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MAKING THE DISCOVERY:
THE CREATIVITY OF SELECTING FICTION MANUSCRIPTS FROM THE SLUSH PILE

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ABSTRACT

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Gatekeeping appears central to creative industries. To better understand gatekeeping, this article introduces a distinction between discovering and justifying the selection of cultural goods. Most research deals with legitimation and justifications for selecting cultural goods. This article draws on American pragmatism to elucidate gatekeepers' discovery of cultural goods under conditions of uncertainty and abundance. The article focuses on the discovery of publishable unsolicited manuscripts. Publishers learn to act upon particular kinds of experiences associated with publishable manuscripts. Gatekeepers learn to abandon preformed ideas of what to look for and instead use either an aesthetic or an efferent reading strategy. In aesthetic reading, a reading flow experience becomes the means to discover manuscripts. Through efferent reading, gatekeepers identify manuscripts as participating in a literary convention and view them either as exceptional within that convention or as adding something to the convention. The qualities of these experiences create the realization of a publishable manuscript; acting on this realization moves the process to the next phase, in which gatekeepers make justifications for selecting or rejecting the manuscript. Gatekeepers discover cultural goods when they have been professionalized and sensitized to produce the "right" type of experiences and creatively act on the qualities of these experiences.

Keywords: American pragmatism, creativity of action, creative industries, cultural evaluation, gatekeeping

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INTRODUCTION

The slush pile at publishing houses is constantly stacked with new unsolicited manuscripts. These manuscripts arrive without a known history. Most of these manuscripts are rejected. In some rare occasions, manuscripts are selected and become published books. Just like other cultural goods in the creative industries, these manuscripts are singularities (Karpik 2010): each manuscript features a unique combination of qualities (Caves 2000; Hirsch 1972; Menger 2014). The manuscripts that arrive are thus non-standardized and gatekeeping is performed without any explicit preformed standards of what to look for in the manuscripts. How are then the manuscripts discovered in a gatekeeping situation conditioned by abundance, uncertainty, and lack of preformed standards for evaluation? In this paper, I show how a pragmatist understanding of gatekeeping answers this question, giving a new perspective to gatekeeping under these conditions.

Gatekeeping appears central not only in publishing but to cultural production in general. The cultural goods produced in art worlds are the result of the joint effort of the numerous actors involved in its making (Becker 1982). Gatekeeping as the activity of selecting and rejecting cultural goods in culture producing industries structures the art world involved. Whether the cultural good is a fiction manuscript, fashion model (Mears 2011), a news story (Shoemaker and Vos 2009; White 1950), or a published book competing for critics' attention (Chong 2013), gatekeeping is involved. In this gatekeeping, an initial discovery of the cultural good is needed for it to be selected. This article analyzes the experiences among publishers as gatekeepers, showing how publishers come to act upon these experiences to do the work of gatekeeping under conditions of abundance and quality uncertainty. In the article, it is also shown how a certain occupational socialization through interaction (Becker et al. 1977; Faulkner 1983) is a precondition for gatekeeping under these conditions.

There is a lack of studies about the discovery of cultural goods in gatekeeping. A reason for this lack is the problem that the early stages of the selection process have always been highly personal and intuitive. In the case of manuscript acquisition, researchers have explained this “gut feeling” dimension of the process in terms of publishers’ reliance on acquired taste and alignment with the publishing house’s position in the literary field (Bourdieu 1993:95-97, 133-134). This and other research has generally not focused on the moment of discovery. Instead, it has usually settled for studying publishers’ justifications for selecting certain manuscripts (Childress 2012; Coser, Kadushin, and Powell 1982; Powell 1985; Thompson 2012; Volkmann, Schimank, and Rost 2014). Hence, research about manuscript acquisition, as well as studies of fashion model selection, news selection, and the selection of books to review, seems to include an implicit yet central distinction between a *discovery phase* and a *justification phase*. Scholars link the former to a personal and intuitive process based on gut feeling and taste and address the latter by exploring the strategies gatekeepers use to justify their decisions. While this distinction between discovery and justification phase has not been fully explored from a pragmatist and interactionist perspective, conceptualizing action in sequences or phases has been crucial to pragmatist and interactionist understandings of action (e.g., Strauss 2008:32-33). Moreover, this distinction has been an explicit and central reference point in studies of scientific discoveries, including philosophy of science studies grounded in the work of Popper (1959) and Reichenbach (1938).²

In this article, I explicate this distinction and connect it with a pragmatist theory of action, thereby not only showing not only how discoveries are made but also how gatekeeping may be

² In the philosophy of science, “the context of discovery” is distinguished from the “context of justification” and is commonly referred to as the “DJ distinction.” Reichenbach (1938) first proposed these terms to distinguish between the discovery of an idea or hypothesis (the context of discovery) and how it is justified (the context of justification). In the philosophy of science, both have been subject to normative analysis. However, philosophers of science have not brought this distinction to bear on the context of manuscript selection. Furthermore, since this is an empirical article, the distinction and analysis is based on empirical material, but there will be no normative analysis of this context.

envisioned from a pragmatist perspective. I also follow a main tenet of symbolic interactionism by focusing on gatekeepers' interactions with manuscripts and other publishers and the meanings that arise or derive from these interactions. In simplified form, gatekeeping is here understood as carried out in four moves and two phases: First, the cultural good is discovered (the discovery phase). Second, the cultural good is moved from the discovery phase to the justification phase. Third, the cultural good is justified (the justification phase). And fourth, the final decision to select the cultural good is made. To identify how manuscripts are discovered and moved to the justification phase, I mainly draw on American pragmatism, particularly work on the creativity of action (Joas 1996) and the efferent-aesthetic continuum of reading (Rosenblatt 1978). This article explicates the first two phases in manuscript acquisition, thereby going beyond existing knowledge about the justification phase and the truism that taste and gut feeling influence gatekeeping. This contribution enables a fuller understanding of the practice of gatekeeping: it shows that subsequent phases depend on the initial phases of discovery and movement to the justification phase.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This research not only contribute to research about creative industries and gatekeeping but also to research in economic sociology and valuation studies.

In economic sociology, research on quality uncertainty and cultural production shows that the issue of quality uncertainty has been handled by re-occurring ties between producers of cultural goods and gatekeepers as well as reputation and track record of the producer (Faulkner and Anderson 1987; Foster, Borgatti, and Jones 2011; Zuckerman et al. 2003). However, in terms of networks and reputation, they are about structures already in place making it easier to reduce uncertainty and make judgments about selection and rejection of cultural goods and producers. In this paper, the gatekeeping situation is conditioned by a radical quality uncertainty as the cultural goods and their creator lack a reputation and where there are no networks in place to reduce uncertainty.

Structural circumstances of acquisitions may effectively explain why certain cultural goods

get selected in gatekeeping. Different forms of adaptive matching are in play (Menger 2014), such as the cultural matching of author and publisher involved in gatekeeping (Childress 2017) or alignments of authors, publishers and publishing houses in cultural fields (Bourdieu 1993). Nevertheless, this perspective seems not to give sufficient attention to how evaluations and deliberations, or in this case discoveries, are made “on the ground” (Beljean, Chong, and Lamont 2015:41). Understanding these processes presumably requires an action theory that transcends the traditional means-ends scheme.

This article’s on-the-ground perspective shows necessary patterns in the experiences of manuscript discovery and how gatekeepers act upon these experiences to move the manuscript from the discovery phase to the justification phase. The suggested model for gatekeeping and the article’s overall pragmatist and interactionist perspective thereby answers recent calls in valuation studies for research into the subjectivity of those who evaluate cultural goods, including these evaluations’ unpredictability, materiality, performativity, and corporeality (Acord and DeNora 2008; Antal, Hutter, and Stark 2014; Beljean, Chong, and Lamont 2015; Hennion 2007; Lahire 2015; Nylander 2014; Prior 2011; Schwarz 2013; Varriale 2016).

Existing attempts to explain the selection of cultural goods of uncertain quality have not fully explored the discovery phase and the movement from this phase to the justification phase in the selection process. For instance, Coser et al. (1982:144-145) initially assumed that publishers are actively looking for certain traits in manuscripts, regardless of the action situation where they engage in selection and rejection. In the end, Coser et al. realized that the assumed rational action model did not work and that they had failed to explain why publishers choose some manuscripts over others; their assessment was that publishers’ choices appeared to be based on gut feeling (Coser et al. 1982:144-145).

Hence, I suggest that the conceptualization of the manuscript acquisition process would be enhanced by distinguishing discovery from justification and introducing work on the creativity of action into this framework. The theory of creativity of action integrates the alternative view on the

means-ends scheme. This view of action as contingent, where actors at times lack goals and intentions, is also foundational to symbolic interactionist theories of action in general (Joas and Knöbl 2009:133-135). The theory of creativity of action focuses on experiences and actions resulting from those experiences; this focus makes it possible to address the discovery phase and the movement of manuscripts to the justification phase. It closes in on the act of discovery and the movement to the justification phase by taking into account individuals' acts and experiences in action situations.

Assuming the creativity of action challenges the models of utilitarian rational action and normatively oriented action. The utilitarian rational action model assumes that people act on the basis of individual preferences to maximize their own utility. Rational actors then use this calculation to choose means to pursue their desired goal (see, e.g., Coleman 1990). In the normative-oriented action model, actions' goals and means are shaped by the actors' shared normative orientations. The coordination of action, in which action is carried out by means pursuing goals, is thus shaped by this shared normative orientation (see, e.g., Parsons 1937). Both models assume that action is carried out in accordance with the means-ends scheme, in which actors act intentionally by selecting certain means to pursue certain goals. These models also assume that actors have control over their corporeal existence and that people act autonomously in relation to their environments (Joas 1996:147).

The theory of creativity of action upsets the assumptions of intentionality, bodily control, and autonomy vis-à-vis the surrounding environment. First, actors do not necessarily engage in actions in accordance with the means-ends scheme. Instead, people identify certain means as available to them and only then identify goals that these means can help them realize (Joas 1996:154). Second, human actors are not always in control of their bodies. Human existence is pre-reflectively given by its corporeality, and people habitually orient themselves in the world in this corporeal existence (Joas 1996:167-184). Third, human actors are not autonomous in relation to the environment; they exist in a pre-reflexive sociality and engage with the world on that basis (Joas

1985, 1996:184-195).

To understand the creativity of action, it is necessary to take into account the pragmatist idea of the inhibition of the act. It is only through inhibition of habits or routines that people start to creatively and actively engage with objects and people in their environments. While these events produce ordinary experiences, they also produce very special experiences. Dewey (1934:37) describes these events as “having an experience”: “[e]xperience in this vital sense is defined by those situations and episodes that we spontaneously refer to as being ‘real experiences’; those things of which we say in recalling them, ‘that *was* an experience’.” Gatekeepers in the publishing world, for example, may face many different disruptions of their routine of sifting through manuscripts, but only a few of these disruptions have the qualities necessary to identify them as discoveries. These special experiences form a unity and a narrative plot, and because of this special character, they are seldom immediately forgotten. Some of these experiences may be aesthetic experiences, which start out as disturbances or inhibitions between the actor and the object and, when the actor and the object have adapted to each other, give rise to feelings of being in harmony (Dewey 1934:45). Having such an aesthetic experience is about consuming an object, which implies that the object is perceivable, appreciative, and enjoyable (Dewey 1934:49).

While “having an experience,” “every successive part flows freely, without seam and without unfilled blanks, into what ensues. At the same time, there is no sacrifice of the self-identity of the parts.” (Dewey 1934:37-38). This free-flowing experience comes close to being in a state of play, in which one flows from one moment to the next; such “flow” experiences are “experience[s] in which the actor’s ability to act matches the requirements for action in his environment” (Csikszentmihalyi and Bennett 1971:45). In other words, when the actors’ ability to act is at an optimal level and when the requirements for action are set to an optimal level, then the actor reaches an experience of flow (Csikszentmihalyi 1975). To be in flow is thus such a special type of experience during which an actor is totally adjusted to an object and in a particular state of harmony (Csikszentmihalyi 1988:33). This experience of flow, with its sense of immediacy and self-

transgression, can be reached while reading and is especially salient while reading fiction (Mcquillan and Conde 1996). Reading has even been one of the most regularly reported reasons for being in a state of flow (Massimini, Csikszentmihalyi, and Delle Fave 1988). This article understands “reading flow” as having an optimal experience while reading that the actor can narrate in a way that tells us something about the qualities of the experience.

Reading flow is a specific reading experience in the discovery phase of manuscript selection, characterized by the mutual adjustment, without interruption, of the reader and manuscript, which are then brought into harmony. To have this kind of experience is to both inhibit the routine event of sifting through piles of manuscripts and transcend and lose oneself while reading. The initial inhibition appears suddenly during the routine event. Creativity enters into the process as the discovery phase moves to the justification phase. This specific type of reading experience becomes a means that is available to the gatekeeper and makes certain ends-in-view possible. These ends-in-views are the imagined consequences of publishing such a manuscript. The initial openness and lack of a means-ends scheme are the necessary pre-conditions that enable some manuscripts to be discovered and moved to the justification phase.

Using aesthetic reading to make discoveries in gatekeeping is different from using literary conventions to read manuscripts and make discoveries. Rosenblatt (1978) argues that readers’ ordered reading experiences are evoked by the meeting of the reader and text in concrete action situations in which the readers actively seek out the meaning of the text. Rosenblatt conceptualizes a continuum of reading stances: at one pole is aesthetic reading, in which the reader takes an aesthetic orientation to reading, and at the other pole is efferent reading, in which the reader takes a non-aesthetic orientation and focuses instead on gathering information (Rosenblatt 1978:22-25). Gatekeepers may select certain fiction manuscripts because they experienced a reading flow during an aesthetic reading but may use conventions to select other fiction, in which case their reading is closer to the efferent end of the continuum. A precondition for having this efferent-led reading experience is to have an embodied knowledge in the form of tacit knowledge (Polanyi 1967) of

conventions, which cannot easily be expressed in words.

This is not to say that publishers have a pre-fixed list or standard of what they are looking for in manuscripts; they cannot tell you exactly what they are looking for, because the manuscript is still a highly non-standardized cultural good and the conventions used are both embodied and tacit. The gut feeling aspect is therefore not ruled out, because efferent reading is about having experiences while using an information-gathering reading strategy to relate the non-standardized manuscript to implicit and embodied literary conventions. When a gatekeeper uses an efferent reading strategy, the act of creativity happens during the discovery phase, when the gatekeeper positions the manuscript within an identified convention and realizes the prospects of the manuscript's position in relation to that convention; the gatekeeper can then use the experience of realizing this favorable position as a means to take the manuscript to the justification phase.

Aesthetic reading is not detached from conventions. A break with literary conventions can give rise to an aesthetic experience, and a gatekeeper may use conventions to understand and explain such an experience after the experience has ended. Similarly, an efferent reading can also involve aesthetic experiences, such as the pleasurable experience involved in suddenly making a discovery. These reading strategies are positioned along a continuum. The analysis below, however, separates the two strategies for the sake of clarity.

FIELD AND METHOD

To systematically study the discovery phase and the movement of manuscripts to the justification phase, I have focused on the selection process for unsolicited debut fiction manuscripts, specifically manuscripts of novels written in Swedish for adults, and on cases in which both the writer and the work are largely unknown to the publishers. In Sweden, debut fiction manuscripts in seldom reach publishing houses through literary agents; they more commonly reach them through

personal networks, and the most common route is unsolicited direct submission.³ Gatekeepers usually do not know much about unsolicited manuscripts and their authors beforehand making it a case of radical quality uncertainty. If they do know something about the manuscript and the author, they try to bracket this information in the initial discovery phase, because they want to have an untethered reading experience. Because the manuscript and author are largely unknown to those judging the manuscript, the discovery phase and the movement to the justification phase can be clearly demarcated. For this reason, unsolicited submissions in the Swedish publishing market are especially suitable for investigating this study's primary research question: how do gatekeepers evaluate something like a manuscript of uncertain quality when no clear standards are available?

To sample publishing houses, I constructed a database of debut fiction books published between 1997 and 2014. The database consisted of 152 publishing houses but focused on publishing houses that had published a debut fiction book during the previous five years. While 152 publishing houses had published at least one debut book during the period, only 30 had published more than five; of those, 23 of the houses still existed in 2014. The types of literature published distinguish publishing houses from each other, for example, publishing houses may be known for their romance novels, for their history of publishing poetry, or a combination of both. Nevertheless, this paper does not focus on the historically contingent position of publishing houses on the publishing market, but rather on gatekeeping and the general reading experiences involved in the acquisition of certain types of literature. In 2013 and 2014, I interviewed 22 publishers who represented the majority of the publishing houses that had published more than five debut fiction books in the previous five years. Interviews usually lasted 80 minutes and took place during office hours either at their workplace or at a café.

³ Of the almost 800 fiction debut books announced between 1997 and 2014 in the Swedish trade magazine *Svensk Bokhandel*, only eight were first acquired by a literary agency and then sold to a publisher. This stands in stark contrast to the US and UK, where it is virtually a necessity to have a literary agent in order to be published commercially (Thompson 2012: 71-74).

For the interviews, I usually brought a list of all the debut fiction books that the publishing house had published since 1997. I asked interviewees to tell me how each of those books had been selected (or how some of them had been selected, if the list was long). I also asked interviewees to reflect upon and narrate experiences during the selection process for specific cases and in general. Many of the publishing houses I studied did not have acquisition meetings; instead, gatekeepers typically read manuscripts at home during odd hours, making it hard to participate in the selection process and do follow-up interviews. The production of shared judgments and meanings in eventual meetings about which manuscripts to rejection or publish (Merriman 2015) is here attributed to the context of justification, and is therefore not the focus of this article. There was, however, a risk that the interviewees might use post-hoc justifications to describe and explain how they selected certain manuscripts; the risk of post-hoc justification always permeates interview studies when people are asked to narrate their experiences.

During my interviews, I attended to the risk of post-hoc justifications and tried to tease out narratives that were as close as possible to the initial discovery. One strategy I used to limit the risk of post-hoc justification was not letting interviewees cherry-pick certain selection processes but instead using the list of published books. I asked them to describe their experiences during the selection process for each (or several) of these books and asked probing questions about their experiences. Retrospective interviews of this kind may fail to explain action due to such interviews' inability to access non-discursive cognitive processes (Vaisey 2009). However, interpreting these interviews at least give access to persons' discursive knowledge making possible to outline the schemas that can guide action (Lamont and Swidler 2014; Pugh 2013). This study uses interviews to show how publishers use their reading experiences to draw boundaries between different types of manuscripts and thereby apprehend the quality of manuscripts. This makes it possible to outline the schema of creativity of action in the situation of gatekeeping.

All interviews were transcribed and indexed by codes and categories in a first-cycle coding. The idea of conceptualizing the discovery of manuscripts in terms of the creativity of action

emerged during this first-cycle coding. I used this apparatus in a second-cycle coding in which I closely studied narratives pertaining to the selection process and, in particular, the discovery phase. The codes refer to the different phases of the selection process, who was involved in the process, and how they spoke about the process, and these codes formed the basis for the analysis.

ANALYSIS

The analysis is divided into two parts. First, I show that publishers discover unsolicited manuscripts by learning to become sensitized, acquiring professionalized taste, and learning to focus on means before ends. This is a pre-condition for making discoveries, and necessary to present in order to understand the gatekeeping process. Second, I show how publishers use aesthetic and efferent reading strategies to make discoveries during the discovery phase and, through the creativity of action, move manuscripts from this phase to the justification phase.

Preparing for Making Discoveries in the Discovery Phase

People who work in manuscript acquisition need to become “sensitized publishers” to make discoveries in the discovery phase. To choose the “right” manuscripts, publishers must learn to cultivate and trust their own visceral reaction while reading, very much like scientists who need to embrace doubt to make scientific discoveries (Beveridge 1957). Publishing gatekeepers become sensitized to their own taste and gut feeling and come to trust it. Gatekeepers learn not to define in advance what they’re looking for in a manuscript and not to act in accordance with a means-end scheme. As Arvid, a seasoned publisher, expressed it, “We have not set an ideal book that we want to find [...] because then we would miss a lot of other things.” To create this ideal reading situation, publishers need to be “as open as possible to what arrives,” according to Arvid. Arvid’s words show that manuscript selection requires openness, meaning trust in one’s own visceral reactions. The publishers make themselves ready for the sudden realization that certain means (a reading experience with the right qualities) are available to them; this experience then produces the desired end (a publishable book). Manuscript acquisition process can be described as a goal-oriented process: publishers are actively looking for or hoping to find a publishable manuscript.

Nevertheless, sensitized publishers have no explicit means available for discovering a publishable manuscript. They do not have a list of criteria or some other standard for evaluating a manuscript to see whether it is publishable. Neither are they actively looking for particular reading experiences, because doing so would disturb their openness to whatever experiences arise during their interaction with the manuscript. Rather, in the action situations of manuscript acquisition, publishers must first experience what it is like to read a manuscript, and only then it is possible to create ends by imagining it as publishable. They discover means before ends. Thus, making discoveries does not come naturally to most publishers. To make discoveries, they need to embrace doubt and uncertainty and learn to disrupt and reverse traditional means-end thinking.

The lack of pre-fixed standards and clear guidelines can present a challenge to new gatekeepers. For example, Cecilia, a newly appointed publisher, claimed to have no difficulty distinguishing between “good” and “bad” literature but said that she had not yet grasped the overall idea and organizational taste of the publishing house. Aligning with a publishing house’s taste requires a professionalization of taste. Gatekeepers must undergo that adaptation to orient themselves properly while reading manuscripts and making gatekeeping decisions. Cecilia expressed her sense of the risk of misalignment with the taste of the publishing house and of not having the “publishers’ eye” when she spoke about her fear of losing a manuscript because of inattention: “I feared for my life that I would let something go, throw it away, or rather reject something that would later be seen as a big mistake.” This is a fear of not being able to discover promising manuscripts in the face of uncertainty and take them to the justification phase or of taking them to the justification phase and then rejecting them. From the perspective of flow research (Csikszentmihalyi 1975), Cecilia was not conditioned for flow. She experienced being challenged but not able to handle the task, producing anxiety about the assignment. She continued:

Cecilia: Today I am crasser. [...] Something extraordinary needs to happen with me and the manuscript. I have been told that the head of publishing rejected something that appeared in the pile of manuscripts and later became a hit.

Interviewer: Was it something he told you? (Cecilia: Yes.) When did he do that?

Cecilia: Sometime when I said that I hoped that I did not throw away something that meant that we would lose a lot of money. He said I should relax; he had done that already.

That the head of the publishing house had failed in the discovery phase meant that the junior publisher could feel less pressure and cope with the uncertainty of making judgments by realizing that one cannot be certain about which manuscripts will become successful. The quote shows that a book's success cannot be determined beforehand; gatekeepers must evaluate manuscripts by trusting their own judgment in spite of the uncertainty and must trust that their ability to make judgments will mature and become more fine-tuned over time. After some successful attempts, Cecilia's fears dissipated. She realized that she actually could find manuscripts, and she began to relax and adopt a more pre-reflexive attitude, avoiding the means-ends scheme and trusting her tacit and embodied knowledge in selecting and rejecting manuscripts. Thus, the sensitized publishers learn to cope with uncertainty by developing a professionalized taste and learning to focus on means before ends. This professional taste is either close to or more distant from their personal taste (Kuipers 2012). However, their taste becomes professionalized and embodied regardless of closeness to or distance from their personal taste. They have effectively put their taste to use to make discoveries when it has become professionalized, meaning that their taste has become homologous to the taste and position of the publishing house in the literary field (Bourdieu 1993). When they are able to cope with uncertainty and align their taste with the publishing house and its position in the literary field, they are able to make discoveries for the publishing house.

A publisher who had been in the publishing industry for a very long time summarized this process as he reflected upon the job of selecting manuscripts:

To be a publisher is to make decisions without relying on any objective criteria. I have seen many people that do not manage to do this. They are too unsure about

their own judgment and perhaps their own place in the system. I follow my own judgment, which I can only talk about in subjective terms. It takes a long time before one knows what good and publishable literature are.

These quotes show that not all publishers are able to cope with the uncertainty of determining the quality of manuscripts and making decisions without having pre-defined standards or goals to support them and the uncertainty of acquiring professionalized taste. As Bertil's experience indicates, publishers must initially learn not to begin the selection process with fixed standards for making evaluations and instead to trust their own judgment and assessments, which they enact through a pre-reflexive, visceral reaction in concrete situations while reading manuscripts. As they continue to do this over time, they may learn right attitude to be a publisher, which includes trusting visceral reactions that are expressions of a professionalized taste that aligns with the position and taste of the publishing house. As they develop this skill, they eventually learn to select the "right" literature and become professionals. Research also suggests that part of being a publisher, and learning about the position of the publishing house in the publishing world, is to develop the ability to relate to relevant reference groups when making publishing decisions (Coser 1975:17). To have learned to habitually think about how the manuscript (as a published book) might be reviewed or what certain consumers might think of the book are both examples of how reference groups may be taken into account in gatekeeping.

The neophyte publishers learn how to become a sensitized publisher through an interactional process involving trial and error through feedback from, for example, more seasoned publishers. This learning of the conventions of being a publisher is found in interactionist literature on occupational socialization, where for example medical students in steps learn how to become medical doctors (Becker et al. 1977), or how composers of music gradually learn how to become Hollywood studio film composers (Faulkner 1983). Moreover, this "on the ground" analysis introduces a way of conceptualizing action that involves a process of socialization whereby

gatekeepers learn to go beyond the traditional means-ends scheme. The next section goes more into detail about how gatekeepers put this professionalized attitude into action to make discoveries.

Discovering Manuscripts in the Discovery Phase and the Movement to the Justification Phase

I have outlined the kind of socialization and sensitization that gatekeepers must go through to make discoveries during the selection process. Depending on the type of submitted manuscript, two repertoires explain how the actual discovery of manuscripts happens: gatekeepers discover manuscripts by engaging in either a predominantly aesthetic reading or a predominantly efferent reading.

Discovering Manuscripts through Aesthetic Reading

When a gatekeeper uses aesthetic reading to discover a manuscript, the discovery is highly dependent on the gatekeeper's personal resonance with the reading material and his or her ability to enact professionalized taste. In this type of aesthetic reading, the value of the manuscript depends on the gatekeeper responding to it by what has been termed "having an experience"—in this case, an aesthetic experience that the gatekeeper then ascribes to the manuscript. Publishers use metaphors to explain these feelings of aesthetic experience in the context of discovery. David, a publisher, expressed the moment of discovery by saying, "You can feel the letters moving toward you," a metaphor he uses to explain how the reader becomes engaged in the manuscript and the experience of heightened sensation. This is both a particular and a rare reading experience that has the necessary qualities to make it an example of "having an experience," where the publisher transcends the situation and enters the state of flow. The gatekeeper associates those experiential qualities with publishable manuscripts, and this association enables the gatekeeper to move the manuscript into the justification phase.

Gatekeepers do not initially know what they are looking for, but in the moment of discovery, they do know what kind of reading experience qualifies the manuscript as a discovery. The tension between not knowing whether they will find something and the prospect and hope of finding something makes them, as one publisher put it, "pumped up with energy" while reading

manuscripts. To be pumped up with energy means creating the conditions for flow as one experience a match of being both challenged and having sufficient skills for the task at hand. Discovery comes with a jolt during the routine of sifting through manuscripts; this publisher described this particular break in routine as “similar to a physical reaction.” In the gatekeeper’s interaction (or “transaction,” in Dewey’s terms) with the manuscript, he or she enters into a reading flow experience. Gatekeepers describe as pleasurable, “wow” experience—an experience that, upon reflection, qualifies the manuscript as a discovery that might be publishable. This is an experience that the publisher often remembers vividly, as it is an example of “having an experience”:

Interviewer: How did you know that it was a good manuscript?

Evelina: It was an intriguing manuscript. It is one of those manuscripts that you start to read and the hair on your arms starts to raise and you feel like “oh, my”. I could not let go of this manuscript; I needed to continue reading it. That type of manuscript is rather rare. It is not often that you start to read a manuscript and feel that feeling. [...] It is a lot about feeling when you select manuscripts. You cannot do anything else except let your feelings for the manuscript enter in the first place.

Evelina describes the first encounter between the publisher and the manuscript. She resonated with the material, which gave rise to an intense experience of reading flow that forced her to continue reading. She was “having an experience” and this flow experience, described in hindsight as an “oh, my” experience, made the discovery for her. This reading experience became a sudden break in routine; Evelina did not plan for it, but she was sensitized enough for it to happen. The qualities of this flow experience enabled her to imagine the manuscript as publishable and to move it to the justification phase. This movement might also involve relating the manuscript to existing standards and conventions of literature, but she made the initial discovery by using an aesthetic reading strategy. Felicia, another publisher, described manuscript discovery in a similar fashion:

Felicia: I think that some manuscripts are really special. I do not have that much time

to spend on manuscripts in general, but some manuscripts I cannot stop reading. In some cases I get a bodily reaction when reading manuscripts. I can feel a tension; I know that this is good. Then I feel like, “Shit, shit, shit, I certainly hope that no one else has got this manuscript as well. I need to read it quickly so I eventually can contact this person.” You start to read this manuscript, and you want to stay there. It is really a bodily experience.

Felicia’s routine of sifting through manuscripts without finding anything is inhibited by this state of reading flow and the intense experience of having made a discovery. The sense of having made a discovery arises because she “cannot stop reading.” This rare and hoped-for interruption of routine is the most important factor for moving the manuscript to the justification phase. Sensing that she has made a discovery places additional pressure upon the gatekeeper, who realizes that her own reading experience might not be unique in the publishing field, and creates a sense of competition with other publishers. This is not an open competition between publishers, as in bidding wars for new titles amongst publishers (Franssen and Kuipers 2013; Thompson 2012). This competition is based on a contextual knowledge (Aspers 2006): Felicia knows that writers regularly send manuscripts to several publishers at the same time, and she has experienced other publishers selecting the same manuscript she selected. She assumes that publishers at different publishing houses share similar professionalized tastes and so assumes that her intense reading experience is not unique; she knows that it is a rare but readily identifiable experience that is highly sought after amongst publishers. Using a predominantly aesthetic reading strategy means initially bracketing conventions. Conventions enter only after the initial discovery has been made, as resources for understanding the discovery and later on, when the final publishing decisions are made. This predominantly aesthetic reading experience is but one repertoire for discovering manuscripts.

Discovering Manuscripts through Efferent Reading

It is also possible to discover manuscripts through efferent reading, which involves gathering information in relation to implicit literary conventions. In efferent reading, in contrast to

aesthetic reading, gatekeepers do not use their valuation of an aesthetic reading experience to ascribe value to a manuscript; rather, they evaluate their reading experience in relation to a convention and use their experiences from the evaluation to give value to the manuscript. In efferent reading, gatekeepers evaluating the manuscript by engaging in active information gathering and positioning of the manuscript within the identified convention. In efferent reading, therefore, gatekeepers rely on an institutionalized classification of content into established genres or conventions (DiMaggio 1987; Hitters and van de Kamp 2010) and often describe such manuscripts as commercial “genre literature” (e.g., crime or romance novels). In efferent reading, gatekeepers use literary conventions to evaluate manuscripts, even though they do not initially know what they are looking for or what the manuscript is about. Discovery happens during the first meeting between manuscript and reader, and deploying efferent reading means that the reader still needs to discover a manuscript by “having an experience” that makes it possible to imagine the manuscript being published and moving it to the justification phase.

Being sensitized to make discoveries means that gatekeepers must first identify what literary genre the manuscript belongs to and what conventions it can, therefore, be expected to use and then reading the manuscript with those conventions in mind. For example, in reading a crime novel, the sensitized gatekeeper begins reading a manuscript with an expectation of certain kinds of themes, characters, and plot points. The gatekeeper has learned these conventions and uses them as an implicit standard; she uses an efferent reading strategy to evaluate the manuscript in relation to that standard. The moment of discovery happens when the gatekeeper realizes that a manuscript is favorably positioned in relation to these conventions:

Interviewer: Are there times when you do not use your gut feeling when you select manuscripts?

Greta: Absolutely. When it comes to straight-out genre literature, then it is seldom about some amazing “wow” feeling (laughs). Then it is more like “Oh, this is something we believe that there is a demand for; this manuscript was made

skillfully.” In the manuscript, you, for example, have an intelligent intrigue or a new theme or whatever it is. Then you might not have the same type of feeling of happiness as when finding literary fiction. Instead, you get a feeling of happiness based on finding something you believe can be big in a commercial sense. Do you understand? It may not have these literary qualities, but like, “Shit, this is really good within this genre. I have never read something like this before, and I think this book will have really big chance of selling.”

Interviewer: This assumes that you are well-read within the genre?

Greta: Yes, it is a bit hard to be well-read within genres. But this is an ability you practice throughout the years.

Greta articulates the difference between discovering manuscripts through an aesthetic reading strategy, where there is a pleasurable wow-experience, and discovering them by positioning them in relation to literary conventions. However, her claim that she does not use gut feelings should not be taken at face value. While she does not describe discovery by positioning as an aesthetically pleasurable “wow” experience, she still relies on her gut feeling to make discoveries during efferent reading. She cannot decide and explain ahead of time what she is looking for, but she realizes that she has made a discovery when she has a sudden pleasurable experience of having found a manuscript that is favorably positioned within a literary convention. This pleasurable experience enables her to imagine the manuscript being published, thus moving it into the justification phase.

Hence, for a publisher to use conventions to discover literature, the gatekeeper needs to have embodied and tacit knowledge of a genre and its conventions to both identify and position the manuscript within its genre. Identifying the manuscript’s position and understanding that position’s significance for the manuscript’s commercial prospects, for example, disrupts the gatekeeper’s routines and constitutes an experience that is a necessary part of making a discovery and that directly moves the manuscript to the justification phase. In this case, the pleasurable emotion of

happiness comes into the situation when the gatekeeper reflects on the manuscript's potential commercial success. The efferent reading strategy of relating the manuscript to the conventions of the genre means that to be good in a genre is to make a unique contribution to that genre's conventions. The gatekeeper uses the experience of recognizing that contribution to move the manuscript to the justification phase.

However, the efferent reading strategy of relating the manuscript to a literary convention does not mean that the manuscript needs to make a unique contribution to a genre's literary conventions to be discovered. It may simply be an exceptionally well-crafted example of the literary convention:

David: This manuscript made it through because it was positioned in the middle of the genre, without standing out in any way, and fully aware that it was situated there. It was selected because it follows the conventions so exceptionally well, both in terms of language and plot. If it had not had these qualities, the manuscript would have been dead like a stone.

The publisher describes an efferent reading in which he identified the manuscript as belonging to its genre and in which his discovery of the manuscript's favorable position in this genre enabled him to move it to the justification phase. Thus, there are two paths by which a manuscript that fits within a literary convention may be accepted for publication: it may make a unique contribution to the literary convention, or it may be an exceptional example of the literary convention. As Franssen and Kuipers (2013:61-62) put it, manuscripts are accepted as a result of either innovation or conservation (see also Nylander 2014). The discovery of a manuscript through the experience of fit between its position in a genre and the commercial potential of that position enables the gatekeeper to imagine the manuscript as publishable, which moves it from the discovery phase to the justification phase.

As shown, the discovery of unsolicited manuscripts by unknown authors is about learning a professionalized taste and focusing on means before ends. Gatekeepers use two different repertoires

to make such discoveries. They can make a discovery by getting caught up in a reading flow experience and acting upon that aesthetic experience to move the manuscript to the justification phase. Alternatively, they may discover a manuscript by identifying it in relation to conventions that they use as standards; in this case, they predominantly use a different reading strategy, closer to information gathering, that enables them to compare the manuscript with the relevant literary conventions. Regardless of how the gatekeeper categorizes the manuscript, he or she needs to discover it and then move it into the justification phase.

CONCLUSION

Gatekeepers in creative industries are imbued with uncertainties about both the quality of the material sent to them and the demand such material might meet in the consumer market. Cultural goods are non-standardized and vary greatly in quality; manuscripts are what Karpik (2010) calls singularities. This article has shown that publishers solve the problem of quality and demand uncertainty by becoming socialized into having a particular attitude when selecting manuscripts. They are socialized to accept uncertainty, cultivate professionalized taste, and discover means before ends. Because they cannot determine ahead of time the exact content of the manuscripts they are looking for, they learn how to interact with the manuscript and how to identify the qualities of their own reading experience that are necessary for a manuscript to constitute a discovery.

Gatekeepers learn to use and act upon their embodied and tacit knowledge when they are judging manuscripts in the discovery phase. I have described the process by which gatekeepers professionalize their taste. This article identifies the qualities of the publishers' reading experiences that are necessary for manuscripts to be discovered, and it shows how publishers act upon and use those reading experiences to select certain manuscripts and move them from the discovery phase to the justification phase.

The article contributes to the study of how organizations and gatekeepers involved in selecting cultural goods organize and socialize participants into making discoveries during the

selection process. It argues that particular experiences become the necessary means for making discoveries.

The article also attempts to unpack what is commonly referred to as “gut feeling” in gatekeeping. To outsiders, the gatekeeping process and talk about gut feelings in decision-making might appear mysterious. The mysteriousness can be derived from the perception that knowledge is kept hidden from the outsiders wanting to understand the process (Simmel 1906:464). Gatekeeping can thereby take on almost magical qualities to outsiders. However, as shown in this article, the talk of gut feelings in gatekeeping seems unavoidable, as the initial judgment is done in an action situation where there are no formal guidelines or standards for evaluation, but where the discovery relies on embodied tacit knowledge (Polanyi 1967). Arguably, the sense of secrecy in gatekeeping comes about because of the difficulty to formalize and articulate the gatekeeping process. This article contributes to unveiling this perceived secrecy and mysteriousness in gatekeeping by presenting the conditions for gatekeeping and outlining and conceptualizing the process involved in gatekeeping and in particular the discovery of manuscripts.

Gatekeeping depends on the networks and positions of the applicant and those evaluating the application—for example, top-tier investments banks tend to hire applicants with an elite educational background and the “right” extracurricular activities (Rivera 2015). However, the results from this article show the process of gatekeeping under different conditions, where there is an abundance, uncertainty, and no preformed evaluation criteria. The research illuminates gatekeeping in creative industries, as these conditions are common in gatekeeping in, for example, fashion modeling (Mears 2011), journalism (Shoemaker and Vos 2009), book reviewing (Chong 2013), and television programming (Kuipers 2012).

To this sociology of culture, about how culture is produced in society, interactionist perspectives are central (e.g., Becker 1982; Faulkner 1983). Cultural goods produced in art worlds are the result of the joint activities of those involved in its making (Becker 1982). The structure of the art world is thus contingent on the actions and choices made by these actors and in particular

gatekeepers' activity of selecting and rejecting cultural goods in culture producing industries. This article contributes to this scholarship on interactionism and sociology of culture, showing more specifically how gatekeeping is done in art worlds through occupational learning processes and phases of action. The article opens up for further research on the phases of action in aesthetic evaluation, the embodiment of evaluation, and the interactional settings and processes in situations of gatekeeping.

In conclusion, this article has theorized the discovery phase of goods of uncertain quality from an American pragmatist perspective. It has shown that experiences with certain qualities become the necessary means for making discoveries. In aesthetic reading, gatekeepers use the aesthetic experience to ascribe value to a cultural good. In efferent reading, gatekeepers evaluate the cultural good by comparing it with a standard and ascribe value to the cultural good based on the experience of identifying its position in relation to the standard. The theoretical framework and the empirical case suggest a general pattern of discovery of cultural goods of uncertain quality and demand amongst gatekeepers in creative industries and beyond.

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