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Introduction: Of Popular and Public Cultures

The tiny airport of Skiathos in the Northern Sporades island complex, Greece, has been buzzing with international popcultural tourist traffic since the release of the musical *Mamma Mia!* (2008). Skiathos was touristified in the 1970s, however, today cinematic tourist fans, who wish to visit *Mamma Mia!* filmed locations on Skiathos and the neighboring Skopelos, add a new edge to mainstream tourism mobilities. Such additions generate their own problems: in the summer of 2018 news swamped the internet that Lalaria beach, where some of the musical's scenes were filmed, is losing its smooth pebbles, which are collected by tourists as souvenirs, a practice resulting in the site's environmental and aesthetic degradation. The Skiathan Cultural Association acted in the most creative way, populating the airport with containers "emblazoned with the words 'Lalaria Beach return pebbles box,'" whereas local authorities announced fines of up to €1,000 (£880 in October 2018) for tourists found in possession of such tokens (Smith). At the same time, posters were pasted on local cruise boats and a billboard was placed on Lalaria beach, urging holidaymakers to "take a picture not a pebble" (ibid.).

Such "honesty boxes" and "conscience posters" are symptomatic of a broader move(-ment) towards reclaiming places developed into tourist locations after their cinematic debut. Take for example the Lofoten islands of the Arctic Circle, known for their pretty fishing villages, snow-capped peaks, and traditional homely architecture, swamped now by *Frozen* (2013) fans. Insensitive film fans anger locals and the regional tourist authorities for using a forest as a public toilet and tourist-camping in cemeteries (Kitching). Consider Dubrovnik, recently colonized by *Game of Thrones* (2011-2019) fans, who, together with international heritage tourists, have displaced residents of the

old town, lost now to Airbnb bookings (Capps). Alternatively, look more closely at the oldest and most famous case of New Zealand, home of *the Lord of the Rings* (2001-2003) filmed sites: the more recent emergence of a trend of littering “freedom campers” in rented vans, speedboat cinematic tourists seeking Isengard, helicopter travelers over New Zealand’s Peter Jackson-filmed glaciers, and popcultural die-hards, who have to be rescued during their haphazard barefoot pilgrimage to Mount Doom (Mount Ngauruhoe), makes locals consider global connectivity in more negative terms (Pannett). It seems that an exciting popular-cultural phenomenon might be subsumed by the public need to manage consumer behavior that is spiraling out of control.

It is impossible to provide a full list of similar incidents within and without Europe here (for various international cases see Tzanelli, *Cinematic tourist mobilities*), so I move on to a commonsensical observation: media-induced, and more specifically cinema-induced tourism, one of the most promising popular cultural niches of the twenty-first century, did not just generate environmental problems and globalized uncivil behaviors against host cultures, it turned into a very *unpopular* phenomenon in host cultures. This experiential dimension matches the “phenomenology of tourism experiences” (Cohen) with a “phenomenology of host experiences,” with the latter standing at the heart of this article. If popularity is in the eye of the beholder, in these specific instances we deal with an under-researched problem in tourism and popular-cultural studies. Existing studies on ‘unpopular culture’ (Lütke and Pöhlmann) tend to confuse unpopularity with perceptions of cultural performance, production or consumption as ‘kitsch’ or ‘camp’ (Holliday and Potts), silencing the latter two phenomena’s inherent ethical complexities (or ignoring them conceptually altogether); instead, they promote rather uncomplicated

ideas of audience and consumer participation that do not consider specific contexts and norms of hospitality and reciprocity. It helps to bear in mind that hospitality exceeds commercial exchange, even when it takes place in commercial contexts (Germann Molz and Gibson; Lashley et al.; Lashley and Morrison), hence, it can involve non-market consumption practices and experiences in need of appropriate analytical tools to explore. Glaringly, sophisticated examinations of the ‘unpopular’ through the prism of Bourdieusian capital, prioritize questions of class and taste (Butler) – arguments I endeavor to revise in the context of cinematic tourism, where, neither guests nor hosts belong to an easily identified or fixed “class.” Another problem with connotations of “taste” with “class” is that they may end up reflecting the critical scholar’s trained gaze/stance too much, sustaining an elitism of which many famous first-generation critical theorists were accused. However, I will also not associate the ‘unpopular’ with subcultural preference or style (Senkbeil, 260-61), even though film tourists are increasingly treated in popular parlance as a global subculture of sorts.

My analytical focus on the “un/popular” borrows less from humanities and more from social-scientific concerns and methods regarding emergence (of phenomena), causation and complexity. The consequences of such hospitality developments spread across the human, natural and technological spheres of action, prompting the tightening of *regimes of governance*: modes of governing locations. This prompts redefinitions of what and how is (to be) toured and what such activities mean for those populations who must live in these areas. The latter is of focus in my study as part of a complex interaction between humans, technologies and environments. I grant the term “unpopular” with two interconnected meanings: the first, which we associate with the word’s common

use, signifies the undesirable and unwelcome. The second meaning extends the former, by flagging negation (“un” as “non”) as the *absence of the popular*: something collectively/unanimously shared. Within this second meaning one is prompted to ask some difficult questions, including what exactly constitutes the “popular” as a domain open to particular social or cultural groups – a concern of the sociology of culture. The eye, ear and heart of the beholder are not generic properties; they should be at least categorized into provinces of meaning and experience. As I explain below, this contextual occurrence renders the “popular” with ecological-aesthetic (“ecoaesthetic”) properties, often marginalized in markets that standardize beauty and pleasure. Twenty-first century cultural industries associated with the spectacle (film) and its embodied enactments (cinematic tourist pilgrimages) tend to standardize intangible goods. Heretofore I follow Gernot Böhme’s argument that aesthetics governs the logic of capitalist economy. “Human play,” constitutive of Schiller’s definition of human freedom, is subjected to aesthetic standardization in this new “aesthetic capitalism” (Böhme, 74): fan pilgrimages and all sorts of tourism are turned into packaged commodities. Seeing past the agency of tourists to “interpret” such commodities for their own benefit, we find groups of locals and hosts, who cannot participate in free play. The “unpopularity” of this imported popular culture is symptomatic of these aesthetic-capitalist machinations, distorting the conditions of human play as a universal right. Sociologies of aesthetics (as an extension of the sociology of culture) prompt scholars to consider the unpopular in relation to what Georges Bataille considered as the excluded part of civilization: pleasure and play. Especially when these two activities/experiences are partnered with actual uncivil (guest) behaviors, they produce

perfectly justified, but dangerous emotions of inhospitality that kill both cross-cultural communication and a vital connection between tourist experience and well-being.

Given the studied phenomenon's connection to uncivil behavior, which is a far cry from established associations between tourism with anomie as psychic liberation from the everyday (Dann), one is also prompted to speak of the "popular" as a version of the "public." Sociologists argued that contemporary changes in human interaction cast the public as a sphere wherein people operate as individuals and view public issues in private terms, thus reducing the world into a mirror for the self, failing to maintain civil behavior and empathy between strangers (Sennett). Because cinematic tourism's "popular culture" is distributed as a good or an experience across different publics, we should think in terms of public spheres *in the plural* (and by analogy private ones, often challenged by popular cultural intrusions). Concerns with public sphere-formation (the project of Habermassian sociology) translate in this article into considerations of the nature of public complaints about cinematic tourist incivility, as well as examinations of the hosts' needs and desires in ecoaesthetic terms. "Ecoaesthetics" is the appreciation of forms of beauty in the making in different ecological contexts, porous imaginary domains humans and non-humans reside. This combines perceptions of the environment with processes of appreciation in both material and phenomenal ways (McCormack, 369). Much like the study of popular culture, this connection is inherently interdisciplinary, raising issues of production (associated with political economy and communication) and consumption (associated with tourism), as well as activist naming and claiming material and immaterial culture (associated with cultural and political sociology and anthropology, as well as politics and even law).

Though currently very narrowly tied to film texts and the politics of (youth) consumer identity (Grady in Fedorak, 15), activism as a form of popular-cultural expression is indisputable. However, scholars in the field of film tourism still have to broaden their cultural horizons (film texts are a small aspect of what is consumed) and elucidate the things popular cultural rituals and consumption *do*, not only *for* (consumers), but also *to* different groups (producers and hosts), who may even be excluded from its institution (Miller, 147-57). Such exclusions are enforced not only because of social inequalities, as most critical theory scholars often argue, but what I will term an “ecoaesthetic partition.” In a chain reaction commencing with uncivil tourist conduct, this partition facilitates the consignment of anti-cinematic tourist activism to irrational or uncivil political behavior, when in fact, as a form of social action it assumes aesthetic content in its attempt to restore the perceived damage tourism inflicts upon human and natural environments. I will not challenge the partition itself but explain instead how uncivil tourist behavior leads to an equally uncivil dislodging of the “popular” from popular culture, and its subsequent replacement with a violent form of populism.

In the following section I analyze the interconnections between different “ecological” domains involved in this phenomenon. I highlight strengths and gaps in the existing scholarship, to construct my argument on “ecoaesthetic partition,” and provide concrete examples of cinematic tourist development to illustrate it. The examples suggest that I prioritize one of the three main “ecologies” involved in cinematic tourist development, which seems to elucidate who communicates ecoaesthetics in popular culture: humans, within and together with their material and spiritual environments. In the third section, I

focus on complications induced by cinematic-tourist development within the “social” and “cultural ecology,” which now appears *split across different permutations of aesthetics*. This divide or partition produces unpleasant forms of populism in popular culture, which inform the study’s conclusion.

Complexity and Communication: Ecological Partitions in Media-Induced Tourism

Let us begin by looking at some dominant arguments in the field of media-induced tourism. Indisputably, locations that featured in films, TV series and computer games as tourist destinations have evolved into a lucrative twenty-first century popular-cultural niche. Such niches, which thrive on contingent collaborations between media and tourist industries, are based on standardized cultural signification, or “sign industries” (Tzanelli, “Constructing the ‘Cinematic Tourist’”; Tzanelli, *Cinematic tourist*; Tzanelli, *Heritage*), which trade in storylines, images and popular cultural tokens to secure a clientele. Several such media-induced tourist destinations emerged and became established or rejected by tourist and host communities around the world as developmental projects, allegedly capable of improving community wellbeing (Beaton *Film-induced tourism* 1 and 2) and fan/visitor mobility (Roesch).

Academic scholarship in the field scrutinized this type of growth in terms of business responsibility and infrastructural organization to cater for the forthcoming fan visitor economy in such destinations (Beaton, *Partnerships*; Kork). Contrariwise, cultural industrial and welfare arguments, which are the most established cross-disciplinary paradigms, focus on consumer objectives (e.g. tourism in pursuit of well-being), and increasingly, on forms of creative labor involved in the design of cinematic tourist

locations, or the producer's/caterer's social well-being. Of course, divisions of labor in the cinematic-tourist industry authorize different groups to perform different tasks (see Hollinshead (*Tourism*; "'Worldmaking' Prodigy") on the role of experts in "tourism worldmaking;" Urry (*Tourist gaze 1*; *Tourist gaze 2*) on their industrial design of the "tourist gaze"), as is the case with all industrialized societies (Durkheim). Without this division, we would not have had organized media tourism, because from the production of films, all the way down to the maintenance of a media-induced tourist resort, we need specialized personnel: film directors, actors and technicians, hoteliers and staff, as well as marketing directors and event organizers, to name but a few groups involved in the chains of popular-cultural production. Naturally, when it comes to human populations, it helps to remember that many of us live in highly stratified societies and cultures, so the ways we experience our world is affected by where we are placed as working and aesthetic beings: beings perceiving and reworking our impressions of our world (Rancière, *Spectator*, 7-9). However, for this article's 'unpopular culture' I do not perform the usual anti-elitist somersault in defense of the poor and disenfranchised classes, often dubbed "white trash" (Hartigan), or the new "other" of mainstream popcultural taste, the "chavs" (Hayward and Yar).

Questions of "popularity" in academic scholarship point to the conditions under which cinematic tourism is received and espoused by hosts and guests. This immediately suggests that we deal with a question of communication across different groups, which potentially leads to the production of different provinces of meaning and experience (constitutive of what I named the pluralization of publics and private spheres in the introduction – see Sheller and Urry). Different provinces of meaning generate different

social ecologies, with different conceptions of what is beautiful even as a consumable product. The conditions point to collaborations or clashes between the primary ecological domains that make life function (for our basic needs) and us create (our desire to live beautifully and happily), rather than merely recreate. I identify at least three ecologies in cinematic tourist development (natural, sociocultural and technological), with a further breakdown of them in the article's following section. These ecologies function through the apportionment of positions and forms of activity, so all humans, natural environments and machines attain a role/function to play on earth. When it comes to popular culture, the orchestration of these ecologies matters, because any clashes in and between them have knock-on effects on all their members.

Let us unpack the role of these ecologies in cinematic tourism individually and in relation to each other. The "natural" refers to the untouched environments of the touristified location. However, when tourism kicks off, natural ecologies are overtaken by environments modified by locals with an aim to make them habitable and sociable, as well as by industries aiming to transform them into tourist resorts. We cannot, for example, imagine the spread of the anime tourist industry in Japan without the production of digital otherworlds in filmed locations in the case of computer game or comics/manga adaptations (Seaton et al.). Such modifications belong to the "technological ecology," which nevertheless seems to simultaneously serve social roles: not only does it bring tourists and locals together, it enables the localities to reflect and constantly rearticulate their identity. Note however how the "sociocultural ecology" cannot function independently from the "technological," which points to the ways people's social and cultural connectivities are articulated materially and aesthetically:

the more localities come in touch with the world (tourists), the more they make (produce) things for themselves and their guests. To illustrate this, take as an example the emergence of local shops selling anime props and foodstuff connected to the popular anime series *Lucky Star* (2007) in the Washimiya district of Kuki city, Saitama Prefecture (Yamamura). Such local trading, as well as accompanying rituals (e.g. tea ceremonies, also featured in the series) merged with externally-induced industrial development, including that of “sacred sites” for fans/pilgrims in the town, which involved both a local Shinto temple and *Lucky Star*-inspired walking tours. In this instance, sociocultural ecologies of hospitality were woven into the technological ones, which involved both the making, advertising and distribution of the anime series, site development in the town and the local sociotechnical sites of baking and serving food as making meaning in hospitality.

Such harmonious development is rare, as the example of the *Lord of the Rings* touristification reveals. There, we deal with a downward ecological spiral, which has involved even complaints filed by Federated Mountain Clubs to the country’s Conservation Department about tour bus congestion around Fiordland in the South Island, local administrations’ threat to impose fines on unruly tourists around Queenstown, as well as growing fears that natural ecosystems in the region erode because of fan over-visitation, onsite cosplay rituals and littering (Pannett). Here, a growing sociocultural ecology, which has evolved from local to national and international tourist interactivity, clashes with the natural, because of their entanglement in the technological ecology of internationalized cinematic tourism, thus urging questions of sustainability. However, even the plea to “sustain” is problematic, because

it posits a series of dilemmas: should local environments be preserved at the expense of the newly-born popular culture of film fandom? Is film fandom sustainable for the locality thrown into relevant place-making business? Constitutive of contemporary economic and sociocultural complexities in which popular cultures are produced and consumed, these ecological landscapes are increasingly in conflict between and within themselves.

Ecological dissonances and the inability to contain all these activities within one fixed understanding of sustainability reveals that popular culture as ritualized behavior embedded in everyday life is far from a stable condition or experiential domain.

Wrongly attributed to the consolidation of different disciplinary agendas, this definitional instability is symptomatic of a deeper diagnostic problem. The problem hinges on unwarranted nominations of tourists as true progressive sociocultural agents and their dissatisfied hosts as irrational, regressive obstacles to true modernization, which is supposed to be desired by all, just so. This discrimination produces and reproduces the trope of host irrationality, regression and inhospitality as a self-fulfilling prophecy. In the experiential/cultural domain of unwanted or badly planned tourist development (which constitutes a separate sociocultural “ecology of hospitality”), the newly-introduced media/fan culture is a de facto unpopular development.

This unpopularity introduces in native cultures the bad agent of populism that few popular-cultural scholars have explored. A distorted image of the will of the “consuming people” (that is, of an established academic definition of popular culture in the field as ‘vibrant...offer[ing] both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards, and avenues for

escape from everyday stresses' (Fedorak, 12)), this agent introduces a novel threat to the hosts' creative identity. Cinematic-tourism hosts begin to produce a coherent response to cinematic touristification, which is hostile to popular-cultural fans as destructive of the social, cultural and natural environments the hosts feel they own. Evidently, we shifted focus here from the complex interconnections between the three ecologies to complications induced within one of them: the sociocultural. This ecology has been discussed in relevant studies as a pluricultural hub comprising different groups, stakeholders, interests and motivations (Beeton, *Community development*; Connell). I place the unpopularity of popular culture within this ecology but issue a cautionary note when it comes to the recognition of the polyphonic nature scholars in the field of film-induced tourism attribute to it. Interpretations of "populism" as a beneficial weapon for and by the hosts, rather than guest/popcultural tourists, change its function and nature: while borrowing from the tools of the spectacular economy of filmmaking in some cases, it can become one-dimensional and stripped off its aesthetic core in the hands of demagogues.

The Affective Time Bomb: "Light" and "Heavy" Definitions of Populism

(a) Sociocultural Ecology and Activity: The Technoculture

The sociocultural ecology is defined by communications between humans and their environments: interpretations of their encounters with the world (within the world), which are thus constantly shaped and reshaped materially (in tourist contexts this is a sketchy but solid rendition of Hollinshead's (*Tourism*) definition of "worldmaking" from a mass-consumption of destinations point of view). However, we are far from clarifying what such encounters and interpretations are like. Let us think of them as a

tripartite version of communication, whereby (a) humans collectively construct their cultures and societies, (b) ritualize their constructions, and (c) solidify such rituals in a “technology” involving embodied memories, customs, habits and practices. This thesis, which is also compatible with Habermas’ suggestion that all “lifeworlds” co-exist, interact with and contribute to particular “systems” of culture, (in)forms a transdisciplinary debate. Fusing the symbolic interactionism of anthropologist Clifford Geertz, with the performance theory of sociologist Erving Goffman and the pragmatist organicism of philosopher John Dewey with the ecological materialism of the Chicago School of urban sociology, this tripartite schema favors the idea that humans constantly interpret situations in creative ways (agency), regardless of the constrictions imposed on them by nature and society (structure) (Christians and Carey, 346; Vannini et al., 462). The act of interpretation is also a strategy of sense-making with technical extensions (I interpret and make material culture on the go and as allowed by circumstances and context) that ethnographic theorists explored as “technography” (Vannini, Hodson and Vannini), more-than-human Actor-Network scholars as “transduction” (Mackenzie), critical-cultural sociologists as “technopoesis” (Hand and Sandywell), and critical realists as “morphogenesis” (Archer). In these transdisciplinary sojourns we find the persistence of what sociologist Jeffrey Alexander has termed “structural hermeneutics.” This is the bespoke Yale “strong program” in cultural sociology, which acknowledges the co-existence of agency and structural impositions, while stressing human agential resilience and creativity (Alexander and Smith; Alexander). To summarize the terminological richness effectively I heretofore use the concept of “technoculture.” All technocultures are mind-body propelled at the most fundamental level, while increasingly also embracing, absorbing and cloning technological machines to represent

human communities at a collective level, and their function remains semiotic (meaning-produced).

No technoculture exists in an ecological void. Technocultures are constantly invaded by other mechanical technologies (film and internet business), other popcultural technocultures (hybrid tourist mobilities involving cameras and other technologies) and their semiotic storerooms (they all produce meaning and thus memories for different social groups), which are also highly mobile in an interconnected world. Nevertheless, these technocultures do not exist in harmony. For example, although the local Albuquerque culture has now embraced the faux criminal world of *Breaking Bad* (2008-2013) TV series, by producing its own simulated narcotics in local sweet shops and location bus tours, but also pursuing its administrative insertion into the digital artscenes of New York (with exhibitions inspired by the series), it simultaneously struggles to eradicate its widespread damaging image as a criminal hotspot with no refined taste to display to consumers (Tzanelli and Yar). The role of popular culture in its tangible and intangible forms is instructive here, as is also the case with the forms of populism that circulate across different sites it claims as its playgrounds (narcotics, criminal traffic and adventure tourism). Unfortunately, we stumble upon another problem: what and whose “populism” are we supposed to address in such contexts of cinematic touristification?

It helps highlighting the interpretative elasticity and realm-bound porosity of the term, which adapts to disciplinary context without opening a dialogue with other disciplinary domains. Thus, in postmodern approaches to popular culture in the humanities, “cultural

populism” (here re-termed “light populism”) is understood as an expression of the interests, values and experiences of people, with a note by critical theorists that such studies should always consider how “material life situations and power relations...shape the mediated experiences of ordinary people” (McGuigan, 244). On its own, however, political analysts would say, this definition does not acknowledge that a genuine expression of the voice of the people is always a construct, or an ontological mediation by a source of power, which is rarely the people. The “people” is a slippery concept that splits across different social and cultural realms and interests anyway, thus leaving us with objections of the type tackled by the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham, whose scholars blamed the scapegoating of popular culture on sources of hegemony (see Hall and Jefferson on class and youth subcultures and Gilroy on race and ethnicity). In communication/audience studies similar objections have been raised about the works of Jenkins and Fiske, who equated the hermeneutic power audiences possess with structural emancipation. In such analyses, “the people” can be generic consumers, disenfranchised working-class groups or ethnic communities, to name but a few options. Between the two opposites of political engagement and cultural celebration in cross-disciplinary scholarship, the “middle ground” stands as a crater in need of filling and shaping up into a popular-cultural home: neither engrossed in pop pleasure without a moral ground, nor disengaged from public culture, nor denied aesthetic depth. Revising Grindstaff’s plea for analytical separations through the “strong program,” I argue that this middle ground should achieve a synthesis of two distinctive intellectual traditions: one focusing on consumption/interpretation and the other on institutions and markets. The aim of such a synthesis would necessitate an acknowledgment that, so far, “we happily celebrate[d] discoveries in popular culture of sociability, fellowship, and

creative resistance to exclusionary cultural forms,” without paying attention to “the popular traditions of racism, sexism, and nativism that are just as deeply rooted. That is popular culture too” (Mukerji and Schudson, 36 in Grindastaff, 217). Once applied to discourses and practices of populism, such popular traditions assume the form of ecoaesthetic practice, which guides human behavior in social, cultural and natural domains.

(b) Populist Technoculture and Ecoaesthetic Partition

In cinematic-tourist cultures, populism transcends (a) individual or collective interpretation to morph (e.g. Archer) into a more *systemic* problem, (b) that cannot be addressed exclusively by specific structural inequalities of class, ethnic or gendered nature (although all these remain part of its structural makeup). In the era of media prosumption, Web 2.0 and tourism cocreation, there is a dark spot in critical postmodern scholarship regarding who is cast as a producer or consumer of popular culture. The *Harry Potter* tourists roaming Edinburgh have, for example, rewritten the film and novel series’ scripts a thousand times over, often creating with their vandalisms of heritage and cosplay quirks, new mobilities of text, ritual and consumption that blend local heritage with film technology. This happens to the dismay of Edinburgh residents and the administrative machine seeking to conserve history and preserve public order (Turbett; Kidd). Nevertheless, such disagreeable blends shed new light on the interdisciplinary advances of the 1990s and the 2000s in questions of social and cultural distinction (Bourdieu; Friedman et al.), as well as those stressing the importance of formal immaterial industrial labor in the production of popular culture (Lash and Urry).

Reconsidering such studies in cinematic-tourist mobility contexts becomes even more important when we shift emphasis from media and reception studies to the fields of hospitality and tourism: nowhere outside these fields is it clear enough that the staging of cultural authenticity by locals (MacCannell) and the constant host-guest cocreation of locality through tourism (Richards) should be examined as a populist activity on its own terms. There are dozens of studies on the foundation and diversification of a *Lord of the Rings* tourist industry on New Zealand, and more on media-induced tourist mobilities, but very few on the emergence of local technocultures around the films. The gap looms even larger when scholars are invited to inspect the unpopularity of the films' popular culture (for exceptions see Tzanelli, *Heritage, Cinematic tourist mobilities*; Rozuel and Douglas). This could be attributed to a weak analytical distinction between the "popular" and the "folk" (Fedorak, 10-13), which, on its own can create suspicions of elitist distinction between "progressive/cool" and "backward/traditional" forms of culture respectively. Casting tourist hosts as mere labor in the service of visitors is enough to shift the study of consumption to tourists, without consideration of the ways local or indigenous material life broadcasts its own cultures of populism. An additional, mostly anthropological ethics of care, might act as a deterrent in explorations of such sensitive matters.

The issue is compound with an increasing aversion towards discussions of the real consequences new consumption regimes, such as those of media-induced tourism, impinge on host communities. As Strinati (236) puts it, populism and elitism mirror each other in their fundamentalist (read: uncompromisingly ideologically-ridden)

natures, in ways that should make one think of the “popularity of popular culture as a real sociological problem.” And yet, such research is often left to social-political scientists, who employ their own “heavy” notions of populism to conduct their studies. Take for example Ernesto Laclau’s understanding of populism as an empty signifier, a rhetorical device of profound ontological power, which can produce a coherent and irrefutable idea of the “people” that does not exist without or before its nomination (often by populist demagogues). For Laclau and Mouffe, “the people” mostly emerge out of selective representation: part of a society (one “representative” class or group stands for “the people”), is used in the tropic production of the whole (tropes are forms of repetitive utterance that bring something to life). Thus, it would be unwise to disregard the importance of socialist politicians’ nomination of New Zealand as “Middle Earth” ravaged by the “Dark Lord” of cultural industries, or the conservatives’ embracement of native hospitality workers in touristified regions as toiling national heroes (Tzanelli, *Heritage*, chapter 3), during an industrial dispute that threatened to move the production of the first *Hobbit* (2012) film out of the country. Both sides brought the “people” to life by selecting exemplary human types from the nation, thus reducing popular culture to a populist tool, and prioritizing the political over the aesthetic. Likewise, from a political-economic stance even closer to popular culture, we may say that Guy Debord (12-13) and Jean Baudrillard see the spectacle (read: the institution of cinematic tourism in locations) as a means to unify society.

Despite any claims to aesthetic judgement, such debates produce equally problematic conceptions of populism (turning “Hobbits” into MPs, to introduce a pun). Although they better problematize the popularity of popular culture à la Strinati, they

conceptualize the host community's identity as "labor" in a typical Marxist vein – a move divesting it of its role as a cultural-aesthetic cocreator. A perspectival shift to the ways protesters in the *Hobbit* controversy chose to parade the streets of Auckland with placards depicting Gollum with a quote "Save my Precious Home!" exposes such an interpretative ambivalence (Tzanelli, *Heritage*, chapter 2). A cultural-sociological analyst would have pointed out that, even when subjected to national-political projects, such collective self-presentations are not representations of something else (the nation or labor), but archetypes of human being (Alexander, "Art and Life," 6). Such archetypes supplant filmmakers and scriptwriters with the movie's "arcplot" or central scenario (McKee) and central heroes (Campbell), who tell stories shared by humans transcending sociocultural or political affiliations. The "Gollum" of protesters was more, if not other-than a representation of the nation or the *Hobbit* activist cultures: it was a whole technocultural ecology produced across different sites by humans in the company of their tools and their natural and material habitats.

The alternative casting of hosts in political-economic research as reactive agents or actors (these days, also more often hostile to cinematic-tourist development), results in a chain of problematic aesthetic judgements: first, the researchers themselves cannot/will not recognize that populism is not just an adaptable political rhetoric, but a force of aesthetic production in the hands of host communities, exceeding particular political objectives (if any); and second, this rigidity, does not allow host communities to assume the analytical role of an aesthetic agent. What is lost in this para-logical process is the recognition of analogy: that hosts can think and act in aesthetically productive ways that inflect those of institutionalized industrial creativity and their popcultural

consumers. For example, we could also “read” the Gollum banner’s meaning in the same way that *Mamma Mia!* fans treat the pebbles they take away home: as ideal-typical objects blending the material surface of the souvenir with its aesthetic depth (Alexander, “Material Feeling,” 786 on the relationship between everyday aesthetics and art; Alexander, “Art and Life,” 6 on social icons; Hume, chapter 4 on souvenirs and archetypes). Hence, creative life with popular-cultural permutations persists even when communities hosting film tourists reject this type of development altogether. Moreover, rarely does this happen on irrational grounds, and most often because of fears that localized ecologies (a whole Gollum technoculture, with all its natural extensions) will be eradicated due to cinematic touristification.

(c) *Populist Ontologies as Self-Fulfilling Prophecies*

To revise now Grindstaff, a *problématique* on popular creativity cannot be confined to specific social variables (class, age, ethnicity, disability or gender), but should be seen as a modified version of what Jacques Rancière (*Politics*) calls the “distribution of the sensible,” which consolidates an aesthetic partition (see first section). Sociologists Ruth Holliday and Tracy Potts, who recently sounded alarm bells about the ways discourses of “kitsch” endorse intersectional elitism by associating kitschification with “bad taste,” unconsciously performed in affectively uncontrollable ways (therefore potentially risky for democratic thinking and acting), bring us a step closer to the root of the problem. My argument is not that kitsch or cinematic tourism endorse social inequalities, but, as Holliday and Potts (243) note in their conclusion, we rush to assign negative affective qualities to specific aesthetic agents, while simultaneously removing their aesthetic capabilities altogether, when we can all enjoy kitsch, which is for fun and happiness. By

not acknowledging the idea that cinematic tourist hosts act and respond logically *and with style* to uncivil guest behaviors or the threats mass tourism mobilities present to local sociocultures, built/heritage and natural environments – by shunting aside the performative tropes in which they express these feelings (see Ziakas) – we reserve populism as a joyful activity for the tourist consumers. If, studied as a mere political event, such “reactions” help the political to override the aesthetic – a move associated with classical theories of populism and totalitarianism that we find in the writings of Hannah Arendt. The trick in aesthetic analysis is to avoid determination by rational thought or moral understanding, without endorsing absolute dissociation from them – “the very freedom from a priori determination that, subsequent to the aesthetic experience, allows greater conceptual and moral development in turn” (Alexander, “Material Feeling,” 789).

The recognition of hosts as a negative political force with irrational affective attitudes towards cinematic tourist development has knock-on effects in these regions “under development.” Thus, although, as the response to *Mamma Mia!* tourist behavior attests, local actions continue to display a creative element, the reality of the aesthetic partition generates the preconditions for the adoption of precisely this one-dimensional (inhospitable) negativity they are accused of (on conflicting hostile and hospitable behaviors on Skiathos see Tzanelli, *Cosmopolitan memory*). In fairness, all development projects should address the specific needs of the places and cultures they take under their wing, so the examination of an aesthetic partition between popcultural and host ecologies as “ideal types” (that is generic and thus useful to theorize from) is not enough: without knowing about the context of interaction, we are left with “models” of

tourist expansion that obey to the Western canon of development, and which cannot apply unanimously even within the developed West or the Global North. It is, for example, problematic to assume that slum tourism inspired by films such as *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008), will respect the development of local ecoaesthetics or appraise the ecoaesthetic environments that local interactions with film fans generate. The visitor's populist welfare trumps upon the host's, as several studies of this film's tourist development prove (Tzanelli, *Mobility*; Hannam and Diekman; Frenzel).

Even conceptions of business responsibility are vulnerable to populism. We can envisage a scenario, in all parties ensure that the political supersedes and replaces aesthetic life. At this stage, fueled by native values, the host community's negativity manufactures its own version of populism, which substitutes pleasure and fun for the consumer's psychosocial welfare with resentment and the need for revenge for the unacknowledged producer's self-preservation needs (Tzanelli, *Cosmopolitan memory*). The cinematic fan/tourist's populist version of the "leisurely people" is inflected and distorted in the cinematic host's populist version of the "wronged people," who seek to "set the record straight" by claiming the developing technological ecologies (fan visitor resorts and sites) as their own sociocultural properties, not to be trespassed by unruly strangers. Such unruly strangers come in different colors and from different walks of life, but, like the "wronged folk," are reduced to parasites invading local ecologies, as Veijola et al. explain in their international study of hospitality. And there is more: Michelle Lamont claimed specifically with regards to working class morality, that the cultural dimensions of class consciousness often override the material ones to enable working-class men to preserve a sense of self-worth. Such groups often foster feelings

of resentment towards other classes they regard as morally corrupt. A similar ecoaesthetic behavior with affective dimensions is employed by disgruntled tourist hosts in our contexts, who replace the reality of industrial transformation from outside and above (the ecological standardization of native locations and cultures for the cinematic tourist gaze) with a condemnation of the visitors' moral flaws (which may be as real in some cases, if behaviors truly harm local environments and lifestyles). By employing the industrial principles of the spectacle and selecting specimen and locations from these ecologies, host communities organize their own populist response against alien unpopular cultures of touristification. At this stage such specimen and archetypes mirror the "Dark Lord" of fascism, who promises to return the good common folk to the "Garden of Eden" that alien consumers monopolized for so long.

Conclusion

Strinati insists that populism's historical connection to critical approaches of mass culture continues to affect its interpretation, either as an analysis of culture (more widespread in the humanities), or as a political strategy (more widespread in the social sciences). He proceeds to highlight that it is better to consider it as an ideology of the producer of popular culture "as a way of justifying what they produce - 'giving people what they want' – and it can equally be an ideology of audiences" (Strinati, 235).

Nevertheless, I explained that in contexts of media-induced tourist development, before becoming a strategy or an ideology, "populism" contributes to the distribution of the sensible (in Rancière's terms), thus introducing an aesthetic divide between hosts (who may or may not be tourism/hospitality labor) and guests/media fans (who are both privileged consumers and producers of popular culture). The abuse of "privilege,"

further enabled by capitalism and its neoliberal principle of “consumers first,” has further knock-on effects: first, it leads to the complete and unauthorized transformation of local social and cultural ecologies. This is an analytical point, which I do not extend to critical observations on local custom from lack of space (let us not forget that not only can the local be retrogressive when it comes to communal well-being, “nativeness” can be elevated to an ideology harmful to vulnerable groups).

The second effect such orchestrated structural (industrial)/agential (fan tourist) abuses have involves the expansion of industrial technocultures, with a simultaneous erosion of their folk/local/popular counterparts, on which industries drew to stage landscapes, popcultural rituals and pleasurable atmospheres of consumption in the first place. Indeed (and this is the third effect, which verifies Habermas’ observations on the fate of public spheres in modernity), this erosion is implicated in wider ecosystemic changes (e.g. natural environments take a hit by overtourist visitations or their industrial modifications). The expansion of an organized industrial version of technological ecology at the expense of other ecologies (the “colonization” of lifeworlds by “systems” – Habermas) is rarely narrated by the affected hosts as a necessary consequence of development for their benefit – if it ever was anyway (and this can be contextually examined). Instead, it is semantically *construed* (Alexander and Smith) as a nebulous enemy with many faces (tourists, media or tourist industries, and so forth), who has stolen the host locality/community/nation’s properties, heritage and beauty, even though all these are ever-shifting categories in a world of globalized cocreation. It is at this stage that the “populist right” of media/cinematic tourists is replaced by the “populist right” of the media/cinematic hosts, who, somewhere along the way, have lost their

most fundamental right as human beings: to make and communicate culture in public in equitable and enjoyable ways.

Ironically, this definitive disconnection between popular and public culture, which consolidates what Sennett calls “the fall of public man [sic]” (see introduction), valorizes the claim for a private culture (custom, local or national ideology), which provides the “disaffected people” (hosts) with a populist strategy. When not addressed, the disconnection makes any “sustainable development” project in media tourism unsustainable, regardless of the amiability with which different industries (film and tourism) try to approach communities. In fact, when the populist time bomb explodes in cinematic-tourist destinations, any professional versions of creativity (movie images, tourist stages) are in danger of being coopted by local/national forces as developmental tools to block cross-cultural communication. Claiming custodianship and “patrilinearity” of all these tangible and intangible products (“they all belong to the people”), they transform the idea of “authenticity” into a biological property; and that is a loss for all parties.

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