

CULTURAL IMAGINARIES OF NEOLIBERALISM: THE PRESS COMMUNICATION OF THE ART MUSEUM OF ESTONIA 2006–2015

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Abstract. The article elaborates on the public narratives of an Estonian cultural agent that testify to its rhetorical acculturation to the moral appeal of market-resilience and market rationalism. The cultural aspect of globalization is addressed by scrutinizing media messages that introduce Baltic art audiences to the contemporary global artworld. For that purpose, a discursive study of the press releases of the Art Museum of Estonia from 2006 to 2017 has been conducted. Depictions of the global artworld as a site of cultural anomie, belligerent rivalry and permanent societal crisis have been discussed as a neoliberal cultural fantasy that fosters and encourages aspiring contemporary artists to adapt to the opportunistic, competitive and survivalist role model of the entrepreneur of the self, as argued by Michel Foucault.

Keywords: cultural globalization, contemporary art, postcolonialism, cultural mimicry, neoliberal culture, Eastern Europe, Baltics, Estonia

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1. Introduction

This paper succeeds the first report on a study of public legitimization strategies in the Estonian visual arts based on contemporary cultural media (Saar, 2018a). It was established in that report that Estonian visual artists, as heralded to local audiences in press communications of the Art Museum of Estonia, are credited legitimacy in the eyes of prospective visitors mostly via assimilative cross-cultural references to third parties (i.e. from other cultures). Based on the frequent occurrence of a superiority/inferiority value scale in these references, it was concluded that artist's media images stand as the epitome of a colonial subject that typical of a recipient culture is "openly hybrid and owes its legitimacy to the kaleidoscopic mosaic of stigmas of marginality once imposed by supremacist cultural policy, but now embraced by the cultural agent in positive terms ..." (Saar 2018b).

The present follow-up, however, extends beyond the implied historical supremacy of the Baltic German romanticism and the rather Francophile modernism. Instead, the cultural imaginaries of present times are addressed in the same sample, as presented by the media exposure of a globalized contemporary artworld and its agent, the contemporary artist. Like its predecessor, the paper also uses the functionalist tenets of Durkheimian cultural anthropology as a departure point – the collective cultural imaginary of the time always serves to legitimize the socio-economic order of the same era (see Durkheim 1912/1995; Bourdieu 1993; Douglas and Wildawsky 1982; Gell 1998). Yet the analytical lens is hereby biased otherwise. The images of a globalized artworld are studied with the somewhat preemptive objective of detecting the figures of speech in Estonian public cultural parlance that might affirm a neoliberal societal order. The bias has its pretexts in the reasonable doubt originating in the tenets from Durkheim. The Baltic success story of conversion to free market priorities, or what has been promoted internationally as such, has already incurred social costs, having been analysed and found guilty of implementing the austere neoliberal sink-or-swim social policies (Sommers and Woolfson 2014). It is telling that the latest studies of social transformation in Estonia also occasionally ring a warning bell about the symptoms of neoliberal failure – the gradual economic, social and cultural stratification of a once upstart liberal society has spiked and graduated into steep internal geographical segregation between a relatively wealthier metropolitan area surrounding the capital Tallinn on one hand, and the rest of Estonia on the other, sidelined, brain-drained, left behind to swim or sink on its own (Vihalemm et al. 2017, Tammaru 2017, Vihalemm et al. 2018). This stepwise societal morphing from the rather flat egalitarian nationalism of the Singing Revolution back at the beginning of the 1990s towards the hierarchical arrangement of social castes in contemporary Estonia has had its usual favourite travel companions; namely, incessant accumulation of both economic and social capital in the upper ranks of society. The velocity of the trickle-up of capital has instigated reasonable doubt pertaining the culture of the time. I will pose this doubt here as a broader research agenda to be raised – isn't it true that the successful Baltic market convergence has brought the rise of a neoliberal culture of its own, epitomized by increasing concentration of both capital and cultural authority in the hands of a select few?

Here is how these hesitant grounds are pondered in what follows. The paper starts from David Chioni Moore's (2001) well-received appeal to subject post-Soviet heritage to postcolonial research perspectives. It also topicalizes the European/Baltic research framework instead of the Soviet/Baltic one, so prominent these days in the Baltic academic context (Krikmann and Olesk 2003, Kelertas 2006, Methis 2011, 2017, *Journal of Baltic Studies* 2016, *Annus* 2018). At variance with the dominant Soviet/Baltic research framework, it rather resumes an orthodox agenda of postcolonial studies – Western cultural hegemony in its historical provinces. To complement a passéist? range of interests bordering on Sovietology, it takes issue with 'the colonial present' under the globalized aegis? of liberal democracy, or the neocolonial empire as critical reception has it (Wallerstein 2000, 2004, Gregory 2004, Mamdani 2004, Mignolo 2011, Huggan 2013). Narrowed down to recent East-

European postcolonial studies on Western cultural hegemony by the various cases of cultural self-colonization in the region (Kiossev 1999, Todorova 1997, Plath 2008, Piotrowski 2009, Ștefănescu 2015, Kalnačs 2016a, 2016b et al.), the theoretical tenets are followed by an implementation of the British school of critical discourse analysis (CDA) looking at images of Estonian contemporary artists, as they are featured in the journalistic storylines of press-releases by the Art Museum of Estonia (AME) from 2006 to 2015. In the concluding discussion, imageries of the cultural agent in question are contextualized within the larger theoretical reception of neoliberal culture, as it has ascended to the titular theme in Western academic literature in the present decade. Conceptual family resemblances between the discursive evidence from the sample and the theoretical concepts of neoliberal culture are highlighted in the conclusion and finalized with a discussion of the Foucauldian entrepreneur of the self – both an elitist and egotistic cultural agent that efficiently appears to fuse the globalized skylines of the contemporary artworld with those of the global neoliberal empire.

2. Daily practices of the colonial present

It stands nothing short of truism in postcolonial studies that anything east of Western ‘core cultures’ has fallen prey to certain imaginative geographies. References to Edward Said’s (1978/2003) “Orientalism” abound. Moreover, his observations on the discursive invention of the Orient as overseas cultural exotica have been augmented as an analytical tool in East-European studies; that is, to the continental vicinity of the European edition of a likewise imaginary global West (Wolff 1994, Todorova 1997, Kelertas 2006, Plath 2008). Authors argue that in the respectively culture-saturated sense of geography, areas labelled as ‘Eastern’ are subjected to a certain evaluative mental distance, the spatialization between metropolis and periphery, with the latter making an appearance as a cultural aberration from civilized Western normality; inferiority, tribal manners and a general lag in progress are implied. This colonial edition of the world map is alleged to constitute the darker, colonialist flip side of modernity and comes accompanied by a like-minded temporal framework that under the aegis of cultural developmentalism leads inevitably to cultural racism and paternalism in varying degrees (Mignolo 2011 and Quijano 2010).

Yet Western Europe does not stand charged alone. Neither is the missing evolutionary link between the East and West always foregrounded in political agendas. The United States and its Washingtonian vista of the rest of the world is caught in the kindred critical loop on entirely different grounds – original sins of essentialism. Both British geographer Derek Gregory (2004) and Ugandan postcolonialist scholar Mahmood Mamdani (2004) elaborate on the explicit derogatory vogue in the public ‘culture talk’ in North America that has ever since the aftermath of 9/11 legitimized a certain persistent ‘colonial present’, where the ‘war on terror’ by means of terror has invented its own moral pretexts, or as official presidential talk would maybe have it – a moral calling to redeem the civilized world from the essentially bad to

the bone muslims of mostly Middle-Eastern origin. Needless to say, in these politics-driven cultural scripts images of the enemy feature as the conclusive evidence of the hopeless cultural otherness of ‘them’, let alone the life-threatening hazard to ‘us’.”

At odds with this soothingly simple binary code, there is an imagined Eastern Europe, dangling somewhere in the fuss about the baby and the bathwater. Not exactly an insinuated radical cultural difference, but definitely paternalized and supervised for the charitable reasons of moral tutelage, say, for the fringe fellow on the brink of Western ecumene (historical accounts from Wolff 1994, Todorova 1997, Plath 2008). Ever since the outbreak of the Christian crusades in the 12th century, but even more so since the Enlightenment, the populace around here has been subject to consecutive or simultaneous projects of cultural salvation. The recent comparativist shift in East-European postcolonial studies has, however, established that this colonial history has nowadays resulted in the more or less steady colonial present, with culture weaponized as a means of positional warfare. Common courtesies aside, the bottom lines in this vein of research tend to gravitate towards the shared acknowledgement that typical of the recipient culture, which has been ‘liberated’ countless times on various messianic grounds over the centuries, the region’s cultural self-image is nowadays prone to a postcolonial self-induced victimization and builds its self-assessments upon the internalized stigmas inflicted via erstwhile external acculturation some time in the colonial past. Yet more to the point in regard to the ongoing colonialism in present-day capitalist liberalism, discussed in the comparativist shift, the region can nowadays be judged, roughly speaking again, for its particular receptiveness to (imagined or not) top-down glances from West-European cultural hubs and a propensity for self-intimidation that results in a sense of inferiority and the compensatory cultural mimicry driven by this. These particular forms of self-categorization have been earmarked in the case of Eastern Europe as self-colonization (Kiossev 1999), radicalised in the image of the poor postcommunist relative, void of both the civilized manners of the colonizer and the cultural exoticism of the colonized (Ștefănescu 2015) and thereby doomed to the twilight zone of a double invisibility inhabited by the Eastern European ‘not-quite-Other’ (Piotrowski 2009), conceptualized in more general terms as a certain white-otherness. For example, it is against this background of European internal (and mutually accepted?) cultural segregation that Benedict Kalnačs (2016a, 2016b) elaborates on the Baltic states as Western Europe’s ‘internal others’, incorporated once and forever since the crusaders’ goodwill to bring redemption to the so called frontiers (also Plath 2008). He, however, extends the issue beyond the loop of culture studies, tending to include most postcolonial research. He addresses colonialism as the global issue (Kalnačs 2016a), following beside others, also Immanuel Wallerstein’s (2000, 2004) world-system theory, yet somewhat downplaying the latter’s ambition to dismount the neoliberal world order in particular as an endorsement of worldwide colonial power relations in economy and socialia. Politologists Ivan Krastev and Stephen Holmes (2018: 119), however, stated recently on a much more critical note that current illiberal counter-revolutions in Central and Eastern Europe are to be approached for the revanchist ‘return of the repressed’. They expand: “After the

Berlin Wall fell, Europe was no longer divided between communists and democrats. It was instead divided between imitators and the imitated. East-West relations morphed from a Cold War standoff between two hostile systems into a moral hierarchy within a single liberal, Western system. While the mimics looked up to their models, the models looked down on their mimics. It is not entirely mysterious, therefore, why the ‘imitation of the West’ voluntarily chosen by East Europeans three decades ago eventually resulted in a political backlash.”

In the present paper I intend to address in a similar vein a certain cultural mimicry of Eastern European transitional societies towards what in the present decade is increasingly referred to as neoliberal culture. The mimicry in question is outlined in the following as it is currently discursively manifested in the public art talk and discussions surrounding art originating in the cultural mainstream in Estonia, a country viewed for some time as a model apprentice of market liberalism. The discursive evidence is thereafter compared against the theoretical profiles of neoliberal culture in the concluding discussion. Overlapping value orientations shared by these two are thereby established. However, for now I will depart from the broader concept of neoliberalism itself as it stands in the Wallersteinian world system (Wallerstein 2004: 23–41) and associated dependence theory. Just to recall it briefly, both theories are built on a central shared argument that proposes the world as being divided into core countries, semi-peripheries and peripheries that are interrelated within a worldwide network of colonial power relations. In these, the core countries are exclusively entitled to capital-intensive and cost-effective labour, while the peripheries have been designated as low-skill and labour-intensive wage-labour opportunities. This division of labour works well to assure the relentless draining of capital towards the core cultures and to provide the *non plus ultra* definition of capitalism for Wallerstein (2004: 24): “We are in a capitalist system only when the system gives priority to the endless accumulation of capital. Using such a definition, only the modern world-system has been a capitalist system. Endless accumulation is a quite simple concept: it means that people and firms are accumulating capital in order to accumulate still more capital, a process that is continual and endless.” And it is this very definition of capitalism that in the Wallersteinian paradigm hosts quite a few complementary terms – neoliberalism, globalism and hegemony (all quite in line with the Foucauldian definition of neoliberalism and its mundane identity formation practices, see Foucault 2008: 147–148, 226–230).

Endless accumulation of capital leads to hegemonic power relations between states, Wallerstein alleges. Yet the term hegemony in his view stands for the common denominator of historical colonial empires with the present neoliberal one. He draws on the 17th century United Dutch Provinces, 19th century British Empire and the United States of America post-WWII in order to highlight their active globalism at their prime: “Hegemonic powers during the period of their hegemony tended to be advocates of global ‘liberalism’. They came forward as defenders of the principle of the free flow of the factors of production (goods, capital, and labour) throughout the world-economy” (Wallerstein 2000: 257).

3. Research sample

The press releases of the Art Museum of Estonia (AME) were approached as cultural texts targeting the general public of times of the austerity measures meant to alleviate the dire straits of the global credit crunch that broke out on 2007/2008. The museum in question, one of the largest institutional operators on the Baltic art scene, was entitled to the authority of an Althusserian (1971) ideological state apparatus, possessing the mainstream cultural means for identity formation by circulating public narratives and journalistic story lines on what ‘we’ are, where ‘we’ come from and what ‘we’ ought do in the future, not to mention the fabrication/inculcation of ‘our’ memories and daily habits, that in turn admittedly foster the establishment of social control and civil obedience (also Bourdieu et al. 1991, Zolberg 1994, Bennett 1995).

The sample surveyed consisted of 223 press releases from AME from 2006 to 2015 introducing audiences to the visual arts. It was established that despite the diversity of cultural value orientations in the AME press communications, their clusters tended to fall into three ample and well-travelled theoretical concepts: ethnocentrism, Eurocentrism and globalism. The boundaries between these three were found to coalesce, yet references to any of them seemed to exhaust pretty much all the resources of self-legitimation available to the cultural producers in 21st century Estonia. Seventy press releases out of 223 were found to mediate the particular time continuum spanning the aftermath of Cold War to the present. In these, using typical variations in time adverbials, the reader of the press releases was repeatedly instructed to embrace the years 1989–1991 as a radical rupture between the Soviet past and the capitalist present, or what is presented in the sample as the dawn of recent liberal freedoms. Moreover, moving on from this conceptual threshold, a distinct intrinsic logic was detected in the set of statements introducing Estonian audiences to the global world and its titular agents – cultural globalization and contemporary art(ists).

4. Research questions and methodology

It is from this theory-laden viewpoint that the paper will report on the cultural imaginaries of globalism in Estonian public art talk. Relevant figures of speech are pondered against two separate research questions:

1. Does Estonian public art talk testify to the endless accumulation of cultural capital in Western ‘core societies’?
2. Does Estonian public art talk testify to the endless accumulation of cultural capital in the upper ranks of its own society?

In order to pave the way to a critical discourse analysis, the two research questions are operationalized as more open inquiries towards the following discursive elements in the press releases of the sample:

1. In what spatial terms is the environment around visual art practices depicted in the press releases of the Art Museum of Estonia?

A methodological concept of the *culturescape* was applied in order to analyse the culture-dependent sense of space in press communications. Along the theoretical guidelines of cultural geography (Sooväli-Sepping 2011) with occasional Marxist leanings (Clark 1973, Mitchell 1996, Cosgrove 1984), any grammatical evidence of deictic reference to the surrounding space, delimiting spatial frames, panorama, or outlooks related to visual art practices was read for the tacit legitimization of some particular social order. Based on these elements of discourse, more conclusive deductions were made about the spatial sentiment the texts in the sample represent.

2. What kind of social group affiliation, social behaviour and social order is associated with visual art practices in the sample?

A methodological concept of collective identity narratives has been used for gathering discursive references to the audience in the press releases. The audience is proposed for discursive study as it is suggestively described in press releases, the collective agency of shared cultural praxes – the legitimate system of restrictions and prescriptions. Any tacit suggestion of social lineation, social behaviour and social order found in the sample has been marked as evidence of ongoing identity policies in the anthropological sense. Material culture, art exhibitions and artworks in the given case, are taken both as markers and instigators of particular social behavioural patterns that indicate in turn an aspiration for a particular social establishment (Appadurai 1986). More to the point, it is the artworks on display that subject visitors to preconditioned conventions of cultural consumption and accepted patterns of social behaviour, and stipulate the notions of legitimacy across society, and for that matter, the recognized differences in distributed social status and group identity (Gell 1998). To provide operationalized closure both in terms of discourse analysis and grammatical units, it is primarily the personal pronouns casually indicating ‘us’, appealing to ‘our’ habits and alleging who ‘we’ are/do in public cultural parlance that help to isolate tacit strivings to comprise audiences into particular social groupings (Bhabha 1990, Bourdieu 1984, 1994, Fairclough 1989, Billig 1995).

3. How are visual artists featured in the sample?

The central methodological concept of CDA – of subject position – has been applied to focus on the agency of artists in the press releases. Norman Fairclough (1989: 39) observes:

In one sense of *subject*, one is referring to someone who is under the jurisdiction of a political authority, and hence passive and shaped: but the *subject* of a sentence, for instance, is usually the active one, the ‘doer’, the one causally implicated in action. Social subjects are constrained to operate within the subject positions set up in discourse types ... and are in that sense passive; but it is only through being so constrained that they are made able to act as social agents. ... being constrained is a precondition for being enabled. Social agents are active and *creative*.

As applied in the present paper, subject positions are detected by focusing on how artists are predicated in press releases, what kind of cultural activities, relations and habits they are attributed, what kinds of behavioural patterns are suggested. It is by

collecting and marking these predicates that the cultural agent at work is profiled in the paper in terms of the cultural template (Sztompka 2002) imposed upon the local audiences to be acculturated. Or more in the vein of Durkheimian sociology, the concept of subject position is augmented by the idea of job vacancies in the mainstream culture industry to be filled by aspiring artists (Bourdieu 1993).

5. Results

5.1. *The culturesscapes of globalism*

The global culturesscape is presented to readers using episodic deictic references to the spatial environment comprising the practices of contemporary art exclusively. It invokes a particular global space-time continuum that makes an occurrence in the press releases some time in the wake of the fall of the Berlin Wall – most adverbs of the time have shifted to the present perfect tense ever since and spatial scope of the cross-cultural references has expanded worldwide. Deictic references analysed on the basis of content reads like an interpretation of reality distinguished by recurrent imageries of spatial volatility and fluidity. In contrast to ethnocentrist and Eurocentrist culturesscapes with their solid orientation of space along a polarity on either the territorial own/foreign axis or modern periphery/metropolis axis (Saar 2018a), the new culturesscape emerges in the globalist culture discourse, one featuring a **subdiscourse of precarity**. It is the vanishing of any spatial markers that stands out first. This deterritorialized environment is, however, suggested to audiences as the panopticon of the cyclical recurrence of crises, of any conceivable sort and shape, supplementing the above-mentioned spatial volatility. On the tacit pretext of evolutionist and progressivist teleology, it seems, this culturesscape is expressed to the public so as to be subject to a permanent structural contingency, with social precarity implied as collateral inevitability. The narrative also reads like a kind of interpretation of reality that rests upon the granted appeal for relentless innovation and creative destruction that allegedly paves a futuristic way towards increasing common welfare. Explicit language is implemented in the discourses of globalism in order to disentangle artistic practices from any geographically reliable boundaries or solid spatial orientation, for that matter, now associated with perceptual restraint. It is rather the backdrop of boundless openness to this fluid cosmopolitan allure that fosters the collateral receptiveness to the metaphors of continuous social cataclysms rushing over the face of the Earth. And it is a kind of figurative manner of speech that presents this eidetic reality as an inevitable, granted and natural context to be adapted to and survived.

To start with, in the global culturesscape, the reader is instructed that Estonia, Europe and all the other territorial entities fall into the category of *anachronisms of the era of the Iron Curtain*, still *drifting around in the present* (AME 2013. “Kriitika...”). They are declared now as melting into the loftier panorama, looming arguably beyond Cold War confrontations and ideologies. A new backdrop unfolds from the tellingly elevated vantage point enabled in retrospect: ... *to comprehend*,

for the first time ever, the visual art of these times for the united entirety, without ideological, geographical and political divisions into two disparate parties, East and West (AME 2013. "Kriitika..."). The superior vantage point is provided with credibility by reference to expert authorities from abroad: *Director of Malmö Art Museum Göran Christenson asserts that the visual art of the Nordic countries has evolved into an international endeavour and hence adjectives like 'local', 'regional' and 'national' come up short in terms of relevance.* (AME 2009. "I Love ..."). The brand new globally *united entirety* is nevertheless legitimated in a somewhat controversial manner by references to the very same signifier, albeit disqualified from drawing upon the passé *anachronism*; that is, the culture of the Occident. The latter, however, draws now upon a completely different grand narrative, and this to the detriment of contesting ethnocentrist and Eurocentrist mental maps of the world. The globalist edition of Occidental culture evidently reaches far back in time in order to project a succession from antiquity. By looking backwards toward the *hotchpotch* of 1990s contemporary art in Estonia under the exhibition title *Recollected Crises* (Kogutud kriisid), the press release states casually among other things that: *The word crisis originates in Greek and means withdrawal, change, movement, rupture and shift* (AME 2006. "Kogutud ...").

Besides antiquity, the era of the Enlightenment in the Occident is also overtly credited in the sample as a founding present crisis-ridden society, yet earmarked for the occasion under a constitutive reciprocity with avant-garde art:

The Enlightenment elicited the ceaseless evolution of criticism and crises, along with both devastating and brighter times. Aesthetic radicalism that one can attribute to Cold War era avant-garde art, held and still holds one of the most important outlooks in criticism and the disclosure of crises (AME 2013. "Kriitika ...").

A sequel to the historiographical revisions comes likewise in an indicative mood. Contemporary Europe is presented in the sample as the legitimate heir of the dynamics of historical crisis and with a rather clear semblance to Ullrich Beck's e. a. (1992) risk society. It is first of all the *processes* of the overwhelming crisis dynamics that are designated purposive rationality and active agency in the sample:

European societal, political and economic affairs are affected right now by processes of restructuring that have led to an instability of social bonds, to a loss of domestic belonging and to a steepening individualism on one hand, and to increasing unemployment, civic inertia and disillusionment in politics, on the other. These changes are experienced in the West foremost as a crisis of the welfare society, while in Eastern Europe they appear as side effects of the capitalist transition (AME 2007. "Don't Worry ...").

Estonia also makes an entrance into the realm of media reality against the background of a global crisis-ridden culturescape. Its self-references indicate a respective self-image. Estonia's contemporary art scene in the 1990s is profiled

retrospectively *in crisis* itself, whence it is trying to acculturate receptively to the latest worldwide trends:

The steepening inadequacy of fiscal subsidies for the arts at the end of the 1980s and its collapse on the eve of the 1990s along with societal changes took place in parallel with the dissolution of the preceding exclusive status of the arts, towards an appropriation and domestication of new art languages from the globalizing scope of culture. Hence, the crisis was to assume a triple effect – it unfolded simultaneously on the fields of economy, symbolics and language (AME 2006. “Kogutud ...”).

The subdiscourse of precarity is subject to intense semantic controversy. The once associated meaning-sets of explicit media messages are also taken into account, and the struggle over connoted meanings reveals a deep-seated polysemy. At least two discrepant reading modes come across, each contesting the other by enforcing its own semantic domain over the signifiers of crisis. For an eye armed with critical theory, images of sustained societal crisis and the inevitability of the boom/doom cycle in the economy draw upon a pointed antagonism towards the capitalism of a particular origin (i.e. critical theory of Polanyi 2001, Schumpeter 2011), and especially in the images of a fluid society (Baumann 2000). However, the particularities of the media exposure of the precarity subdiscourse in press releases rather tend to avoid the dystopian implications of critical theory and instead override them with the rather affirmative and receptive take on societal crisis, as argued by its most prominent spokesman, Milton Friedman (1962, xiv): ‘Only a crisis – actual or perceived – produces real change. When that crisis occurs, the actions that are taken depend on the ideas that are lying around. ... Our basic function [is] to develop alternatives to existing policies, to keep them alive and available until the politically impossible becomes the politically inevitable.’

With both intellectual camps arguing for ‘social change’ against the backdrop of a crisis-ridden society (welcome or not), the journalistic storylines in question have chosen their side by a tacit choice of narrative means. As a clear disclaimer, one does not encounter in press releases critical notions of social anomie, steepening crisis cycles, an erosion of social coherency or the pathogenesis of modern society for that matter. Not to mention the original common appeal for more community-minded civic action. However, on the other hand, neither can one see overt declarations of radical deregulation, privatization of national industries and public-sector programmes or deep cuts to the welfare state, notorious for liaisons to neoliberal policies. Instead, a Marxian jeremiad on ‘everything solid melting down’ comes conversed as a Miltonian confession rather via a particular agenda framing. Here, claims made by critical economic sociology are endorsed, yet with implicit concession to the prospective positive outcomes of permanent crisis in the long term. To start with, everything solid and sustained is insinuated as irrelevant, if not counterproductive, for the worldwide cultural causes of contemporary art, its events and agents. This particular bias is induced in press releases by the particular set up in storytelling –

crisis is always proposed as a common contextual reference field, as if a naturalized environment granted and presumed nowadays as constitutive to current practices in contemporary art. Crises are never addressed as an issue in press releases, they are never problematized as an urgent agenda of contemporary art, but presented in the undisputed terms of the sedimented discourse one is invited to adapt to and roll with. Moreover, they are also provided with self-sufficient agency in press releases, they are attributed the causal ability to foster consequences and unleash a peculiar dynamism in societies. As in Europe, so in Estonia, the reader cannot miss the fact that contemporary art projects its activities exclusively against this, as if granted, culturescape.

5.2. Collective identity narratives in globalism

What meets the eye at first in regard to the affiliation of the social groups, social behaviour and social order related in globalist discourse to contemporary art practices, is that all of these practices also make an appearance between recursive references to crisis-discourse. They are also embedded, as it were, in the crisis-ridden life-world; in other words, in the aforementioned global time-space continuum that makes an appearance in the press releases shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall. They are, likewise, presented to the reader in the present perfect tense, mostly. These constellations in the perception of time carry serious discursive implications. They seem to complete the preceding consecutive progression of ethnocentrism and Eurocentrism with a grand finale that indicates no further aspirations towards the imagined future. In a manner of speaking, there is no future in these press releases in their use of the present perfect, suggested apparently as a historical terminal point.

This gradual evolution towards the 'endless present' also reads as a stepwise decrease in the social stock required for cultural practices, up to the moment when it shrinks to personal artistic career trajectories in a globalist culture discourse. First, an ethnocentrist parlance made sense using metaphors of national integrity and social egalitarianism, also via populist and communitarian value orientations, all anchored in the press releases to a peculiar boreal bias in the sensation of space and the respective cultural self-image as a rugged Northern nation among other ancient Scandinavian tribes. The Eurocentrist outlook rather gravitates towards the rhetoric of a class society, divisions of social merit implied in the unequal distribution of credits to a certain select few, summoned in the sample as a national intelligentsia and literati, affiliated either to the Baltic German heritage and/or the Francophile modernism. In the globalist discourse on culture even this social hierarchy dissolves. Collective identity narratives are best captured instead in the fragmentary **subdiscourse of individualism**, testimony to the so-called escalating individualization processes in contemporary societies (Giddens 1991, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002, Baumann 2000).

In the globalist culture discourse, artists apparently are not expected to blend into social groups other than those regimented *ad hoc* for the production of exhibitions. No affinity with any age group, generation, intellectual pedigree or sustained interest group is found worth mentioning except in terms of a critical distance based on a

tacit conviction that belonging as to a group so to a culturescape may come at a cost – ominous perceptual restrictions to one’s world view. Agents of artistic practices are now identified as follows: *17 known artists from all over the world* (AME 2013. “BMW ...”) or *graffiti stars ascended to the status of legend from different corners of world* (AME 2011. “Tänavakunsti ...”), with no generational, geographical, national or social identity added. The only common denominator comes in following to the fore more like fragmentary epiphanies of a global artistic elite. Unsurprisingly, this agency articulates itself amidst perceptual horizons of the crisis-subdiscourse, yet from a calculated and rational distance:

Crisis rampages around us, the state revises the boundaries of its real existence, values are re-estimated, radical measures are taken, resources are slashed and taxes are raised, – nothing is the same anymore. Without interfering in daily politics, it is, however, also time to inspect the affairs on the frontiers of contemporary art ... (AME 2009. “Asjade ...”).

This shows that the self-reference to *us* amidst crisis comprises contemporary artists only, since the pronoun studied is predicated as being busy at the respective *frontiers* in the next sentence. This implied a vantage point, despite its alleged exclusivity, seems to share a similar attitude towards crisis with the *state* mentioned in the passage – it is the managerial take on the risks being handled, expenses to be downsized and objectives adapted to open opportunities. It reads as a productive, instrumentalized and purposive approach. Crisis is not, hence, calling for some sort of trauma treatment here, but for a context-sensitive and calculated behaviour at both mentioned *frontiers*, as it were. It is, once again, presented as a preordained and ‘natural’ environment that defines the range of social possibilities. Moreover, it also reads as constitutive of the contemporary arts, and culture in general is connoted. The latter two are alleged a congenital responsiveness to a crisis-ridden production mode that in Estonia dates back to the 1990s:

Contemporary experimental art ... considers the deliberate violation of rules as its main priority, and also draws traditional approaches into crisis, the latter applied to distort the former (AME 2017. “Kirjaoskus ...”).

The younger generation (of Estonian artist – JS) discerned the loss of art’s erstwhile symbolic position as a natural point of departure, accompanied by quests for a new type of communicativity ... For that matter, crisis was not bound to existential circumstances but grew to open a microphone staged for different kinds of pleas (AME 2006. “Kogutud ...”).

Second, the social group implied alternatively in references to *us*, *ours* and *we* has also legitimate social behaviour attributed to it. It is subsumed in the following as the **subdiscourse of competition**. Contemporary artists are expected to develop competitive edges and belligerent agility, attend the struggle over personal success

and assume the ethics of personal accomplishment, all this to the detriment of civic commitment and aspirations for social change detected to a lessening degree both in ethnocentrist and Eurocentrist cultural discourses. In the globalist culture discourse, social behaviour is encouraged to lean on the advantages of rational and strategic planning, while treating artistic practices for instrumentalized means in the fight for social reward, understood as personal improvement in social status. Militant metaphors of Hobbesian society are abundant; competition between artists/contestants is proved healthy, allegedly resulting in a breakthrough onto the international arena, to certain leading positions and membership of the global cultural elite. The subdiscourse of competition comes across in many figures of speech, all owing some of their explanatory power to semantic domains of warfare and sports. More persistently than ever, social behaviour is described now in terms of nothing short of strategic management and competitive dynamics. Certain manoeuvres are told to take place on the *frontiers of contemporary art*, are delivered to the reader as a *strike* or *breakthrough*, caused by a *vigorous artistic position* and unfolding as the *takeover of space with flags flying high* and so on (AME 2009. “Asjade ...”, AME 2009. “I Love ...”, AME 2010. “Kõik ...”, AME 2011. “Kas ...”). Quite often these manoeuvres are placed onto the *international arena*; they may result in making it onto the *charts* of contemporary art or the *top hundred of the most influential* (AME 2013. “Crystallized ...”). *Competitive momentum* is considered beneficial to practising contemporary arts (AME 2006. “5 teost ...”), with the *Olympic Games* and *races* featuring in the background as explanatory reference points. *A success story* on the international arena is related to provide credibility for the contemporary arts, with the associated *skilfully managed breakthrough to leading positions* to provide artists with a career model. The social mobility of artists is literally expected to assimilate the ballistical trajectory of the *rising star*, ascending rapidly upwards to promised pleasures for the ultimate few – the *superstars*.

A skilfully managed breakthrough to leading positions in international art life back in the 1990s and the first decade of the 21st century, known as the ‘Nordic miracle’, essentially extends the same success story of which the most prominent representatives – Olafur Eliasson, Annika von Hauswolff, Elmgreen & Dragset, Superflex and others – enjoy the status of superstar. They are seconded by the world class names of international art from Malmö art collections as Wolfgang Tillmans and Nan Golding and the range of rising stars from the new generation (AME 2009. “I Love ...”).

Third, a certain social order is indicated to have been born out of precarity, individualist opportunism and competitive behaviour, namely that of cultural meritocracy. The **subdiscourse of meritocracy** is found in the sample in scattered episodes of petty, yet persistent, distinctions between contemporary artists, broadly put again, of domestic importance, internationally advanced and the global elite. In the globalist cultural discourse, the artists relevant to its value orientations are subject to a constant cultural ranking. Certain *locally known names, rising stars, international*

art celebrities (AME 2009. “I Love ...”, AME 2010. “Neoekspressionismi ..”), *prominent artists of the international top league* (AME 2011. “Armastuse ...”) are regularly invoked as personified nodal points in this global cultural oligarchy, let alone the aforementioned *graffiti stars ascended to the status of legend from different corners of world* (AME 2011. “Tänavakunsti ...”).

Also, at odds with the pervasive metaphors of precarity in the spatial sensations of the surrounding culturescape, respective segregated geographical entities are invoked and allocated unequal cultural validity of provincial/metropolitan distinction, not to mention the rigid hierarchy of the three cultural castes inhabiting the terrain spanning from the former to the latter. Artistic careers are asserted to run the same course, with corresponding ascendancy in social standing between departure from the province and arrival in the metropolis of global saliency, or what is presented in the sample as such. None of this is invoked in explicit and literal wording. Yet the casual ease with which the details of this centralist geography are elaborated along with coincidental ascent to the ranks of global cultural oligarchy comes across as if a presumed acceptance exists from the likewise attuned reader. The imagined **geography of success** tells the difference between the province and the metropolis – an artistic career is expected to unfold in the latter, wishfully imagined ‘world arena’, with the former mentioned briefly in passing as a take-off point toward subsequent success, if at all. The global cultural nobility, referred to occasionally as biennial artists, is alleged to only inhabit the global hubs of cultural life. It is as if there exists an imagined supreme cultural ecosystem referred to in the sample as *the worlds leading art events and museums acclaimed worldwide*. Such superlative structures, however, are peppered with a *non plus ultra* topping. There are the most central among the central – *the worlds most central (maailma kõige kesksematel) art exhibitions and the exhibition templates and most central international forums that have influenced the evolution of Western art most of all (Lääne kunsti arengut enim mõjutanud näitusformaatides ja avangardkunsti kõige kesksematel rahvusvahelistel foorumitel* (AME 2007. “Virtuaalne ...”). Coincidentally or not, all of these hubs apparently lie in Western Europe or North America, with a few exceptions in Asia. The only credit Estonia is found worthy of is being an aleatory stopover for international itinerary exhibitions that expose local audiences to the global celebrity culture. This kind of discursive evidence has the cultural capital radically concentrated at the disposal of the promised lands with restricted access, social and geographic segregation taken for granted and adjusted along the evaluative grids of the omnipresent axes of the province/metropolis power relations.

5.3. The cultural agency of globalism

Turning now to the objective of the third research question – how are visual artists featured in the sample? – as mentioned in the introduction, this was addressed in discourse analytical terms of the position attributed to contemporary artists as subjects. The following observations on how this shared subject position is predicated in the sample tend to complement the observations highlighted so far, in that it relates to the perceived precarity of the culturescape and the sanctioned

competitive behaviour of ‘us’. While overtly attributed the *artistic position* and *strategies and tactics* of action (AME 2007, “Kestev ...”), contemporary artists are mostly considered to be cosmopolitan multiculturalists and the wandering nomads of radical cultural liberalism. This is featured in the elevated awareness of ‘innate’ creative freedoms and sovereign prerogatives, barely commensurable with an ethnocentrist commitment to local lyricism and modernist Eurocentrist optimism. The freedoms in question can be epitomized under the auspices of unlimited liberty, openness and playfulness. However, it does not take much effort to realize that all of these tend to constitute a discursive lineup of ‘negative liberties’ as argued by Isaiah Berlin (1969/2002) – rather escapist liberties that is, than ‘positive liberties’ of restrained civic commitment. This **subdiscourse of negative liberties** is apparent in many respects, but mostly in run-away attempts to be emancipated both from the semantic domains originating in known art historical frameworks and territorially binding identifications. The two come tightly intertwined for the reader and manifest a familiar opposition to anything sedimented and solid in favour of the *free falling of meaning*:

In 1961, while moving from Dresden to Düsseldorf, Gerhard Richter did not just trade his social and political milieu, but also his artistic environment. He abandoned East-Germany’s traditions of socialist realism in Düsseldorf and ignited a dialogue with late art informel (L’Art Informel) and rising pop art. Hesitancy towards anything sedimented and solid in the arts is planted in him ever since: ‘I am not following any particular intentions, nor system or course for that matter’, says Richter in 1966 (AME 2008. “Gerhard ...”).

... we are dealing with experimental art that with its ideology and physical manifestations sufficiently purposefully counters conventional aesthetical customs to omit it from any creative activity aimed at innovation in the arts ... The narrative of (Paul – JS) McCarthy’s interventions, like (Mike – JS) Kelly’s, is anachronistic. This is characterized by the free falling of meaning, confusingly opulent bouquet of metaphors and exuberant exposure of activities ... The collection of his early works testifies to an anti-dialogue with the then dominant abstract expressionism. McCarthy can reduce Pollock’s swift painting gymnastics to symptoms of a maniacally relentless dabbling (AME 2007. “Paul ...”).

The reluctance towards contextual strings softens to oscillating ambiguities, though, when applied to institutional frameworks. The latter represent the stark contrast strengthening the case of the nomad rebel willy-nilly. That is, one more rhetorical distinction between the societal context and artistic text is made, likewise in favour of precarity over solidity. In one case exemplified as the tension between the rigid *white cubes* of the gallery network and the *fascinating energy of street art*, allegedly at odds with the former. For a cultural nomad, so the logic reads, this is an opportunity to declare a romantic faith in the *modus vivendi* of the radical outsider, drifting beyond the margins of the sedimented establishment:

In most cases, that kind of domestication has proven to demonstrate meagre results. On order to bring 'writing art' into the spatial environment conditioned for creating, into the 'white cube', some of its genuineness most disappear ... (AME 2008. "Koht ...").

The cultural nomad is allegedly beyond any ideological providence and communitarian tutelage. S/he is also alien to any statist ideas, but more prejudiced. The state is earmarked with stigmas of the cultural Other in the globalist sample, discredited as *grotesque* and *exalted* (AME 2007. "Jaan ..."). The subdiscourse of negative freedoms nevertheless has its escapism combined with a much more affirmative and populist take on the consumer choices of the 'common man'. Escape from art historical, territorial and statist boundaries has its trust and solidarity in as if the likewise detached and emancipated cultural consumer, in an explicitly postulated standoff with the repressive state. It is argued in the press releases that the latter presents the common man with a mandatory enlisting in ideological struggles, even to the point of a compulsion to *bloodletting* if required. The state, so it reads:

... demands a straightforward answer from the common man about whose side he is on, who he condemns and who he is willing to let bleed ... He (Jaan Toomik – JS) scrutinizes the common man's life stories, but chases the moments saturated with flamboyant metaphysical pretence, confession or emotional tension peaking over the top ... It's up to the visitor to decide whether to cry or laugh ... we are addressed in terms of from-the-womb-to-the-tomb and those of communion and community spirit and, for that matter, redemption and deprivation revealed in the mundane odds and ends of the daily routine. (AME 2007. "Jaan ...", also AME 2007. "Transverse ...", AME 2013. "Crystallized ...", AME 2006. "Skaalanihe ...").

The reluctance towards any conceivable social constraint expressed in the **subdiscourse of negative liberties** and attributed to contemporary artists in the sample has, however, a certain obvious ingrained constructive and affirmative edge. First, this reads as a proponent of individualization and the atomization of societal bonds as observed in established individualization theories (see Giddens 1991 and others above). While Giddens and Beck consider the topic in terms of what they call subpolitical subjectivity and emancipated life-trajectories in the loosened social integrity of so-called reflexive modernism, Baumann (2000), just to recollect common knowledge briefly, has it instead in the radically critical terms of liquid modernity with narcissist ego-trippers and ignorant soldiers of luck drifting all over the social space with no societal imperative or rationale left as a guiding landmark. Once again, the sample of globalist cultural parlance in question tends to respond to this state of affairs with approval. Namely, a particular type of cultural agency is proposed – one resilient to the ever-changing horizons of the social milieu, always open to *ad hoc* tactical solutions favouring its personal self-serving life-policies and their expected beneficial outcomes.

6. Concluding discussion

Following shift from the discursive evidence to its interpretation may add to the mainstream derogation of the national agent from a liberal perspective (Anderson 1991, Gellner 2008, Smith 1988), provided that the Estonian contemporary artist falls into this category. This time, however, it may stand charged from a workerist and leftist perspective instead, more specifically fostering worldwide corporate interests by affirmatively implementing the rhetoric of free trade and market rationales under the auspices of a borderless cultural globalization. The academic left has trailblazing precedents established for the occasion (Bourdieu 1998, Harvey 2005, Wallerstein 2000, 2004, Duménil and Lévy 2011, Crouch 2011). Yet, the fact that the nemesis in question in these insights, neoliberalism, has not been entitled a cluster of cultural value orientations of its own, could be due to the leftist way to see a social struggle, where anthropologists see cultural imagination as a reproductive force of the given social order (e.g. Appadurai 1996).

While the popular concept of neoliberalism has allegedly already lost its ability to signify any distinct and scientifically valid research area due to its promiscuous liaisons with far too many theoretical perspectives (Clarke 2008, Venugopal 2015), its junior but admittedly likewise evil twin-brother, neoliberal culture, seems yet dogged by all the misfortunes of the struggling parvenu. Therefore, with a Wallersteinian understanding of neoliberalism in place (see above), a more detailed account of the emerging concept of neoliberal culture might be in order.

Recent literature addressing such a notion still gravitates towards the regrettable collateral of the social consequences of the policies surrounding the creative industries and this in the vein of political economy, never mind the otherwise leftist repression theories (Hesmondhalgh 2008, Lovink and Rossiter 2007, Gilbert 2016, McGuigan 2016, McRobbie 2015). Some recent developments in this vein have, however, resolved in a more contemplative anthropological take that favours the holistic amalgamation of culture, socialia and economy into the interplay and negotiation of quotidian routines of the population that, it so happens, also informs the research paradigm of social transformations. It is through this twofold analytical lens that neoliberal culture has become historicized at best in my view; in other words, credited with a temporal scope and singular idiosyncrasy of its own.

It is with meticulous attention to large-scale intellectual transformations that the historians of ideas Daniel Stedman Jones (2012) and Daniel T. Rodgers (2011) have traced the genesis of a certain strictly academic and marginal economic doctrine in interwar Europe and its ascendancy to an all-encompassing political supremacy in postwar US. The aftermath of this cultural landscaping is said to be the peculiar climate change in North American social imagery of the last quarter of the 20th century: “Strong metaphors of society were supplanted by weaker ones. Imagined collectivities shrank; notions of structure and power thinned out. Viewed by its acts of mind, the last quarter of the century was an era of disaggregation, a great age of fracture” (Rodgers 2011, 3). As Rodgers’s book unfolds, neoliberalism barely gets a mention, yet its usual accomplices, Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher,

nevertheless have their speeches (while in office) analysed for the rhetorical idiom that both address and draw on the popular social imagery of the time. Rodgers (2011: 18) insists that all post-WWII presidents in the US, let alone Thatcher, have increasingly spoken to audiences against the discursively constituted back-drop of a crisis-stricken society: “To talk in the presidential voice was to talk against a backdrop of crisis, danger, and trial.” Hence, their recurrent nationwide appeals to personal risk management, responsibility and choices with a ‘world in peril’, as the common backstory (*ibidem*). The age of fracture, the leitmotif of the book, however, is diagnosed as a distinctive condition by the author – spreading a ‘contagion of metaphors’ that collapses cultural narratives into an even larger, allegedly suprahistorical metanarrative of allegedly impeccable market mechanisms.

The historical retrospections of Stedman Jones and Rodgers are convenient to couple with Patricia Ventura’s (2012) and Jim McGuigan’s (2016) rather sociological approaches to what they explicitly call neoliberal culture, emerging allegedly some time in the aftermath of the Cold War. Both refer to Raymond Williams and Michel Foucault in order to build a case against the neoliberal offensive in culture, yet the former implements the Williamsian key term ‘structure of feeling’ and the Foucauldian term ‘entrepreneur of himself’ in a rather introductory mood to conduct quite a few case studies of corporatist takeover, commodification and monetization of American pop culture, family values, consumption habits, patriotism and so on. While the main concern of the latter is typical of the European angle on neoliberal culture, creative industries policies in general and Robert Florida’s (2002) ideas on creative class in particular. Given the indisputable liaisons of both Williams and Foucault on the ideas of social struggle and social conflict-led (occasionally Marxist) theories of power, the notion of the neoliberal structure of feeling comes across as expected – allied with serious implications for human agency. It is already on the second page of her book that Ventura (2012: 2) comes clean:

Neoliberal culture as a structure of feeling impels us to extend the market, its technologies, approaches and mindsets, into all spheres of human life, to move the ideology of consumer choice to the center of individual existence, and to look to ourselves rather than larger social-welfare structures or society as the source of our success or the blame for our failure – indeed, to define “success” and “failure” in market terms. In short, to become entrepreneurs of ourselves as Foucault terms it.

Ventura’s objective is nothing less than the taxonomy of neoliberal culture, and quite in the manner of Venugopal’s (2015) attempts to recuperate the scientific validity of the senior twin-brother – neoliberalism. Ventura catalogues the object of her study in line with five suggested bullet points, each invoking a particular component of neoliberal culture, as exemplified in US-bound case studies. The brand new Manifest Destiny of Northern America is said to unfold through complementary processes of the erosion of the welfare-society along with the corresponding ‘responsibilization’ of individuals and families in matters of social reproduction. In the process, the author argues in a Foucauldian vein, that the respective “relations

of power are exercised concretely on bodies and through their biological features in order to force life in a population to endure in very prescribed ways” (Ventura 2012 24). Out of these, globalization, corporatocracy and hyperlegality are also isolated as distinct components of neoliberal culture, all demoralising statist ideas on their own grounds and paving way to the individual rational actor, market-oriented entrepreneurs of the self (Ventura 2012: 16-25), “individuals (who – JS) feel solely responsible for their lives and come to believe that they are not entitled to assistance from the larger social structure” (Ventura 2012, 4).

McGuigan’s thought, on the other hand, meanders rather randomly over the timespan stretching from the early nineties to the present (i.e. up to 2015 or so) while evaluating cultural mores of the time as if through the eyes of both Williams and Foucault. He credits Williams for enlightening prescience and timely whistleblowing on what surfaces, in his *Towards 2000*, as the ruthless “new politics of strategic advantage”, labelled back then by the author’s forecast as Plan X, now qualified by McGuigan as the harbinger of impending neoliberal episteme, attended by a peculiar cultural habitus: “There are also deep supporting cultural conditions. Plan X is sharp politics and high-risk politics. It is easily presented as a version of masculinity. Plan X is a mode of assessing odds and determining a game plan. As such, it fits, culturally, with the widespread habits of gambling and its calculations” (Williams, quoted in McGuigan 2016: 100).

Moreover, in between mandatory condemnations of creative industries for advancing economy-biased socio-cultural meritocracy and amnestying social inequality on the grounds of the so-called natural right to supremacy over selected congenital talents (criticized also by Littler 2013), the author elaborates ‘neoliberal selfhood’ in great detail. He carries on, while recalling Weberian taxonomies of social types, with the profile that uses comparable terms and at a similar length as that discussed by Ventura. Both come up with an evocative human agency of its own kind that impels daily practices of self-responsibilization and personal choice, all testifying to lone, disentangled yet competitive behavioural patterns in search of personal advancement. Ultimately, the discussion for both boils down to the Foucauldian agency of neoliberalism, the self-serving ‘entrepreneur of himself’, yet this time resolving in McGuigan’s wording as the social pressure of biopower to form oneself into a ‘successful persona’, characterized by ‘enlightened avarice’ and ‘business acumen’. Following to the letter a great many authors working in the Foucauldian vein, he resumes that neoliberal selfhood is to be understood as sustained “recasting of identity in terms of flexibility, adaptability and instant transformation”, all required to achieve a certain market-resilience or buoyancy above the granted precariousness of the conditions of labour. It is this kind of compulsory individualisation that he sees as the human agency of a “highly competitive and relentlessly harsh social environment”, induced also in neoliberal cultural practices by the creative industries:

“People subjected to the general uncertainty of precarious labour, and especially the unpredictability of casual employment in apparently glamorous ‘creative’

and allied careers, though not only there, must fashion the kind of self that can cope where collective representation has been eliminated or severely restricted. This kind of self today is a neoliberal self, figuring a competitive individual who is exceptionally self-reliant and rather indifferent to the fact that his or her predicament is shared with others – and, therefore, incapable of organising as a group to do anything about it.” (McGuigan 2016: 132; see for similar observation, McRobbie 2015)

7. Research questions answered

How much of the discursive evidence provided can be matched with the theoretical profiles of neoliberal culture? Strictly speaking, two main research questions remain answered inconclusively. Yet if one dares to challenge the philosophical risks of nominalism and taxonomy, then some of it can be juxtaposed in terms of a Wittgensteinian (2009) family resemblance to recently established theories of neoliberal culture.

1. Does Estonian public art talk testify to an endless accumulation of cultural capital in Western ‘core societies’?

Yes. The evaluative segregation of imagined geographical entities was detected. These were allocated unequal cultural validity according to a province/metropolis distinction in the press releases. Artistic careers are exhorted to run from the former towards the latter, with corresponding ascendancy in social standing between the departure from the province and arrival at the metropolis of global saliency. Based on this observation, the analytical concept of the **geography of success** was developed to tell the difference between the province and the metropolis, with the former mentioned briefly in passing for the take-off point of subsequent success, if any. Global cultural nobility, on the other hand, referred to occasionally in the form of biennial artists in the press releases, was alleged to inhabit global hubs of cultural life only. It is as if the imagined supreme cultural ecosystem that is referred to in the sample comprising only the *worlds leading* art events and *worldwide acclaimed* museums. All the hubs mentioned were located in Western Europe or North America, with a few exceptions from Asia. The only credit Estonia was found worthy of was as an aleatory stopover for international itinerary exhibitions that expose local audiences to worldwide cultural celebrities. It was concluded that the discursive evidence suggests a radical concentration of cultural capital at the disposal of imagined promised lands (pro core cultures) with restricted access, both social and geographic segregation taken for granted and adjusted along the evaluative grids of the global omnipresent axes of province/metropolis power relations.

2. Does Estonian public art talk testify to the endless accumulation of cultural capital in the upper ranks of its own society?

Yes. Contemporary art and cultural globalization were heralded to Estonian audiences framed within the **subdiscourse of precarity**. That is, a crisis-ridden society was suggested as a natural and unavoidable phenomenon in the press releases.

Crisis as such was also tacitly affirmed to be a productive force serving worldwide causes of both contemporary art and cultural globalization. One may paraphrase the discourse of neoliberal presidents (see above and Rodgers 2011: 18) – to talk with the voice of a contemporary artist is to talk against the backdrop of permanent crisis and danger. It is instructive that instead of solid spatial or otherwise sustained contextual markers detected both in ethnocentrism and Eurocentrism (Saar 2018b), the images of volatile and crisis-ridden society were proposed in the globalist culturescape for the one and only granted environment. Moreover, crisis stands in the press-releases, in all its precarity, for the predicament that is nonetheless affirmed to have the greatest potential to engender an aspired social or cultural change.

As to the latter term, it reads at closer inspection that it signifies rather the artist's own upward advancement in socio-cultural standing towards the ranks of an imagined worldwide cultural upper class than an increase in the common good in the welfarist sense of the word. Images of the contemporary artist, one might recall, were exposed to be responsive to radical individualism, competitive behaviour and an affinity with the worldwide cultural meritocracy, all connected in a career-oriented type of cultural agency. This agency is represented in the sample to socialize strictly on a professional basis and within the time frame of temporal joint-exhibitions only. This shrinkage in sociability shows among other things in the personal pronoun 'we' being engaged in the globalist sample to signify contemporary artists exclusively, with the remaining cultural intelligentsia omitted, and the regular audience even more so. In addition, the contemporary artist is suggested to assume leverage through competitive behaviour in the international art scene, allegedly filled with likewise motivated contestants, skilled in strategic game planning and up for improvement in personal cultural merit. It is here that the Foucauldian entrepreneur of the self makes an explicit appearance in cultural terms. The press releases tend to motivate and instrumentalize the practices of contemporary art on the uplifting causes of certain social rewards awaiting artists personally in the case of artistic success. Namely, the **subdiscourse of global cultural meritocracy** is making an appearance in the sample via figures of speech referring recurrently to a certain elite of contemporary artists known worldwide that are told in press releases to enjoy the privileged high life of ultimate celebrities. This kind of vista of the social climber towards imminent personal success might, it reckons, foreclose most probably other, less glamorous and more egalitarian civic-minded prospects of commitment.

Detachment from contextual constraints comes across via **the subdiscourse of negative liberties**. A methodological concept of subject position was applied to scrutinize the more specific cultural qualities contemporary artists are attributed in the sample of globalist discourse. Contemporary artists were found prone to the worldwide nomadism of radical cultural liberalism, embellished in the sample with an elevated awareness of their 'innate' creative freedoms and sovereign prerogatives to question any cultural boundary conceivable, a stance that is barely commensurable with the ethnocentric commitment to home-soil lyricism or determined modernist crusade detected in the Eurocentrist cultural discourse. The freedoms in question were found present in the sample as a recurrent emphasis on unlimited artistic

liberty, openness and playfulness that resulted in the conceptual detraditionalization and derritorialization of the cultural agency in question. But the defiance of art historical conventions, territorial boundaries and cultural meaning making in general fostered one more observation. It was argued above that the contemporary artist is presented to the reader of press releases as the personification of what Isaiah Berlin (1969/2002) called ‘negative liberties’ – escapist liberties to dodge a permanent commitment and remain in a relentless flux of cumulating artistic practices that also evade unambiguous comprehension in favour of virtually eternal and open-ended semiosis beyond any terminal closure. This explicitly declared arbitrary and contingent subject position, adding to images of a precarious culturescape, was yet proven combined with plain anti-statism – a hasty willingness to condemn the state as such on outright allegations in the compulsory enlistment of ordinary people in ideological bloodsheds. The demoralisation of the state and related social entities on these grounds seems to serve the worldwide causes of both globalist market imperatives and its subtexts of neoliberalism.

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