

Moulding Cultural Capital into Cosmopolitan Capital

Media practices as reconversion work in a globalising world

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Abstract

Various media allow people to build transnational networks, learn about the world and meet people from other cultures. In other words, media may allow one to cultivate cosmopolitan capital, defined here as a distinct form of embodied cultural capital. However, far from everyone is identifying this potential. Analyses of a national survey and in-depth interviews, conducted in Sweden, disclose a tendency among those in possession of cultural capital to recognise and exploit cosmopolitan capital in their media practices. Those who are dispossessed of cultural capital are significantly less liable to approach media in this way. Relying on various media practices in order to reshape one's cultural capital exemplifies what Bourdieu called a reconversion strategy. As social fields undergo globalisation, media offer opportunities for the privileged to remain privileged – to change in order to conserve.

Keywords: cultural capital, cosmopolitan capital, media practices, Bourdieu; media use

Introduction

Across scholarly and popular discourse it is often implied that the media landscape, in all its diversity, constitutes a venue where dispersed members of the “global village” would come together in moments of cosmopolitan cultivation. Hannerz (1990: 249) and Hebdige (1990) argued, respectively, that cosmopolitanism was now part of everyday experience, because of the “implosive power of the media”, or, because other cultures now come visit us on our screens. Such thinking is echoed in notions that media render “the global” “ready-to-hand” (Szerszynski & Urry 2002), when questioning whether cosmopolitanism can be mass-mediated (Herbert & Black 2013; Rantanen 2005), and in ideas that social media are forums of “virtual cosmopolitanism” (McEwan & Sobré-Denton 2013) or constitute “cosmopolitan contact-zones” (Herbert & Black 2013). What seems to be implied here is that agents across social strata harness cosmopolitan capital from the affordances offered by various media. We take issue with such descriptions and argue that even if we accept the problematic assumption that media invite us to

become cosmopolitans, we are left with the largely unattended question of what sense different social agents make of such invitations. If media are to be seen as sources of cosmopolitan capital for social agents, one needs to carefully consider *by whom* this potential is identified and appreciated. In order to shed light on these matters we draw on Bourdieu's sociology since it promotes an understanding of the relationship between culture consumption, lifestyles and the social hierarchy.

We seek to investigate the role of individuals' volume of cultural capital – a set of embodied, objectified or institutionalised symbolical resources that improve chances in life (such as university degrees, occupational titles and “legitimate” ways of manoeuvring in the social world manifested in “cultivated” tastes and manners [Bourdieu 1986]) – in recognising the media as instruments for accumulating and maintaining cosmopolitan capital. That is, using media for creating or maintaining transnational social networks, learning about other cultures, and staying up to date on what is going on in the world. We find inspiration in Bourdieu's notion of reconversion strategies (1984), as well as in the sociology of cosmopolitanism which has theorised cosmopolitanism as an important resource in contemporary, increasingly transnational, social life. When analysed as a form of capital, cosmopolitanism becomes set of socially recognised resources and skills used to navigate in a globalising world, embodied and reproduced in privileged groups in society (Bühlmann et al. 2013; Calhoun 2002; Christensen & Jansson 2015; Igarashi & Saito 2014; Kim 2011; Weenink 2008; Weiss 2005). Our aim is thus to examine if and how cultural capital shapes the ways in which social agents approach various media and their affordances, i.e. how they *classify* the media as means to obtain cosmopolitan capital and thereby reproduce their position in the class structure.

This perspective allows us to move beyond arguments which posit that the affordances and wide dissemination of various tools for mediated communication between cultures “may now make just about everybody a little more cosmopolitan” (Hannerz 1990: 249; cf. Beck 2011; Held 2010). We propose a more nuanced understanding of the complexities involved in how people orient themselves in relation to the potentially cosmopolitanising affordances in the media landscape – an approach inspired by Coudry's call for a “socially oriented media theory” (2012) and Madianou & Miller's (2012) concept of polymedia, through which today's everyday contexts of media practice can be understood as “an environment of affordances” (ibid: 170). In order to address these questions we draw on a national survey as well as qualitative interviews with young men from various social positions in Sweden.

Cosmopolitanism as mediated: Problem area and research question

In media studies, *cosmopolitanism* has predominately been understood as a moral will to act upon injustices and suffering in the less privileged areas of the globe – a willingness that can potentially be triggered by various mediated appeals (Chouliaraki 2013; Joye 2009; Madianou 2013; Scott 2013). While this body of research addresses a topical issue – the moral force of the media in the age of globalisation – it stops short of considering cosmopolitanism as included in, and affected by, processes sustaining power relations between groups, or classes, *within* a society. A particularly pronounced strand of research has focused on the semiotic-discursive make-up of various media outlets, with the risk of assuming, more or less explicitly, that social agents react in accordance

with the communicative invitations on offer (see, for example, Chouliaraki 2008; 2013; Joye 2009; Orgad 2012). A diverse media landscape risks being treated as a means to universal cosmopolitan cultivation. This thinking is perhaps most explicitly spelled out in Poster's argument:

If the figure of the cosmopolitan suggests an upper or middle class liberal persona, then the recent articulations of global culture are well beyond those relatively restricted limits, extending the imagined community of participants quite broadly across the planet and throughout all social strata. (2008: 699)

Such rhetoric is visible to varying degrees in discussions of the possibility of mass-mediated cosmopolitanism (Herbert & Black 2013; Rantanen 2005), as well as in the supposition that "media can endow people with the necessary skills and predispositions to develop the cosmopolitan outlook" (Yilmaz & Trandafoiu 2014: 4). A growing body of research has delivered empirically informed critique and nuance to notions that media audiences develop cosmopolitan sympathies when consuming various media, and emphasised that different groups in society relate to the global potentials of the media in different ways (see e.g. Kyriakidou 2009; Lindell 2014; Ong 2015; Scott 2013; von Engelhardt & Jansz 2014). We seek to expand upon this strand of research by studying cosmopolitanism as a resource in "the struggle for privileged positions in trans-national arenas" (Weenink 2008: 1103) that may, or may not, be identified and exploited by audiences and users via various media practices (an open-ended concept dealing with all that which "people do/say/think that are oriented to the media" [Couldry 2004: 124]). Following Bourdieu's (1984) notion of reconversion strategies (i.e. the (pre-)reflexive strategies deployed by privileged social agents in order to maintain their privilege as social fields undergo structural transformations), the possibility that various groups in society identify, appreciate and make use of the cosmopolitanising affordances of the media in divergent ways, and that such multiplicities of media-related practices fit into wider processes of social reproduction, warrants consideration.

The sociology of cosmopolitanism has addressed cosmopolitanism as a form of capital, and thus highlighted both that it encompasses more than a moral disposition and that it is tied to the dynamics of social reproduction in transnational social contexts (see e.g. Igarashi & Saito 2014; Weenink 2008). Regrettably, the role of the media in generating such capital is still being somewhat obscured. Skrbis et al (2004), Kendall et al (2009), Holton (2009) and Skrbis & Woodward (2013), who all otherwise skilfully argue that we need to identify the "structural realities" of cosmopolitanism (Kendall et al. 2009:21), remain inattentive to the fact that the various ways in which groups approach the media and their affordances may in themselves be connected to processes of social reproduction. Discussions tend to come to a premature halt once the possibility that "exposure to media" might "predispose one to react positively to the idea of contact with other cultures" (ibid: 22) has been unravelled. For example, Vertovec & Cohen suggest that media "represent obvious sites for stimulating cosmopolitan awareness and highlighting cosmopolitan practices" (2002: 21). Our present times are thus "perfectly suited to the proliferation" of cosmopolitanism, thanks in part to how media contribute to creating a "shared sense of the world as a whole" (Skrbis et al. 2004: 117). Beck, in turn, holds that the media, at certain times, "[create] an awareness that strangers in distant places *are following the same events with the same fears and worries as*

oneself. Strangers become neighbours!” (Beck 2011: 1350). Along similar lines, Held has argued that cultural cosmopolitanism has been “given an enormous impetus by the sheer scale, intensity, speed and volume of global cultural communication” (2010: 111). Broadly speaking, then, whereas media studies tend to approach cosmopolitanism as compassion or morality that may or may not be triggered by the media, the sociology of cosmopolitanism remains empirically inattentive to questions regarding the role of media in cosmopolitan cultivation.

There is thus a gap in existing research in that not enough attention has been paid to the ways in which cultural capital engenders divergent orientations towards the media as a potential means for obtaining *cosmopolitan capital*. A central question regards the extent to which the moral force of the media described by media studies constitutes an opportunity for dominant class fractions to reproduce their social status.

We do owe Merton credit for establishing that “cosmopolitans”, rather than “locals”, tend to recognise that the media potentially enables involvement with “the outside world” (1968:461). However, empirical research needs to detail how agents with different volumes of cultural capital approach the media, and the extent to which the classifications of media for cosmopolitan cultivation are incorporated in more or less reflexive strategies for nurturing a privileged position in society. Recent sociological research has shown that cultural capital as a force of social division in society is less (or not only) about being well-versed in traditional highbrow culture, but (also) about being “connected to IT, communication and globalisation” (Prieur, Rosenlund & Skjott-Larsen 2008: 67). Cosmopolitan media practices are emerging as new ways for the privileged to manifest cultural distinction (Meuleman & Savage 2013; Prieur & Savage 2011). We seek to build upon these findings by studying how social agents describe various media and their (cosmopolitan) affordances. Against this backdrop, we pose the following research question: *What is the role played by cultural capital when it comes to approaching various media as sources for obtaining cosmopolitan capital?* The next section delineates the Bourdieusian framework on which we base our approach.

Cosmopolitan capital and media classification

When thinking about an individually-embodied cosmopolitanism in a globalising world “from the perspective of social inequality” (Weenink 2008:1104), it is fruitful to approach it as a form of capital (Bourdieu 1986; Igarashi & Saito 2014). *Cosmopolitan capital* is defined as those resources that individuals draw upon in order to gain or maintain their social positions as fields become increasingly transnational (Kim 2011; Weenink 2008); it is seen as “a portfolio of resources that are globally acknowledged and asked for” (Weiss 2005: 723). The contents of this portfolio can range from necessary competencies for interacting with people from various parts of the world (Weenink 2008), to having a “cosmopolitan lifestyle and taste” (Kim 2011: 113; cf. Meuleman & Savage 2013). Cosmopolitan capital is thus a distinct form of embodied cultural capital that is increasingly important in the struggle over social positions across various social fields, as they undergo globalisation (Bühlmann et al. 2013; Weenink 2008).

We are faced with an ongoing “evolution of class societies” (Bourdieu 1984:157) in terms of the globalisation of social fields and the emergent importance of cosmopolitan capital (cf. Bühlmann et al. 2013; Christensen & Jansson 2015; Igarashi & Saito 2014;

Weenink 2008). Media become important in relation to such transformations because they have the capacity, in theory, to facilitate the accumulation of cosmopolitan capital. Social agents may “work on themselves” via media practices to keep on a par with the transnationalisation of social fields – for example by establishing contacts abroad and learning to navigate other cultural settings. However, we should not expect everyone to recognise the value of such media practices. Since previous research has unearthed a connection between cultural capital and cosmopolitan capital (Meuleman & Savage 2013; Prieur & Savage 2011) it is relevant to speak of *reconversion strategies*, via Bourdieu, as

actions and reactions whereby each group strives to maintain or change its position in the social structure, or, more precisely – at a stage in the evolution of class societies in which one can conserve only by changing – to change so as to conserve. (Bourdieu 1984: 157)

Those in possession of cultural capital may increasingly have to rely (unconsciously and consciously) on reconversion strategies to maintain or improve their positions. Members of social classes already in possession of cultural capital, e.g. in the form of educational merits, could be expected to be socially predisposed to identify and recognise the value of the cosmopolitan potentials of the media landscape as a means of conserving their position in society. In other words, the global affordances of various media might constitute ways for agents to mould their cultural capital into cosmopolitan capital, i.e. to “cosmopolitanise” their cultural capital.

Thus *media classifications* – the affordances that social agents recognise and possibly exploit in the contemporary media landscape – are likely to work in tandem with the volume of cultural capital a social agent possesses. Media practices are thus “classified” in the sense that they tend to work concurrently with agents’ capital and habitus, defined in Bourdieu & Wacquant (1992:126-127) as “the durable and transposable systems of schemata of perception, appreciation, and action that result from the institution of the social in the body” (see e.g. Bennett et al. 2009; Danielsson 2014; Skeggs et al. 2008). Though not typical in the research conducted at the intersection of media studies and the sociology of cosmopolitanism (as delineated above), the basic premises of this perspective are hardly new: research on media audiences has repeatedly unearthed the socially structured (and structuring) nature of media reception and use (see e.g. Danielsson 2014; Kim 2004; Reimer 1994; Robinson 2009; Skeggs & Wood 2011).

On an overarching level, our proposition that cosmopolitan media classifications are connected to the possession of cultural capital would suggest that those who have higher levels of education and occupy more privileged social positions will be more disposed to identify that various media may allow them to build transnational social networks and learn about the world. More specifically, and moving into our qualitative data, we may expect young men undertaking vocational education, and growing up in homes generally lacking in cultural capital, not to recognise (or even to distance themselves from) such affordances in the media. By contrast, young men enrolled in university preparatory schools with academically-qualified parents could be expected to be predisposed (by way of habitus) to a more cosmopolitan classification of the media (Bourdieu 1984).

In the following sections we investigate this proposition empirically by examining the connection between social positions and classifications of the media landscape as a source for obtaining or cultivating cosmopolitan capital.

Method and material

In addressing the role played by cultural capital in classifying media as sources of cosmopolitan capital, we combine analytical strategies and data material collected within two different projects (Danielsson 2014; Lindell 2014). The dual focus enabled by combining the two projects allows us first to provide a general overview on the social stratification of cosmopolitan media classifications and second to delve deeper into how young men under different conditions of existence (mis)recognise the cosmopolitan potentials of the media. First, we draw on a national web survey that was distributed to a representative sample of 2,500 people in Sweden in February 2013 (Lindell 2014). The response rate was 41 per cent (n = 1025). Three statements with which respondents were asked to agree/disagree were provided. The statements were designed to capture an orientation toward the contemporary media landscape that has as its leitmotif the obtaining or maintaining of cosmopolitan capital, that is, a cosmopolitan media classification (Table 1). Variables were constructed as an index that ranges from 1 (“do not agree at all”) to 10 (“completely agree”) (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.68). Using regression analysis, variables were related to age, gender, transnational mobility, political orientation, residency, respondents’ self-designation of their social class, and education. Since we are here interested in cultural capital, and social positions in more general terms, we used subjective class position and level of education to position respondents in a class structure.

Table 1. *Cosmopolitan media classification: Variables used and their interrelation*

| Media and technologies of communication... | Component 1 |
|--|-------------|
| ...make me experience the world as a smaller place | .742 |
| ...put me in contact with peoples and cultures in other parts of the world | .860 |
| ...motivate me to travel to meet people and cultures in other parts of the world | .747 |

Comment: Loading scores, one component extracted in principal component analysis (Varimax rotation).

Second, in order to explore social agents’ own narratives about the cosmopolitan potentials embedded in today’s media landscape, as well as the role of cultural capital in this respect, we draw on empirical data from qualitative interviews with 34 young men (aged 16-19 years) from an urban area and a rural municipality in Sweden. The interviews were conducted in schools between 2009 and 2011 as part of a research project on social class and digital media practices amongst young men (Danielsson 2014). Whilst an exclusive focus on young men prevents us from drawing insights about other demographic segments it helped the (male) interviewer to close in on everyday media practices which in some cases can be a sensitive undertaking.

The respondents were recruited from academically- or vocationally-oriented upper secondary schools and study programs. The latter were purposively selected so as to get access to young men coming from different regions of social space, i.e. having grown up in families with unequal access to cultural capital. The continuous interplay between Bourdieusian theory and empirical data gradually resulted in a threefold classification of the boys based on: (a) their access to institutionalised cultural capital in the family (parental educational level and occupational titles); and (b) their own educational and occupational aspirations (orientation of current study program).

- *Those rich in cultural capital* have parents with academic qualifications and corresponding occupations; they attend academically-oriented schools and study programs, and aspire to occupations such as journalist, diplomat and scientist.
- *The upwardly mobile* are relatively lacking in cultural capital, insofar as their parents generally do not have academic qualifications and hold working class- or lower middle class occupations, but they attend university-preparatory study programs and aspire to occupations such as doctor, teacher and engineer.
- *Those poor in cultural capital* are united by the lack of academic qualifications among their parents, by the fact that they undertake vocational education, and by their inclination towards traditionally male working-class occupations such as welder, electrician and truck driver.

This analytical construction of social classes is an important complement to the pre-conceived categories used in the survey. Both approaches, we argue, are important for establishing the role of cultural capital when it comes to recognising the cosmopolitan potentials of the media.

Using interviews to explore and detail the significance of class in general and cultural capital in particular – in this case for how young men approach various media as potential sources of cosmopolitan capital – poses certain challenges when it comes to the interpretation of data. Class is also present in every single interview situation, making the narratives produced in these situations the result of a staged encounter between the researcher (as an identified agent of academic culture) and the various respondents (all endowed with a class-distinctive relationship to this culture). This has been kept in mind, for example when making sense of the often brief responses from those poor in cultural capital to our invitations to “describe” or “elaborate”. As Skeggs et al. (2008) have pointed out, methods are not neutral in terms of class; access to the resources necessary for producing an elaborate narrative within an interview (e.g. linguistic capital) tend to be socially stratified. Understanding class and cultural capital as part of the interview situation also sheds light on how interviewees represent themselves. It might have been important for boys who recognise, and want to be recognised by, academic culture (i.e. those rich in cultural capital and the upwardly mobile) to represent themselves as academically worthy to the interviewer, for instance by presenting their media-related preferences and practices as more educated and cosmopolitan than they actually are. Following Bourdieu’s take on reflexivity (see e.g. Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992:194-195), such reflexive insights have been integrated in the present interpretative work.

Results

Table 2 shows the social stratification inherent in classifying the contemporary media landscape as a source of cosmopolitan capital insofar as it is understood as allowing one to encounter people and cultures from different parts of the world, making one want to travel to see the world, and rendering the world a smaller place. The analysis shows that relatively frequent international travel, political orientation (whether to the left or right), and age (younger) are all associated with this kind of media classification at levels that are statistically significant, whereas gender and residential area are not. More important

for our purposes, however, is the fact that institutionalised cultural capital (level of education) and living in a working class household also yield significant associations. Those identifying as working class do not recognise the cosmopolitan potential of the media landscape to the same extent as entrepreneurs or white-collar workers do. Furthermore, university-educated respondents tend to classify the media as a source of cosmopolitan capital to a greater extent than those with lower levels of education. Approaching the media in this kind of way is thus tied to social position in terms of access to cultural capital (via education and the character of the household).

Table 2. *The social stratification of a cosmopolitan media classification*

| | Cosmopolitan Media Classification Index |
|---|---|
| Age | -.01* (.00) |
| Woman | .12 (.12) |
| Travels outside Nordic countries > 2 times/year | 1.36*** (.20) |
| Travels outside Nordic countries once or twice/year | .78*** (.16) |
| University educated | .54*** (.14) |
| Taking political stance | .55*** (.15) |
| Urban residency | .07 (.13) |
| Working class (subjective) | -.92*** (.15) |
| Constant | 5.64*** |
| R _{adj} ² | 16% |
| N | 961 |

Comment: Ordinary least square regression. Un-standardised coefficients (standard error in parenthesis). Significance codes: *** $p \leq 0.001$, ** $p \leq 0.01$, * $p \leq 0.05$. All variables except “age” are dummy variables: “woman” (reference: man); “travels outside of the Nordic countries more than twice a year” (ref: have never been outside Nordic countries/never, 1-2/year); Travels outside Nordic countries once or twice/year (ref: >2 times/year, have never been outside Nordic countries); “university educated” (ref: low, middle-low, middle-high education); “political stance-taking” (ref: neither “left” nor “right”); urban residency (ref: non-urban residency); working class (ref: farmer, white collar worker, higher white collar worker, entrepreneur).

We now turn to our interviews with young men and their classifications of the media, in order to nuance the overarching perspective. More specifically, we take a closer look at the class-distinctive ways in which they talk about two sets of media practices endowed with the potential for accumulating cosmopolitan capital. During the course of the interviews the main media practices that emerged in the discussions related to the (mis) recognition of cosmopolitan capital were news media practices and online socialising practices. While one can of course fathom other kinds of media practices in this context, these are the two brought to the fore in the boys’ narratives.

News media practices

Not only do those rich in cultural capital express a belief in the importance of following the daily news flow, they also seem to have acquired a taste for news in general and high-brow news in particular. These boys are well aware of the different symbolic value generally conferred on various journalistic products, and in talking about their news consumption they tend to be quick to stress their preference for investigative journalism, in-depth reporting and current affairs programs. Most importantly, they also share an inclination towards international news and current affairs coverage. Some enjoy what they call an “authentic” view of the world, as provided by public service programs like *Korrespondenterna* (“The Correspondents”) and *Dokument utifrån* (“Document from Abroad”). Others appreciate the cosmopolitan potentials of the contemporary media landscape in a more general manner:

Carl: I like stuff that concerns oneself, so to speak. About, well... facts about society, about which party says this and which party says that. I’m pretty interested in public matters, and that’s why I think it’s important to learn more. And the newspapers write about it quite a lot, of course. But also... well, if something has happened in the world, like... there might be a war somewhere, or a disaster, or something like that. I mean, I think it’s important to keep updated about it and see what actually happens /.../ It feels so bad in a way, not knowing what’s going on, just living in some bubble in Gothenburg and... I also find historical stuff pretty interesting. I read quite a lot of history magazines and stuff.

There is a sharp contrast between the way Carl talks about the importance of “keeping updated” about what is going on in the world and the ways in which the upwardly mobile and those poor in cultural capital talk about their news consumption practices. While the upwardly mobile acknowledge the value of such practices, they do so mainly in an instrumental manner, for example by stressing their academic usefulness within the social science programme that most of them attend. In other words, they occasionally take an interest in the news, but primarily because the school encourages them to – not because they enjoy doing so. Consequently, those upwardly mobile boys attending the natural science programme, who are less likely to reap academic benefits from following the daily news flow, tend to express indifference towards the news. Gustav says: “I don’t care that much about what’s going on in society, really. I’m more interested in the world of computers and gaming”. Still, this pattern is not completely clear-cut. Eddie, whose parents are migrants from the Middle East, thinks that “everyone should read the news” in order to “know what’s going on in the world”, and he also displays a taste for foreign news.

Those poor in cultural capital are also inclined to express disinterest or even distaste in relation to news consumption practices due to their perceived lack of usefulness. Daniel thinks it is “a waste of time” visiting online news sites, whereas Patrick has difficulties in recognising a point in staying informed about current events in distant places:

Patrick: I don’t know, I don’t think it’s that interesting to see what’s going on in the world. I don’t care that much, really. There’s nothing I can do about it, so why should I like read about it and get depressed? /.../ It’s not funny to read that like a hundred kids have been blown up somewhere in the world, it’s...

Interviewer: No. But isn't it important to like know about it, or...?

Patrick: Yeah, of course it is [silence] Hehe, I don't know what to say, I just don't like to read the news.

However, just like the rest of the boys, Patrick does seem aware of the symbolic value generally granted to international news consumption, but contrary to those rich in cultural capital, his practical sense, rooted in a certain class-habitus, orients him away from such practices by telling him they are "not for the likes of him". In other words, he seems to recognise the value of cosmopolitan capital while simultaneously refusing it, since he in any case is refused access to it (cf. Bourdieu 1984: 471).

Indeed, not all boys lacking in cultural capital express indifference or antipathy towards news media consumption. However, those who enjoy such practices tend to do so not because they offer global outlooks and possibilities to learn more about the world, but rather in ways that have every chance of being dismissed as uncultivated (as opposed to cosmopolitan). Not only do these boys share an inclination towards local news, more importantly they also tend to talk about news consumption in terms of sensation and amusement instead of civic duty and moral virtue. Accordingly, their news preferences and practices are likely to merely reveal their inherited shortage of cultural capital and reproduce their subordinate social positions, instead of expanding their cultural capital through the kind of conversion into cosmopolitan capital that seems to take place among those already rich in cultural capital.

Access to cultural capital thus seems to constitute a precondition for the recognition and potential acquisition of cosmopolitan capital through news media practices in the contemporary media landscape. This relationship emerges with even greater clarity from the class-distinctive ways in which the boys talk about another set of media practices capable of generating cosmopolitan capital, online socialising practices.

Online socialising practices

When asked about the upsides of the Internet in general, and the various affordances of digital media for interpersonal communication in particular, those rich in cultural capital tend to stress the opportunities for getting and staying in touch with distant others and for learning more about the world through such contacts. In other words, they recognise the Internet as a means for the acquisition and accumulation of cosmopolitan capital. Ian elaborates on his positive feelings towards using the Internet for social networking:

Well, you can make like contacts and at the same time keep in touch with old friends. I believe that... well, you create like a larger world for yourself if you easily make contacts via the Internet /.../ It's easy to find people to stay the night with if you're travelling by Interrail or something, if you're only averagely active on the Internet and talk to people /.../ I believe it's easy to make contact with people with different perspectives on the world and... who live in different places and who have the same interests as you do, or completely different interests... because it's so very open and so easy to make contact with people.

This class-distinctive inclination to identify and appreciate the cosmopolitan potentials embedded in the everyday media environment is further exemplified by Nils. Weighing

the potentials of the Internet against its pitfalls, he is not only displaying a rather sophisticated awareness of its cosmopolitan potentials but also a propensity for realising them:

There are extreme positives as well, like the fact that globalisation wouldn't have been as all-encompassing if the Internet had not existed. But for example, now I can just log in to ICQ and enter some chat room, and like that I'm talking to a girl from China, you know. So it's like... it's bettering the communication between countries. And hopefully it will increase the understanding of how different peoples and religions view different things /.../ When I have nothing better to do, I usually log in to ICQ, enter some chat room and chat with someone. Yeah... just making contact, saying "Hi!", really. It's pretty cool in a way that you can build a relation with someone who lives like really far away. For example, I have a contact on MSN [Messenger] who lives in Egypt, who's really nice.

Both Ian and Nils accentuate the effortlessness with which they might use digital media for making and maintaining contacts with distant others. This suggests that their class-habitus is well attuned to the space of cosmopolitan practice enabled by the Internet. It therefore also makes them well equipped for moulding their inherited cultural capital into the perhaps increasingly important cosmopolitan capital in a world of globalising educational fields and labour markets.

Among the upwardly mobile and those poor in cultural capital, most intercultural social contacts are made through diverse online gaming practices. Even if such practices occasionally involve linguistic exchanges with people from other parts of the world, there is little indicating that these boys are prepared to transfigure such exchanges into cosmopolitan capital. The upwardly mobile suggest that the communicative elements of their online gaming practices are predominantly instrumental in nature, i.e. geared towards succeeding in the games rather than towards getting to know other players. New acquaintances thus remain quite superficial and rarely develop into the kind of relationships whereby intercultural learning and the cultivation of cosmopolitan attitudes are more likely to take place. Richard, previously a member of an internationally composed "guild", describes his relationships with fellow gamers:

Eh, to me it's just... I only care about the game. I mean, if I'm with him... "Okay, he's German" – okay. "What's he doing in his spare time?" – I don't care. I'm there for the game. And then it should be for the game, I think. I'm not doing much more than that.

Most of the boys lacking in cultural capital are not as competitive as Richard when it comes to online gaming, but they still tend to agree that their gaming practices rarely lead to any deeper relationships with new acquaintances. Tobias, who plays mostly for fun, also gives another clue as to why boys deprived in terms of cultural capital might fall short in realising the potentials for cosmopolitan capital embedded in their popular online gaming practices:

Yes, I have [made contacts through online gaming]. It's mostly Swedes though, because I play more with Swedes. My English sucks pretty much, so I'd rather keep with Swedes in order to be able to speak Swedish. Really. So there are some Swedes then, that I've got to know /.../ But I mean, you don't know them like I know my... like we know each other [referring to his schoolmates in the group interview].

Tobias's perceived lack of English skills thus makes him reluctant to play with people who do not speak Swedish. Consequently, he also abstains from the potential values, in the form of linguistic skills and intercultural insights, obtainable from online gaming. Here it becomes obvious how the incorporated shortage of inherited cultural capital characteristic of the upwardly mobile and those poor in cultural capital might block their opportunities for acquiring cosmopolitan capital, and for expanding their cultural capital at large, not only through online gaming practices but through online socialising practices more generally.

Media classifications and reconversion strategies in a globalising world

We have been concerned with how social agents with different volumes of cultural capital approach the potentials of the media for building transnational social networks, keeping up to date with world affairs, and inspiring intercultural encounters. By way of a national survey and qualitative interviews with 34 young men in Sweden, we have unearthed a connection between cultural capital and cosmopolitan capital, expressed in how different people relate to the affordances of various media. The material suggests that those endowed with a relatively substantial volume of cultural capital seem socially predisposed to recognise and exploit the communicative opportunities of “polymedia” (Madianou & Miller 2012) in order to obtain cosmopolitan capital, for example by seeking to establish contacts in different cultures, or by embracing and enacting the value of keeping up-to-date with what is going on in the world. Thus, the socially privileged deploy various media in order to mould their cultural capital into cosmopolitan capital as social fields undergo structural transformation in terms of globalisation. While we call upon future research to further substantiate the explications presented here, our findings provide a contemporary example of what Bourdieu (1984) called reconversion strategies – ways for the privileged to remain privileged in today's globalised world.

This study contributes to the growing body of research regarding the relationship between media audiences and the question of cosmopolitanism by conceptualising cosmopolitanism as a socially valued resource that is intimately connected to cultural capital. This focus has taken us beyond celebratory accounts of the cosmopolitanising potentials of the media (e.g. Beck 2011) and allowed for an empirically-informed perspective on how (cosmopolitan) media practices unfold in the everyday life of individuals in possession of or lacking in cultural capital. The results of this study also build upon the extensive body of media-sociological work that has emphasised the class-based character of media practices.

While technology certainly facilitates transcendence of “the local” by permitting people to make contacts across the world, experience new sites and cultures and follow events in faraway places, far from everyone recognises the value of such affordances. We have here pointed to the “classified” character of cosmopolitan media classifications.

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