. The previously infringing practices are embraced as an important aspect of the organization’s identity (Martin et al., 2006) as they constitute “evidence” of how the entertainment field can be different, even while maintaining contested hegemonies. Reflecting on the nature of the organization Sharon explains:

It is a much looser interface than most venues have [...] it is to be a model of how leisure doesn’t need to be a category, and entertainment can be something that you generate and participate in, as well as consume. (Sharon)

Sharon’s praise for the participation opportunities generated in the community by themed nights, such as the comedy combo and comic book events, critiques a perceived alienation of individuals from the production of culture, prevalent in the field of entertainment. Eco (1975) for example, argues that the consumption of a pop music concert is a display of both physical and mental energy which lures the audience. There is however an inherent contradiction between the artist producing energy while the audience is expected to observe in a comparatively passive manner. Eco perceives this as an unfair and unequal form of division

of labour which alienates the audience by forcing it into a largely inactive role. The dominant passive consumption mode of mainstream venues is rectified here with the prosuming opportunities generated by the organization, in line with the tendency of fan communities to contrast their active engagement with their object of passion with more mundane aspects of social life (Kozinets 2001).

Findings also demonstrate how the space integrates DIY alternatives by appropriating the influence of exo-cultural practices as “aesthetic responses to contesting hegemonies” (Visconti et al., 2010, 526). This is achieved through members’ treatment of utilitarian objects and practices not as contested functions that serve the commerce of running a cinema and arts venue, but as artefacts orchestrated by the space. For example, when the old server was to be replaced by a new one, members had the impulse to place the new acquisition in public view:

We could have a monitor permanently displaying the access log which would make it the coolest toilet block in town, possibly the UK. I like the idea of it being like a cabinet of curiosity type artefact. (Angela)

In the same manner as cabinet of curiosity objects had undefinable categorical boundaries, Angela describes how the server serves a functional, a symbolic and an aesthetic purpose by providing service to the community, carrying an underlying political message against propriety systems and being exhibited as a work of art. Reflections on the offering of Club Cola as a home-made alternative to the original brand reflect similar aesthetic concerns:

It [Club Cola] has become one of the things that we are proud of. To me that has been a perfect project. It has been in the media, it is like something the community is known for. People understand that it is homemade, anyone who understands the open source connection (...). It has got its own life and I guess the volunteers like it and then they talk to customers about it and people like coming

here and knowing that we got our own special stuff. (...) The motivation behind it was to extend the program into bar, I see the bar just as much as part of the program as what goes on on stage.” (Rayanne)

The appropriation of the refreshment as an artistic performance challenges the traditional expectation that cultural production takes place on stage. In this case, while bar practices are there to serve the commerce of arts venues, the ingroup deranges that order by altering and aestheticizing the mode of operation of such practices. Pleasure and status is derived in the awareness that those unable to understand the reasons behind such meaning subversions are left discomforted and excluded (Bourdieu, 1984; Holden, 2001). In both the case of the in-house server and the home made drink, what started off as an infringing need for a contested object is dealt with through the construction of a space that provides aesthetic opportunities to integrate such appropriated practices. With the space “allowing” for such symbolic transgressions to occur, the experience of cinema going is singularised by subtly challenging the limitations of the mainstream leisure model.

Discussion

Appropriation allows participants to move away from the rejection of products or services typically assumed by anti-choice (Hogg, 1998; Hogg et al., 2009; Wilk 1994) and anti-consumption behaviours (Zavestoski, 2002; Penaloza and Price, 2003; Fournier, 1998), enabling members to mobilize hegemonic practices in trajectories that reflect “our” way of doing it (Ostergaard et al., 1999). While prior research has focused extensively on how communities rely on appropriation strategies to protect their ingroup from the stigma of hegemonic practices (Arsel and Thompson, 2011; Kozinets, 2001; Muniz and Hamer, 2001; Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001; Schouten and McAlexander, 1995), it is unclear what trajectories

such practices transcend from their initial forms to more community friendly expressions. In investigating such trajectories we draw attention to the longitudinal nature of the appropriation journey and explain the mechanisms that underlie the purification of contested hegemonies when members reject objects and their enactment, replace objects by domesticizing their production and, isolate negatively contested objects, enacting them in elaborated practices. We find that an anti-establishment space can only be semi-autonomous from the market, since allurements as well as practical concerns “tempt” participants with the adoption of negatively contested practices (Kozinets 2002), giving rise to filtering mechanisms. By orchestrating new trajectories members are able to alleviate conflicts arising from the ideological incongruence between the nature of the space and associated distinctions, and the contested character of field-dominant practices. Trajectories result in the appropriation of the field from which the contested practice originates from, the appropriation of the practice itself or the initiation of an entirely new practice. For the journey to be successful, however, both unacceptable betrayals and purified practices need to be able to contribute to a spatial anti-consumption system of meanings. Accordingly, the last stage of practice trajectories is one of contextual integration.

Findings demonstrate that distinction motives do not always prevail in the community’s consumption preferences. Extending prior studies in countercultural consumption contexts (Arsel and Thompson, 2011; Hietaken and Rokka, 2015; Kozinets, 2002; Kozinets and Handelman, 2004; Martin et al., 2006; Schouten and McAlexander, 1995), we provide insights behind the motivations of adopting ideologically incongruent practices, specifying practical concerns, prior socialisation, emotional attachment to field established habits and individual preferences as the triggers of appropriation. Building on discussions on the tensions between countercultural and mainstream market dynamics (Hietaken and Rokka, 2015), our study attributes such tensions to members having to satisfy micro-stakes – i.e.

those that have their roots in practicalities and temporary affectual allurements- which are conflicting with contextual macro-stakes like the preservation of the nature of the experience. The study of practice appropriation has been dominated by a perspective which privileges the authority of the tribe in the resignification process (Arsel and Thompson, 2011; Holt, 2008; Schouten and McAlexander, 1995; Martin et al., 2006). Instead, we demonstrate how authority shifts in a sequential fashion from the contested practice to the space as a whole. In this process, members act as “enablers” of a shift of focus from the infringing practice in question and the micro stakes it serves, to the space as a whole and the macro goals of community. Conspicuous resistance is thus not only grounded in restricting the mainstream practices that members get involved with (Hietaken and Rokka, 2015). Our investigated organization more importantly gains distinction from the purification abilities of the space and its ability to transform commercial practices and integrate hegemonic objects, ultimately exercising a greater authority over such objects than that of the mainstream marketplace. The agency of the space lies in its choice-editing properties (Mayo and Fielder, 2006) to the extent that choices are made *for* participants *by* the space. The cinema houses the value orientations, resources and skills that members need to advance hegemonic practice trajectories. Building on prior research that suggests practices operate like apprenticeships for community members (Schau et al., 2009), we find that space is an agent actively contributing to this learning process. Operating as a toolset, spatial conditions provide the coordinates for what practices can or cannot be successfully purified, expedite purification tactics, and increase the visibility and symbolic value of appropriated and resignified practices.

The integration stage of infringing practices highlights how conspicuous rejection is a highly contextual act, grounded both in the context in which it takes place but also bringing into the forefront the settings from which the concerned commodity or practice originates (Holden 2001). Warde (2005, 139) argues that “practices have a trajectory or path of

development, a history". By outlining such trajectories we seek intent in the dialectic relationship that exists between the previous, hegemonic consumption context, the current context of anti-consumption and the rejected, replaced or isolated commodity. We find that conspicuous resistance is achieved spatially given that the meanings of absent and appropriated acts are supported by a holistic anti-establishment experience. Integrated practices (re)constitute the space in an elitist manner as a space for thinkers, enthusiasts and intellectuals while, in turn, the space continuously improves its capabilities for effectively integrating infringing practices in its context. In that sense, practices and space exist in a co-dependent relationship.

An example of how practices constitute space and vice-versa can be found in anti-choice. Findings show that the anti-choice of an unacceptable betrayal (Canniford and Shankar, 2013) in a particular setting generates meanings for the space associated with a highbrow experience, insofar as the absent practice is one that has powerful associations to the context within which it originates and from where the practice's meanings originate (Holden 2001). For example, by removing the material comforts of a modern chain multiplex cinema (decorations, sitting areas etc), the space criticises the escapism meanings associated with cinema-going and that are in conflict with the ingroup's regime (Arsel and Bean, 2013). In turn, contextual and spatial conditions support the contested nature of rejection (for example, in the case of our findings the absence of a pop-corn machine becomes conspicuous within a shabby, radical cinema venue). Once integrated in the space, anti-choice has a spillover effect to other practices in that it reinforces the meaning of appropriated acceptable betrayals taking place in the context. Equally, the resistance motives that underlie DIY alternatives and new practices that accommodate intact contested commodities, such as mainstream films integrated in events, are communicated more effectively due to their integration in a singularised space.

Practical Implications

From a marketing point of view, findings increase our understanding of how mobilizing hegemonic practices in new trajectories can create symbolic value in relation to “what else is there” within a given field. Particularly in a sector like the cultural industries the question of how symbolic value is generated and managed becomes an increasingly complex one (Edvardsson et al., 2011) given the range of options that consumers have available in their pursuit for distinction. The entertainment industry and movie theatres in particular, despite the realisation that consumers are increasingly looking for authentic and diversified products, are persistently offering a massified, fetishized experience or rely on creating co-opted environments which capitalise on an “alternative” positioning. Both types of experience, however, are becoming irrelevant to the critical consumer who, attempting to escape mechanical reproductions, is seeking a closer connection to artistic offerings (Adorno and Rabinbach, 1975). Through an opposite process of attempting to co-opt what are largely hegemonic field practices, consumers are reclaiming the connection between the object of art and its reproduction, creating environments which, while unable to evade an at least partial dependence on the industry’s ways, manage to provide opportunities for expressing resistance.

The study further shows how resisting organizations with limited resources, particularly those operating in competitive fields, can employ negatively asserted value as a way of attracting and maintaining consumers. For example, our investigated organization cannot always afford the cost of hiring new films from distributors and as a consequence may delay the screening of new releases. While this significantly lowers distributor costs, since the film’s cost is reduced as it loses its novelty, at the same time the organization is disadvantaged in the face of lucrative mainstream theatre halls that seize audiences by

showcasing the same films first. By singularizing the cinema going experience through means of their collective skills, members are able to attract loyal audiences that are willing to wait in order to experience the film in this particular context. Not unlike independent bookshops or record stores competing with more lucrative corporate chains, the importance of context in enabling consumers' engagement with the object of practice is grave for such resisting organizations and our study shows how even hegemonic practices can contribute to the construction of systems of meanings that engage field aficionados.

We further propose that resisting organizations can benefit from better comprehending the distinction between acts of resistance that are repeated and scripted and those that require more heavy resource investment to be carried out. The production of DIY alternatives as a way of appropriating hegemonic practices is harder to repeat because of the amount and diversity of resources that members need to sustain in-house production. For example, the production of Club Cola required extensive time and research and the use of an external laboratory in order to take place. By contrast, recontextualisation relies on more readily available discursive resources –and primarily members' cultural capital-, facilitating repetition and scripting. As a result, recontextualisation tactics, where members have become more efficient in isolating the contested object, tend to correspond to faster trajectories for hegemonic practices, while DIY alternatives constitute more long-term investing tactics of appropriation. While both of these tactics may be useful to resisting organizations, we propose that low resource organizations in particular can benefit from scripting that allows them to readily assert negatively driven distinction as well as eliminate the paradox of having to rely on field-dominant tactics due to practicalities or allurements. Scripting involves a more calculated approach to learning from members' skills and past successes and establishing these as repeated rituals that make the organization “known for” a singularized experienced in a largely commercialised field.

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