

Establishing Collective-based Mural Art in Husby, Stockholm: Henri Lefebvre's 'Work of Art' and Scholarly Political Engagement

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This article takes up Lefebvre's challenge to apply the intellectual tools of the academy to the practical production of urban space, and discusses an effort to make use of our theories of signification in re-articulating stigmatized suburbs. Often referred to as 'vulnerable', 'disenfranchised' or 'marginalized', stigmatized suburbs and the people living in them are targeted by many social and economic initiatives simply because they are distinctly vulnerable, marginalized or disenfranchised. In so doing, initiatives interpellate and reproduce the geographical imaginary that is both the outcome and the source of their target groups' political disadvantage. The article shows how a particular community initiative attempts to overcome the problem of interpellation. It uses Callon's notion of 'the qualification of products' to understand the initiative's efforts to transcend the objectification of the targeted groups as well as the symbolic limitation of agency. This allows us to follow the process by which the initiative attempts to re-symbolize the body and the neighborhood identified through the category of 'the immigrant'. The article suggests that efforts to overcome the problem of interpellation must go beyond the realm of the symbolic to include, as well, social and material elements. The article ends with a reflexive note on the extent to which the engaged scholar is also caught within the interpellation paradox.

Keywords

spatial resistance, territorial stigma, suburb, Stockholm (Sweden), engaged scholarship, social entrepreneurial process

What has been called the spatial turn in the social sciences has introduced a sophisticated understanding of space and uncovered the dialectical complexity of socio-spatial processes. Moving beyond substantialist definitions of place as a *physical* site describable through directional vectors and cartographic coordinates, students of space have developed heightened sensitivity for the *social* position inscribed in and reproduced by sites (Bourdieu, 1999), along with an awareness of the role played by (*symbolic*) geographical imaginaries in the socio-spatial dialectic (Dikec, 2001). An abundance of terms have been coined in the last two to three decades to express this spatial sensitivity, some of which capture the three-dimensionality of space more successfully than others. For instance, geographers use ‘geographical imaginations’ to describe the effect of our mental images of space in the (dis)empowerment of the communities occupying the physical spaces that are imagined in this way (Massey, 2005); that is, the role of geography in (socio-economic) ‘spatial (in)justice’ (Soja, 2010) or ‘uneven geographical developments’ (Harvey, 2000). The popularity of Foucault’s notion of ‘heterotopia’ (Foucault, 1984) – a neologism that he used to highlight the ideational *and* material dimensions of place, both equally real yet of a different nature – also testifies to an increased awareness of the importance of conceiving space beyond its purely physical coordinates (Soja, 1995). Or, more relevant to this article, one could cite Wacquant’s ‘territorial stigmatization’, a sociologist’s way of stressing the centrality of space in today’s “new regime of urban marginality” (Wacquant, 2007). The consistent theme running through these new terms and animating lively discussion is an effort to introduce space in our understanding of power relations.

More sophisticated analysis notwithstanding, Lefebvre’s challenge still remains. *The right to the city* is a plea to approach the city as an *oeuvre* – as an ongoing process of producing urban space – which requires the involvement of a variety of differently positioned social actors (Lefebvre, 1996). Further, Lefebvre’s challenge calls us to use our intellectual tools in the practical production of the urban space even as we subject these “fragmented and partial attempts [to] criticism, practical assessment and global preoccupation” (Lefebvre, 1996: 153-4). In that essay, he singles out signification, or rather, a system of significations, as a specific intellectual tool for re-working the urban space (*ibid.*, p. 152).

This article takes up Lefebvre’s challenge, both at the practical level of engaging in urban social relations of spatial production and at the intellectual level of implicating our theories of signification in the re-articulation of the city. More particularly, it applies contemporary elaborations of the problem of interpellation (Althusser, 1972) into the design and analysis of an urban intervention initiative in Husby, the Swedish epitome of the dualized city, failed integration policies, and racialized socio-economic inequality (Pred, 2000).

Often referred to as ‘vulnerable’, ‘disenfranchised’ or ‘marginalized’, stigmatized city suburbs such as Husby, and their dwellers, only become interesting by being distinctly vulnerable, marginalized or disenfranchised. The particular term used to refer to these areas and its residents interpellates them under a broad category that reifies the very power differences that urban initiatives (may these come from planners, architects, politicians or non-profit organizations) aim to transform. Categorizing them according to their vulnerability identifies residents and the lived space according to a particular, limited and limiting, trait. That is, in order for a group to be deemed a deserving object of social investment, it needs to be qualified as vulnerable, thus performing and reproducing the geographical imaginary that is both the outcome and the source of the residents’ political disadvantage. This moment of interpellation overlooks other aspects of their identities and other experiences of the suburb, denying dwellers’ agency and subjectivity and thus failing to acknowledge them as actors and agents of the urban change the initiatives would like to bring about.

The article shows how a particular community initiative attempts to overcome the problem of territorial stigmatization. These attempts are visible in the conscious avoidance of the term ‘immigrant’ to refer to its target group as well as in the series of alternative meanings and new geographical imagery it tries to attach to the neighborhood it works with. Its strategies focus on enrolling well-established actors whose social position and symbolic recognition can be transposed to the neighborhood and its residents. In this way, the article attempts to go beyond recognizing the difference that space makes (Thrift, 2006) toward an understanding of the socio-spatial dynamics that produce legitimate voice.

The article grows out of my practice of ‘engaged scholarship’ (Boyer, 1996), a practice that stresses the critical and transformational importance of co-constructed research involving both academics and practitioners (Ganesh et al. 2005; Parker et al. 2011). In that sense, the article takes on Blomley’s challenge to connect the political and the theoretical not only inside but also outside the academy, to

reconcile progressive activism and academia (Blomley, 1994). The article thus contributes to Lefebvre's discussion on the role of academics in carving spaces for political engagement. After positioning my practical, political and academic involvement in the initiative, the article follows my and my colleagues' efforts to establish Voices of the Suburbs (VoS[1]), a community-based social entrepreneurial initiative aiming at introducing the collective production of mural art as a tool to work with the residents of Stockholm's stigmatized suburbs, the youth in particular. In its efforts to engage with these communities, the initiative seeks a way to move beyond the labels and geographical imageries that produce and homogenize those areas as well as to re-symbolize the signified identified by such labels and images. The article ends with a reflexive note on the extent to which I, as an activist researcher, together with my colleagues, am caught in the paradox. In the process of getting funding, the initiative enacts itself as spokesagent of the stigmatized residents, necessarily performing symbolic violence on those it represents.

The article uses Callon's notion of 'the qualification of products' to understand the initiative's efforts at transcending the symbolic limitation of agency and overcoming the symbolic denigration of the neighborhood. By following the process through which we attempt to re-symbolize the body and the neighborhood identified with the 'immigrant' category, the article is able to trail the actors successively enrolled, to register their stakes in the initiative, to apprehend the arguments mobilized, and to recognize the articulation of new meanings and images to the stigmatized suburb. Findings suggest that efforts to overcome the problem of interpellation must go beyond the realm of the symbolic to involve, as well, social and material elements. More particularly, results show that symbolic resistance to stigmatizing geographies proceeds by organizing symbolic, social and material aspects into a new set of relations that works complementarily, but distinctly, towards the intended (the initiative's imaginary of) social change. First, in the process of qualifying the suburb and its inhabitants, aspects external to the neighbourhood itself become pivotal, namely, traits – such as one's symbolic and social capital – and stakes – such as organizational objectives and personal ambitions – of the actors successively enrolled to the initiative. Second, the material elements involved – such as walls and money in the case studied – glue and reify the re-organized constellation of actors' traits and interests.

Naming – Is symbolic resistance possible?

Can we escape the performative effect of each act of naming? Is it possible to name without enacting the subject and the space being so named? How can the "incompletion of interpellation" (Butler, 2000) be mobilized for a practical re-articulation of hegemonic discourse on the suburbs? How can we resist the productive relation between the symbolic realm of labels, categories and geographical imageries and the material realm of objects, populations and sites? Is it possible to escape the violence of a performative hegemonic language? How big is the space of re-signification and how is that space to be stretched, translated and re-attached to differing meanings and images?

More specifically, let's take the signifier of the 'immigrant'. Naming someone as 'immigrant' constitutes the immigrant subject. The act of qualifying an area as 'immigrant' constitutes that area as an immigrant ghetto. Designating the subject and the area as 'immigrant' gives that subject and that area qualities that unify it with other subjects and areas that may differ in nature (Pattillo, 2009). The 'immigrant' tag conceals the invented nature of the immigrant. It unifies a group of heterogeneous people along many dimensions – Iranian and South American, women and men, expatriates, professional experts and those who migrated for other political or economic reasons (Sassen, 1999). And in the Scandinavian context, those that immigrated as adults and those that were born in Scandinavia of foreign born parents. Naming, that is, does more than designate or qualify. It is a performative act that retroactively constitutes its reference (Zizek, 2000), dashing difference across those that are so interpellated. The act of naming a broad range of people as 'immigrant' implies that they have a minimum common quality and constitutes that implication as a fact. It constitutes the group. And the ghetto. The symbolic order – the label, the tag, the category together with the images attached to it – is instrumental for the constitution of reality.

This constitutive act is at the core of very real efforts to achieve social change. It is, indeed, at the center of political action because any effort aimed at addressing the injustices brought by a society organized along the ethnic boundary needs first to address the violence of a language that performs that very boundary. Understanding the productive relation between symbolic order, and social space

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allows us to uncover the inherent paradox in such efforts, a paradox that questions the very possibility of any effort of re-signification and thus the possibility of academics to articulate new geographical imaginations that may carve spaces for political engagement (Fenton, 2004).

The paradox: Any attempt to change the meanings and images attached to the immigrant body and the immigrant neighborhood presupposes the existence of the unified body and the unified neighborhood. Such efforts need first to identify the neighborhood and the body as 'immigrant', thus constituting the immigrant body and neighborhood and reproducing the very category that they aim to subvert. Whether reintroducing heterogeneity into the 'immigrant' marker or addressing the material conditions of possibility at the root of the label, the starting point is the qualification – and thus, constitution – of a group and a physical space as 'immigrant'. Or, as Bourdieu (1977) would have it, the language used to describe the group and the site that are targeted by change efforts imposes a scheme of classification (immigrant vs. non-immigrant) that produces a form of recognition of socio-spatial order that hides the arbitrariness of its foundations.

Given the paradox originating in the performative relation between the symbolic and the social orders, how do efforts aiming at igniting socio-spatial change relate to this productive symbolic order? More particular to the case at hand, how can we contest the signifiers associated with the ethnic boundary (in the Swedish context, those of 'immigrant' – *invandrare* – and 'suburb' – *förorten*) and how can we articulate new significations to what such signifiers refer to (particular bodies and neighborhoods)?

Method: Studying resistance to stigmatized space

One way to study processes of spatial re-signification is to follow the everyday practices of ventures that aim to transform the connotations that are attached to stigmatized bodies, stigmatized neighborhoods and stigmatizing categories; it is to trace the folding of new spaces which results from combining and recombining actors anew (Bingham and Thrift, 2000; Latour, 1997). Callon's notion of the 'qualification of products' in his analysis of the dynamics of markets can be helpful here. With it, Callon refers to the process through which qualities are attached to a product; it concerns agents' efforts to classify and "position the products they design, produce, distribute or consume, in relation to others" (Callon et al., 2002, p.196); it is the process of associating characteristics to a product in order to singularize it from similar products. A product transforms as successive qualities are attached (or detached) to it by a variety of agents and through a diversity of product specifications, tests, trials, catalogue descriptions, or other organized strategies to qualify products. As an example, a car

"starts off by existing in the form of a set of specifications, then a model, then a prototype, then a series of assembled elements and, finally, a car in a catalogue that is ordered from a dealer and has characteristics which can be described relatively objectively and with a certain degree of consensus. Once it is in the hands of its driver the car continues moving, not only on roads but also, later, for maintenance purposes to workshops, then to second-hand dealers. At times it becomes again an object on paper, which takes its place alongside other cars in the guide to second-hand car prices in specialized magazines" (ibid., p.198).

For the purpose of this article, the qualification of products is the process through which a set of qualities is articulated into a product, thus *signifying* that product. Such a perspective highlights the active and reflexive role of actors in the qualification process and thus in the constitution of reality (markets in Callon's analysis).

Callon's 'process of qualification' reminds us of two key methodological aspects for the study of social initiatives aiming at symbolic change. First, symbolic structures are not only grounded on semiotic dimensions, but also on material, non-human aspects such as the technologies used to qualify and requalify what is being named. Thus, when studying symbolic change, also materiality (and spatiality) needs to be considered. Second, social structures (markets, in their text) are not an independent sort of macro actor. Rather, social structures can be seen as the sum of a myriad of heterogeneous micro-interactions and micro-situations embedded in space. Chains of interrelations

among micro-actors closely located ultimately translate into macro-structures. Through a process Actor-Network Theory (ANT) scholars call ‘translation’, micro-actors transform into macro-actors, people into States (Callon and Latour, 1981). It is the situated local articulation of that myriad of actors that needs to be studied if we are to understand and address “power-differentiated communities” (Haraway, 1988). These two lessons amount to emphasizing the centrality of local socio-spatial relations in the study of social change, also when this change is symbolic in nature.

Applying these ideas to understanding community-based initiatives that aim to catalyze symbolic change in stigmatized neighborhoods requires that we look at the process through which such efforts requalify space. Following the process of qualification of the signified (the immigrant body and the immigrant neighborhood in our case) and re-articulation of the signifier (the ‘immigrant’ category) allows us to see the chain of actors mobilized, the new images attached to the body and the neighbourhood, the logics of argumentation exercised in the re-structuration of public debate, the shaping of a new constellation of interests, the articulation of a new set of socio-spatial relations. That is, the article follows the practices that aim to requalify the body and neighborhood identified by the stigmatising category of ‘the immigrant;’ it follows the everyday efforts of a community-based social venture to re-organize the string of associations tied to the community; it traces the articulation of new geographical imagery and the mobilization of social and symbolic capitals to bring about the organization’s intended social change.

Embracing Lefebvre’s challenge, the article follows the community-engaged social entrepreneurial venture that I founded and continue to chair, thus inserting itself within the growing tradition of post-critical ethnographers/activists that travel the “blurred boundary when Other becomes researcher, narrated becomes narrator, translated becomes translator, native becomes anthropologist” (Noblit et al., 2004, p. 166). Overcoming the objective, neutral observer of traditional ethnography, and moving beyond the individual, subjective selves of postmodern ethnography, activist researchers focus on how one’s subjectivity continuously informs and is informed by one’s relation with and representation of the Other (Madison, 2004). Sometimes referred to as the “new ethnography” (Goodall, 2000), these activist researchers use Haraway’s (1988) notion of positionality to comment on the difficulties of integrating academia and activism (Blomley, 1994; Harvey, 1992; Merrifield, 1995; Tickell, 1995). “A doctrine of embodied objectivity”, positionality in the communities she studies and participates in allows the activist researcher to engage in manufacturing situated knowledges – “partial, locatable, critical knowledges sustaining the possibility of webs of connections called solidarity in politics and shared conversations in epistemology” (Haraway, 1988:584).

In what follows, I contextualize my own positionality, “thereby making it accessible, transparent, and vulnerable to judgment and evaluation. In this way, [I] take ethical responsibility for [my] own subjectivity and political perspective, resisting the trap of gratuitous self-centeredness or of presenting an interpretation as though it has no ‘self,’” (Madison, 2004, p.8).

Setting

Located twenty kilometers north of Stockholm, Husby, a neighborhood of the Kista-Rinkeby Borough, is a so-called ‘million program suburb’. At the end of the 40s and beginning of the 50s, a rising housing shortage burdened major cities in Sweden. As a coordinated response to the general housing shortage, the Swedish parliament decided in 1964 that one million dwellings should be built in the coming ten years. These were to be built in the outskirts, taking advantage of the increased accessibility made possible by the new transport technologies such as the car and the commuter train. Swedish municipalities were granted favorable financial conditions for large-scale construction work, particularly if these were larger than 1000 dwellings. As a consequence, these areas came to be characterized by a functionalist aesthetic determined by economic effectiveness. 25% of all dwellings in Sweden today were built between 1965 and 1975 and 10% of Stockholm’s population live in one of its seven ‘million suburbs’. At the time regarded as an example of modern and rational building, the first dwellers were pleased with the high standard and big living spaces. Today, however, “the areas of the million program” have become a symbol for failed housing policy, the result of excessive state intervention in city planning. Many of these areas have been demolished or wait empty for demolition. This fact notwithstanding, in the major cities such as Stockholm, Göteborg, and Malmö these neighborhoods are overcrowded, mainly with people under great social and economic pressure, very

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often with roots in a foreign country (within the wider trend of an increased ethnicization of the urban periphery – Wacquant, 2008; Immerfall and Therborn, 2009; Schinkel and van den Berg, 2011).

----- Insert map of Husby within the City of Stockholm -----

Indeed, ‘the million program areas’, ‘the suburbs’, have become synonymous with ‘immigrant ghetto’ in the media and the popular mind (Ericsson, 2006; Pred, 2000; Wacquant, 2008b). Paraphrasing Slavoj Žižek, the ‘million program suburb’ “provides a common ‘container’ for free-floating, inconsistent fears” (Žižek, 2000, p.149), socio-economic in nature such as the crisis of the welfare state, the intrusions of government in major housing developments, immigration, and unemployment. This container, the dwelling of the immigrant other, just as her body, symbolizes this intractable set of social meanings and obstructs any further inquiry into the social relations that are at its root (Butler, 2000, p.26), further exacerbating processes of territorial stigmatization (Wacquant, 1996) and spatial injustice (Harvey 2000).

As a researcher located in the Kista campus of the Royal Institute of Technology, I had studied those social relations in the Kista region for a longer time. For over one and a half years I had followed state-driven efforts to redefine a traditional immigrant suburb, a million program area, into a high-tech region of international standards. Initially interested in the so-called ‘digital divide’, I became aware of the founding violence of an episteme – the ‘immigrant’ –, which re-formulation I had meant to study. State-driven top-down efforts to re-define the immigrant suburb into a high-tech region had fallen into the linguistic trap of re-producing old dichotomies with new ones. The ‘Swede’ and the ‘immigrant’ had become the ‘techie’ and the ‘non-techie’, changing the signifier without addressing the socio-spatial relations that grounded it (author, 2010). What’s more, I, too, had become a cog in the machinery of symbolic re-production as, by studying the immigrant suburb, I enacted the space and the body which very existence I so readily denounced.

If top-down state-driven initiatives were bound to instantiate unity and re-produce territorial stigmatization, I wondered, are bottom-up initiatives able to create a platform that opens up to the heterogeneity of the stigmatized groups? How could the voices and imaginations of the immigrant subject be involved in the articulation of new geographical imagery?

An invitation to visit Stanford University and a research grant allowed me to spend over one and half year in the Bay Area. Frustrated by the realization of my own role in perpetuating territorial stigma, I started to consider strategies, instruments, methods, and concepts to work towards overcoming ethnicity. It was in San Francisco then that I one day found myself standing in front of a mural done by Precita Eyes Mural Arts Center.

Precita Eyes was a community-based mural arts association deeply committed to the communities it worked with, educating them about the process and history of public community mural art and bringing art into the daily lives of its people. Apart from the community-building process set in motion by their mural work (Poon and Lai, 2008), I saw in their murals a way to take space in the public sphere and thus give room to the many voices of the suburbs. This, I thought, could contribute to nuance the often limited and biased dominant geographical imaginary of the suburbs and its residents. It could re-articulate the socio-spatial dynamic that constituted them. I set out to translate those ideas to the Swedish context, Husby in particular.

Findings: Attaching actors, requalifying the suburb

The first step to re-signify Husby was to enroll new actors into the socio-spatial process that constituted the immigrant suburb. The actors enrolled were heterogeneous in nature: a social researcher (me), a nonprofit organization manager, an artist, foundations, educational institutions both nationally recognized and with a strong local presence. Each actor brought his/her own stakes to what, a year and

a half later, would become VoS – stakes that did not necessarily have to do with Husby per se, but which, nevertheless, were articulated into the efforts to overcome Husby’s territorial stigma.

The Swedish Red Cross, Stockholm division

Together with a colleague from the Stockholm division, Åsa Beckius had worked on an internal report for the Swedish Red Cross for over half a year. With a focus on social exclusion in present-day Sweden, the report argued that the Red Cross was weakest in the areas and with the groups that needed it most: the socio-economic burdened suburbs of the city. Further, it recommended launching a ‘Big City project’ that focused on these suburbs. Two were suggested in the Swedish capital: Skärholmen and the Kista Borough, Husby in particular. Tight collaborations with local actors and local residents were proposed in an attempt “to avoid divisions between ‘us and them’” (Beckius and Hormazabal, 2007). Åsa was made responsible for initiating the Red Cross’ Big City project in Husby.

When Åsa and I met in June 2008, Åsa was looking for innovative ideas, local partners, and community-based methods to work with in the suburbs; that is, she looked for accomplices and strategies that could help her redefine the Swedish Red Cross’ work at home – both in the sense of how it worked and who it addressed. I, in turn, was looking for an organization from which to test the newly brought ideas; an organization from which to highlight the heterogeneity of the suburbs and from which to start the work of re-signifying the ‘immigrant’ in general, and Husby in particular.

In other words, to my spatial sensitivity for Husby, the Red Cross’ strive for organizational change was added to the new set of meanings building up around Husby and its residents. The enrollment of the Red Cross’ Big City project together with the ideas from community-based art, was more than a mere collaboration between two actors. The attachment was the beginning of a process of articulating the initiative’s target group as well as of organizing symbolic spatial resistance. To be sure, the one requirement of the Red Cross’ Big City initiative was that it focused on the youth, and thus, VoS ultimately came to articulate its target group as the “young residents of the socio-economic vulnerable city suburbs”. In that doing, VoS juxtaposed two adjectives – ‘young’ and ‘vulnerable’ – in a combination that identified the vulnerability to address – ‘socio-economic’ – without ever mentioning its ethnic quality. The choice of terms to describe our focus was a first step into re-signifying the suburbs and, by extension, we hoped, into reformulating Sweden’s racialized integration debate (Pred, 2000) into one of class differences.

The Royal College of Art

In the hope to associate symbolic recognition to the eventual community murals and, by extension, to Husby and its dwellers, next step was to build relations to established art institutions. Together with Johanna, an artist working in a local theater, we met Filippa and Tite, two faculty members at the Royal College of Art with a personal interest in developing mural art in Sweden. While Filippa looked for forms for “taking place in the urban space as a way to shape contemporary stories”, Tite lamented the neglect that had befallen such an “ancient technique” resulting in the College of Art recently ceasing the only mural workshop that existed in Sweden. The million program suburbs had used a standardized modular building technique requiring an even terrain, for which numerous concrete walls had been erected. The women turned these into “excellent public spaces where to develop mural art”, thus re-articulating the abandoned, derided and dull walls of the suburbs into potential canvas for expressing contemporary forms of urban misery (Bourdieu et al., 1999). The defamed concrete walls of the suburbs thus transformed into spaces for dialogue and for residents’ political engagement.

----- Insert pictures of Husby’s concrete walls -----

Beyond personal and professional interests, the Royal College of Art had been supportive of the idea. The College had the explicit mandate to broaden its student body, which today consisted

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overwhelmingly of “children to middle-class Swedish families”. In engaging in community-based art in Husby, the College saw the potential to attract a more diversified student body. Once more, a derided quality of the suburbs – its mixed ethnic urban underclass population – was requalified in terms that facilitated enrolling the symbolic standing of the Royal College of Art into VoS and, hopefully, Husby.

That is, in the effort to organize a re-symbolization process of Husby, two of the neighborhood’s often denigrated qualities were elicited and re-articulated. First, the spatial dominance of concrete walls in the public space was framed as an urban canvas for visualizing contemporary stories and developing urban mural art. Second, its ethnic heterogeneous youth became repository for the College’s future student body. The requalification of Husby proceeded through reframing its derided traits in line with the stakes of recognized actors whose symbolic stance could in turn maintain the Husby so requalified. Indeed, the process of re-signifying the suburb involved a dynamic relation between the actors enrolled and Husby’s spatial traits.

The wall

We still needed a wall, a physical space from which to continue the work of requalifying the stigmatized suburb and its dwellers. Åsa offered a wall in the Red Cross’ premises in Husby – a big theater room used by local associations and residents for a variety of activities, from associational meetings, dance classes and concerts, to baptisms, weddings and funerals. Although the wall was indoors, and so less public and less visible than the ones I had seen in San Francisco, it was a rather open space and thus accessible to anyone. Further, the fact of the wall being indoors sidestepped the rather long, arduous, and uncertain process of getting the permit for “change of facade” required by the City of Stockholm. The state-owned property owner Svenska Bostäder possessed the premises that the Red Cross rented. And although Svenska Bostäder didn’t see the painting by youngsters of a wall in one of their premises with positive eyes, they trusted the Red Cross.

It is at this point that Åsa and I became aware of an additional signification that was attached to the ‘immigrant youth’ category. More accurately, the meaning was associated with the combination ‘immigrant youth + painting in the public space’. It was a social meaning that we would have to work to detach if VoS was to become at all. Namely, graffiti. Or rather, ‘wall scribbles’, as they are called in Sweden[2]. Svenska Bostäder, as well as other wall owners and established actors that I had been talking with, tightly connected ‘immigrant youth + painting in the public space’ to wall scribbles, vandalism of public space and citizen insecurity.

It was the public nature of the paintings, their open spatial quality, that evoked different reactions from the established actors, each of them connecting his/her own imaginary space to the same physical space. Some had worked in favor of the social venture: mural art in the urban space had interested the Royal College of Art and acted as a force for its enrollment. Others were working in its detriment: graffiti was radically adjured by property owners feeding onto the symbolic violence exercised on those territorially stigmatized as “youth from the [immigrant] suburbs”.

The foundations

Re-signifying the suburb would be inviable without economic support. For this purpose, among others I approached the Swedish Inheritance Fund. The Fund aims to

“support civil society associations and other non-profit organizations that want to test new ideas to develop activities for children, youngsters and people with disabilities in their own terms. [...] The goal is to develop welfare, quality of life, participation, equality of rights and opportunities as well as contribute to social, ethnic and cultural integration”.

Our ideas suited well those of the Fund: we were a civil society organization introducing a novel idea – collective mural art – in Sweden to increase youth participation in the public space. Yet, the Fund also emphasized a quality we had purposely avoided thus far: an explicit reference to “ethnic and cultural integration”. Relating to ethnic integration, we felt, directly played on the division between

Swedes and non-Swedes that the initiative aimed to re-signify. That is, the initiative would have to frame its target group as 'immigrant', segregated along the ethnic line, once more making them interesting by virtue of their ethnic otherness; they were to be construed/qualified as politically vulnerable and as enjoying fewer rights and opportunities than their implicit (Swedish) counterpart. For the initiative to be deemed worth funding, ethnicity would have to be enacted, reminding us of the practical paradox of the problem of interpellation. That is, our efforts at re-signifying the suburb and its dwellers were constrained by institutional demands on (and financial hurdles of) local social ventures imposed by major funders which need to account for the social benefit of their investments. Such financial and institutional constraints co-opted us into reproducing the symbolic violence we aimed at resisting.

The target group

Most students at the College of Art came from middle-class families with 100% Swedish background, whereas the majority of the youth living in Husby came from families dependent on social welfare and with a background in South America, Africa or the Middle East. Most of the Arts' students had never been in the socially burdened city suburbs, while the Husby youngsters did not even know of the Royal College of Art. The first dreamt of becoming well-established artists, the second, simply of getting a space in Swedish society. Aiming, as we did (and still do), to re-signify suburban space, we needed to go beyond its physical (the painted site itself) and symbolic (re-framing established imageries) aspects to consider the social dimension of the space: the habitus physical space imprints in individuals as well as the hierarchy of social positions inscribed in sites (Bourdieu, 1999). To accomplish this, the collaboration with the Royal College of Art would be instrumental for its potential to bridge distant socio-economic groups. Bridging distant social positions, I argued, was key to the process of re-signifying the 'immigrant' and articulating new geographical imaginaries to the suburbs. Thus, we planned to have both groups collaborating in the production of the mural. The meaning attached to a label such as 'immigrant', I argued, was both the outcome and the source of underlying social relations structured along the ethnic boundary. To re-symbolize the body of the person of foreign background and the spaces where she lived, I meant (and still do), work has to be done on both sides of the line, crisscrossing physically, socially and symbolically separate relations. Accordingly, while the mural was to be painted in Husby, some art workshops would be held in the College of Art.

We also contacted the arts and crafts teacher in the Husby School. Reine was a young Swedish man with a passion for working with the youngsters of the suburbs. He immediately liked the idea and introduced the mural as part of the fall term's curriculum for the elder students, those in 9th grade (15-years old). As he later expressed it, he was interested in:

“... an outsider com[ing] into the school environment. [...] The school is a closed environment. And now, they get to meet the Red Cross, listen about the world outside. That's really interesting!”

In his affirmation of the initiative, the teacher was thus acknowledging the importance of building 'bridging social capital' (Putnam, 1993). He, however, did not focus on trust or reciprocity, which are often the defining characteristics of social capital as well as its most celebrated outcome. Rather, Reine brought yet a new stake into the enrollment of a new actor and the re-signification of the suburb, opening the school to the outside world and by extension giving the youth the opportunity to look into larger Swedish society.

The application for funding

Thus far, the social entrepreneurial initiative was a bundle of stated collaborations, frustrations over the Swedish integration debate, desires to change conservative organizational cultures, and dreams to develop mural art in Sweden. It encountered fears of vandalism in public walls, concerns for reproducing power relations structured along ethnicity, desires to open the world of the school, and lack of funding. The suburbs became host to an attractive multicultural non-middle-class youth, to inviting grey concrete walls, to potential local communities. This set of meanings, images and actants, however, amounted to very little without economic capital that could give those agreements, dreams

and fears a more material existence. Imagery needed hard economics if it was to carve spaces of political engagement.

To that end, I wrote an application for seed funding to the Swedish Inheritance Fund in late spring 2009. It sought funding for a first pilot project through which to “investigat[e] the interest among the youth, develop work methods and engage partners”. The arguments deployed in that text referred to the actors already engaged as well as to the variety of qualities that had been developed throughout the process thus far. In a sense, the application was the textual materialization of the process of re-signification we had engaged in up to then.

Concerning the actors, the application emphasized both Johanna’s close connection to the Royal College of Art and the art workshops to be held at the College with young residents of the suburb. The involvement of one class from the Husby School was also central to the proposal given the Fund’s focus on youth involvement. Formally, VoS’ pilot project was to be conducted as a Red Cross project. Further, the application stressed my affiliation to the Copenhagen Business School and close collaboration with the Stockholm School of Economics. The list of actors not only showed the broad scope of the initiative; building on those actors’ reputation, the text translated their symbolic capital into a sign of the initiative-to-be’s seriousness and quality, granting an institutional recognition to the initiative that we hoped could be attached into a new geographical imagery of the stigmatized suburbs.

The arguments themselves were intended to begin, already in that text, re-articulating the qualities commonly attached to the suburbs and its residents. Accordingly, the ‘walls of the suburbs’ were transformed into “a platform where the youth can express their cultural identities, their everyday concerns and their dreams for the future”; ‘the young residents of the suburbs’ became active “actors in decisions concerning the public space in the suburbs” and were to be appreciated for “bringing new ideas into Swedish art and city life”.

Another attempt to start re-signifying the suburbs already in the application was the explicit avoidance of the term ‘immigrant’ throughout the text. In the seven pages long application, the term ‘immigrant’ (‘invandrare’) appears once, and even then, it is part of a quote from a young resident of the suburbs, under the “Background” section. The quote is used to exemplify residents’ feelings of outsidership, resignation, and lack of sense of belonging connected to a derided suburb. That is, it is used to illustrate the dissolution of place, the spatial alienation resulting from territorial stigmatization (Wacquant, 2007), and thus to stress the need to re-associate the meanings granted to the term ‘immigrant’ that so qualifies those suburbs. Instead, the terms used to describe the target group and its residential area were “youth living in socio-economic vulnerable areas”, “cultural diversity”, “suburban areas”, or “the youth of the suburbs”.

In other words, the application was the textual materialization of the network of heterogeneous actors that had been enrolled throughout the social entrepreneurial process. It was, too, testimony to the wide set of qualities and social meanings articulated throughout the process thus far and to consider in efforts to re-signify the foreign body/neighborhood and re-articulate the “immigrant” signifier. Finally, the application gave form to a geographical imaginary we were all putting together.

Stuck in the paradox:

Translating symbolic subordination implies exerting symbolic violence

Hitherto, the article reveals the socio-spatial practices my colleagues and I engaged in to re-configure symbolic space: finding arguments to requalify the vulnerability of the group being addressed into an attractive quality to be sought by other actors; articulating a new geographic imaginary that engaged actors into action; mobilizing interests and stakes that could restructure the terrain of debate on the vulnerable suburbs; and enrolling actors that could contribute with their reputation and recognition (symbolic capital) to the reformulation of the immigrant youth. Our ability to participate in these practices (and thus, potentially change space) depended on the social and symbolic capital we possessed (Bourdieu, 1999:127). We used our social position to requalify the symbolic subordination of the stigmatized dwellers in the suburbs.

Yet, in doing this, we also performed symbolic violence on those whose voice VoS aimed to empower. Throughout the whole entrepreneurial process (and again in this article), we objectified the immigrant voices. We had become part of the “structuring structure” that reproduces the social reality

we aimed to re-signify. In our efforts to transform the social space drawn by ethnicity, we were also transformed and co-opted by it. Struggling to avoid the illocutionary force of a divisive language, we were (and still are) caught in the productive force of a network of actors and actions that positions and authorizes us and our texts to speak in the name of the suburbs and its residents, but that does not concede the same authority to those voices themselves.

ANT's concept of translation helps us to understand our inability to escape the socio-spatial practices we contested. For Callon and Latour, translation refers to all sorts of means by which an actor accepts the authority to be a spokesman for another actor; it refers to the chain of actors and micro-situations that enacts social divisions and effects social hierarchy. Translation consists of:

“all the negotiations, intrigues, calculations, acts of persuasion and violence, thanks to which an actor or force takes, or causes to be conferred on itself authority to speak or act on behalf of another actor or force”. (Callon and Latour 1981, p. 279)

Although looking for a new vocabulary, despite our efforts to elicit the heterogeneous realities hidden by the objectifying ‘immigrant’ category, my colleagues and I are part of the networks that use and re-produce the unified signified: the academic field, the non-profit sector, and the field of established art. Furthermore, the continuous negotiations, calculations, and acts of persuasion necessary to build VoS and gain funding, conferred on us authority to speak on behalf of the (objectified) immigrant. That is, the successive enrollment of well-established actors into the actor-network VoS effects (mis)recognition that positions VoS as spokesagent of the immigrant other. Thus, the series of translations leading to VoS also entangled us further into the productive mechanisms of the symbolic order. And yet, as Wacquant argues, “[o]nly an immense, specifically political work of aggregation and re-presentation (in a triple cognitive, iconographic, and dramaturgical sense) can hope to enable this conglomerate [the territorially stigmatized] to accede to collective existence and thus to collective action” (Wacquant, 2007). This is at the heart of the interpellation paradox.

Discussion: Enrolling actors to re-articulate space

The same questions that opened up this article also guided the social entrepreneurial venture studied. These questions had to do with the possibility of change in the realm of the symbolic. How to re-signify a stigmatizing category such as ‘immigrant’? What socio-spatial practices do such initiatives engage in in their efforts to structure the terrain of public reasoning and debate? What actors and what stakes are mobilized in the formulation of new geographical imaginaries? Given the research background of the initiative’s leader (me), what usually are second order concepts became first order concepts in the initiative’s praxis and self-reflection – a first step to accept Blomley’s challenge to connect the theoretical and the political outside the academy (Blomley, 1994).

The article uses Callon’s notion of ‘the qualification of products’ to deploy the efforts of the social venture to re-signify ‘the immigrant’ by qualifying its target group as well as its methods. Accordingly, the process of engaging partners, searching funds, and refining the initial idea becomes one of re-defining the target group to be addressed, formulating the social change to be pursued, and rehearsing the arguments to be deployed in the effort to re-articulate hegemonic discourse on the suburb and its dwellers. In that qualification process, aspects other than those coming from the group itself are instrumental. More particularly, the actors’ own stakes became central to re-signify the ‘immigrant’ category.

----- Insert Table 1 here -----

Thus, the (objectified) immigrant youth became a way towards the necessary renewal of a sclerotic organization (Red Cross’ stake in the initiative), and overcoming failed outreach processes (the Royal College of Art). Similarly, the immigrant suburb was transformed into a canvas on which to visualize the heterogeneity of voices and stories coming from the suburb and develop mural art in Sweden (the

Royal College of Art). The re-signification of the immigrant was thus clothed as youth participation and local democracy (the Swedish Inheritance Fund), and pursued through bridging together marginalized and established youth (thus addressing the socio-material basis of the symbolic realm).

In so doing, a large network of actors, each composed in turn of a variety of (social, symbolic and material) elements, were successively mobilized. Åsa's, Johanna's and my social and symbolic capital together with non-human components such as the wall were bundled together into a text that was submitted to the Swedish Inheritance Fund. The text effectively transformed social and symbolic capital into economic capital when the Inheritance Fund granted the money.

The social entrepreneurial process of articulating new imaginaries and mobilizing political engagement can thus be considered an assembling process: The process of enrolling a heterogeneity of elements (both human and non-human, symbolic and material), ordering them (through the arguments and epistemes used to describe the growing network) and, at least temporarily, stabilizing them. In other words, the entrepreneurial process of an initiative aiming at change in the symbolic realm involved aggregating and re-presenting (in Wacquant's triple cognitive, iconographic, and dramaturgical sense) the vulnerability of the group addressed into an attractive quality for well-established, recognized actors as well as organizing those actors into a network that worked complementarily towards the intended change.

Regardless of how well anchored in the community the social entrepreneurial process may be, however, the initiative is bound to reproduce the symbolic violence that is also its impulse. As it enrolled an ever larger network of actors and locales, VoS (and with it my colleagues and I) were recognized as spokesagents of the suburbs and its residents (although none of us lived in the suburbs). This entailed first, a positional distance to the communities we represented; and second, an imposition of our particular principles of vision and division.

Sure, we were in continuous dialogue with the people we represented and, hopefully, attuned to the effects of our principles of vision as experienced by the subordinated. Yet, at the end of the day, our own positional dispositions framed representation to acquiesce in the stakes of those occupying homologous (dominant) positions to ours. And so, their stakes (those of the dominant) came to shape VoS and the arguments it presented in its final application to the Swedish Inheritance Fund. It is in this sense that ANT's concept of translation runs parallel to Bourdieu's notion of symbolic violence. Both notions aim to capture the micro-sociological mechanisms that re-produce power-differentiated communities. To the Bourdieuan analysis, translation brings materiality into the performance of order, hierarchy, and symbolic subordination.

This is the paradoxical position that traps us as activist researchers. Following Lefebvre's ideas, VoS accepted the stigmatized suburbs as 'places of the possible', places that "contain the floating and dispersed elements of the possible, but not the power which could assemble them" (Lefebvre, 1996:156). While the symbolic recognition granted to actors occupying higher positions in the social space (the scholar, the professional non-profit manager, the recognized artist) made it possible to assemble the latent potential hiding in these derided places, the same symbolic recognition granted to us also reproduced the residents' subordination. Becoming (through VoS) the spokesagent for the suburbs implies objectifying and unifying the many voices within that community, and brought us back to performing the very symbolic violence we aimed to transgress. Blomley's question, it seems, remains unanswered: "How can we contribute to and learn from progressive struggles without reinforcing the hierarchies of privilege, silencing those with whom we work?" (Blomley, 1994:31)

There might be solace in Judith Butler's words: "social transformation occurs not merely by rallying mass numbers in favor of a cause, but precisely through the ways in which daily social relations are re-articulated, and new conceptual horizons opened up by anomalous or subversive practices" (Butler, 2000, p.14). The subversive practices in which VoS engages imply re-articulating the social relations enforced by the terms it aims at subverting. Thus, along the way it establishes relations between groups that otherwise would never meet, such as the student of the Royal College of Art and those of the Husby School. Symbolic change, the initiative seems to propose, goes both through reformulating the categories we use to perceive the world and through dislocating the relations at the origin of those categories. The first effort struggles to avoid the unifying effects of the category. The second strives to re-structure the relations perpetuating those categories. Thus, although caught in the "Bourdieuian assemblages" (Leander, 2011) of symbolic violence, VoS might still be able to open new conceptual horizons and re-articulate the networks that Butler suggests are conducive to social change.

Notes

[1] Voices of the Suburbs is a free translation from the Swedish name XXXX, that will hopefully be more friendly to English-speaking readers. Although friendly, the translation unfortunately loses a host of meanings implicit in the Swedish name, meanings that highlight the role of space in the persistence of urban socio-economic inequality. Literally, XXXX would read “XXXXX”.

[2] Two words exist in Swedish to refer to paintings done with spray in public walls: “klotter” and “graffiti”. Although some recognize the artistic qualities of graffiti, most condemn the damage done by indiscriminate scribbling in public walls. To underline the differing meanings, I have freely translated “klotter” with “wall scribbles” while maintaining “graffiti” for its most positive sense. Similarly, I use “damage of the public space” to refer to “skadegörelse”.

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