

## Introduction

*This special issue documents and extends some of the academic debates that took place in Sofia during the symposium “New Perspectives and Interventions: the State of Play in Cultural Sociology and Sociology of Arts” (31.08–02.09.2023) as a joint initiative of two European Sociological Association (ESA) Research Networks: RN07 (Sociology of Culture) and RN02 (Sociology of the Arts), supported by the Bulgarian Sociological Association and the Departments of Sociology and Cultural Studies at the Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”.*

*The symposium’s title and call for papers consciously deployed Bourdieusian terminology in its reference to the “state of play” in these specific subfields of sociology. Central to discussions, therefore, was a consideration of the potential limits of (post)Bourdiesian sociology, i.e., the extent to which the sociology of arts and culture – while confronting the challenges of a digitised world of artificial intelligence and post-humanism – is moving beyond the methodological and theoretical boundaries delineated by Pierre Bourdieu, or whether it is expanding the conceptual range of this key perspective on arts and culture. More specific debates ensued about whether Bourdieu’s metaphors were now constraining the ability to deploy the sociological imagination or whether they remained the most effective conceptual tools available, the “historical quintessence” of the field, to use Bourdieu’s terminology.*

*Three particular global “events” of long duration provided an immediate backdrop for several papers and keynote presentations. One was the COVID-19 pandemic that the world was still re-emerging from at the time of the conference. The repercussions were still felt especially in the arts and cultural sphere, and the global pandemic’s short- and long-term effects were often directly explored or indirectly reflected. Another is Russia’s invasion of the Ukraine. This was the topic of Oleksandra Nenko’s powerful keynote, “Troubled Home”: Displaced Place Identity in the War-time Works of Ukrainian Artists. Thirdly, though gender discrimination and sexual harassment in society in general and the arts and culture sectors in particular are not new, and have been topics of research for ESA RN02 members for years – such as Marie Buscatto, Mathilde Provansal and Sari Karttunen, the #metoo movement accentuated the issues and silenced histories that began to emerge and provide the basis for concerted analysis.*

*The selected works in the current thematic issue echo some of the symposium’s main questions, among which are: What do cultural sociology and sociology of the arts have to say about the crises of our times, characterised by growing*

risks, insecurities, inequalities and overall precarity? More specifically, in symbolic production, what interventions can sociology of culture and arts make in critiquing canons and hierarchies of value? To what extent is sociology an activist discipline when it researches the practices of activism/artivism? How can digital humanities approaches contribute to research on art in public spaces? What is the impact of social and digital inequalities on cultural practices? What methodological and pedagogical innovations derive from scholarship in cultural sociology and sociology of the arts?

These topics were also reflected in the core event of the symposium, the round-table discussion, a transcription of which is presented in this volume. During this discussion, the interlocutors considered the various challenges associated with “doing sociology”: researching, teaching and thinking sociologically; critically revisiting old concepts and inventing new ones; developing new sub-fields; working in collaboration with others and across fields; and deploying metaphors as means of enabling (and inhibiting) the sociological imagination and quest for precision – in response to uncertainties and crises.

In the masterfully written introductory essay, based on his keynote lecture, **David Inglis** depicts sociology as caught between its intellectual aspirations and the academic neoliberal realities, but above all – as a metaphoric science, whose analysis of the social world depends first of all on naming processes which necessarily involve drawing upon metaphors. This is a continuous process as “things being studied are in some sense akin to, or comparable with, other things that we already have names for”. Once a metaphor is in place, it influences what sociologists choose to study (and, by extension, what they overlook). The author traces the history and the *raison d’être* of different long-deployed sociological metaphors such as “social stratification”, borrowed from “strata” in geology; “field”, introduced by Bourdieu (who borrowed this from Weber); the animal nutrition-related metaphor of the “omnivore”, devised by Richard Peterson at least in part as a means of producing a theoretical model distinguishable from Bourdieu’s. As Inglis notes, this metaphor has launched thousands of studies globally testing the link between social class background and taste. Central to Inglis’s provocative argument is that sociologists can be trapped by the metaphors they deploy. This is because metaphors “may ossify, become widely accepted but hollow clichés” and constrain how reality is perceived. Further, some metaphors are favoured over others due to power dynamics in the field. They set the boundaries and limits of the research agenda as expressed in “state of play” literature reviews. Inglis concludes that the task of sociology is to seek out new and productive metaphors (including redeploying old ones) while

discarding those that are “dead” or rigid, which now hinder or limit the ability to think sociologically.

Another possible trajectory of cultural sociology and sociology of arts is presented in the article “Art, Media, and Spirituality: Haunted by Algorithms?” by **Guido Nicolosi**, devoted to the relationships of arts and media as objectified forms of the human creative mind, in the context of the often-underestimated role of materiality as an agent (“anchor”) of cultural memory, supporting the transmission of traditions and tacit knowledge. More specifically, the article aims to shed light on a little studied (and to some extent taboo) topic in late modernity’s secular intellectual cultures: the raising of new forms of spiritual beliefs and new kinds of animism, paradoxically enabled by the latest technological developments and related to digital media in contemporary society. Nicolosi reflects on “the uncomfortable duality of irrational beliefs and rational technologies”. Intertwining in his analysis the earliest manifestations of prehistoric art with the development of magical animistic beliefs, Nicolosi traces the line of objectification of these fantastic beliefs through artefacts, media and technological innovations from early modern times to the current era. Nicolosi refers to these phenomena as new forms of sacralisation in post-secular society.

In his article “More matter, with less art? On the transformation of university students’ cultural lifestyles and culturalization after the millennium” **Jan Fredrik Hovden** uses longitudinal data from surveys of students at four different tertiary educational institutions in Bergen, Norway from 1998 (N=1113), 2008 (N=1223) and 2020 (N=1589), to explore changes in how the student population integrates into the cultural field. Hovden’s primary focus is on how this correlates with the social class origins of the students and educational programmes pursued. The analysis is back-dropped against long-term changes in university education and access to the world of arts and culture in Norway, which parallel trends in the rest of Europe. Increasing polarisation regarding class background and educational programmes in terms of both economic and cultural capital is observed. Based on sophisticated and detailed quantitative analysis of the longitudinal data, Hovden finds that “rather than a great social levelling of educational and cultural opportunities, the [educational] reforms and proclaimed [cultural] revolutions have, if anything, strengthened the class differences among the students in Bergen in both respects, demonstrating the immense inertia of the social world and the efficiency of its reproductive social mechanisms”. Furthermore, Hovden sees classical arts and cultural forms, and the canonical national Norwegian arts and cultural figures in decline among the sampled university students in Bergen. In the face of this general decline, Hovden also finds students

are increasingly following the cultural and economic trajectories laid down in their parental homes, concluding that universities now function less as an open arena of change and lifestyle socialisation than an arena that accelerates and consolidates initial cultural and economic class segmentation.

Contributing to debates about taste and evaluative judgements, **Simon Stewart** examines the critical reception of Woody Allen's film *A Rainy Day in New York* (RDNY), when Allen was under scrutiny as a consequence of allegations about his private life. In his thematic analysis of 81 reviews written – in the main – by established film critics from around the world, Stewart outlines three interrelated modes of evaluative judgment. Field-specific aesthetic judgements assess the properties of a cultural object concerning the state of play in the culture field. For example, in the case of RDNY, the dialogue is deemed to be archaic, and the actors, Timothée Chalamet and Elle Fanning, “appear to be reciting an alien language they learned phonetically”. Ethical judgements refer beyond the field to the sense of a “common good” and are rooted in what Max Weber called “value-rational” social action. They are prominent when (for example) Allen's film is criticised in terms of its gender politics and when links are made between allegations about his behaviour towards women and RDNY's depiction of amorous older men in pursuit of much younger women. In considering the temporal dimension of evaluative judgements, Stewart borrows and adapts insights from the classical sociologist Georg Simmel's notion of “objective culture”, drawing attention to the tension between the critical reception of RDNY at the moment and the aesthetic value that has accrued to Allen's reputation over time which speaks with a “supra-individual voice” made up of countless evaluative judgements. This raises the question: if objective culture represents the concentrated mental labour of the past and present, with what voice will it speak about Allen's work in the future?

As mentioned above, the topic of sex discrimination and gender equality was a pertinent theme at the conference. The article “The Gender Gap in the Bulgarian Film Industry” by **Alexander Donev** and **Emilia Angelova** brings a local focus by investigating awareness of and attitudes towards gender inequalities in the Bulgarian film industry. The article is based on a survey of 132 respondents in the Bulgarian film industry. By a common metric, accounting for the released films directed by females, with 18% Bulgaria lags slightly below the EU average in the period 2017–2021, 22%, and substantially behind the front-runners in the EU which average over 30%, revealing the potential for improvement of the equality between the sexes is that area. However, Donev & Angelova compare their survey results to actual statistics and show that male respondents tend to underestimate the gender

gap in many different areas of the film industry, thus misjudging or downplaying the problem. While there is an awareness of the gender gap, most accurately perceived among females in the industry but also among males to a lesser extent, Donev & Angelova find an important policy-relevant difference regarding how best to correct this inequality. The work done by Donev & Angelova is highly significant in that it outlines the contours and depth of the challenge of promoting gender equality in the Bulgarian, and likely similar, other film industries.

**Voica Pușcașiu** narrates in her article the story of an initially limited task for students to digitally map monuments in the public spaces of the middle-size Romanian town of Cluj-Napoca during one of the COVID-19 lockdowns. Gradually, after expanding the task, collecting information about more than 250 monuments from across Romania and creating a digital interactive pilot map, a bigger project emerged out of the desire to make a comparison between the situation and perceptions of Romania's monuments and those of other countries in the region, "considering the rather superficial yet well-known similarities" between many cultural, ethnic, and religious differences and nationalistic discourses in the countries representing the former Communist Bloc. As the author reports, the crowdsourcing call for monuments profited from Erasmus+ mobilities and conferences in the region and Contested Histories – an initiative of the EuroClio network, albeit with variable degrees of success. One of the interesting conclusions is that the public monuments in the post-socialist countries which often have been analysed as a source of endless culture wars, are in Romania consigned to a forgotten past to which the present young generations are not sensitive. Finally, the article is a good empirical case to contemplate the possibilities and restrictions of the method of digital cartography as a grassroots initiative.

Contributing to debates about cultural production, **Lía Durán Mogollón's** article examines the habitus of literary translators while also seeking insights from others working in the field, including authors, publishers, agents, and employers in public agencies. Mogollón's focus is on literary translators and their structural position, one that lends itself to expressions of a 'radical habitus' comparable to that of social movement activists and which enables them to navigate the challenges of creatively working with texts across languages and different regions of the literary field. Whether connecting with other translators as part of transnational networks or reading alongside authors at literary events, translators can pursue their vocation while accumulating symbolic, cultural and social capital. Their cultural capital extends beyond higher education qualifications and knowledge of a foreign language because they are also skilled writers, diligent readers of literature across languages,

*and expert decoders of local dialects and small talk. At the centre of their specialism is “Sprachgefühl”, which translates as language sensitivity. At the same time, they are constrained by the size of local markets, the limits of state funding and the precarious nature of their work in the light of technological developments. Moreover, the economic capital they accrue is sufficiently limited to ensure that many of them have to work in other jobs to augment their income.*

Svetlana Hristova, Simon Stewart, Christopher Mathieu