MEDIATIZING CRIMES OF STYLE: A RESEARCH ON THE CHANGING NATURE OF CRIME AND DEVIANCE

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ABSTRACT

The present study seeks question traditional subcultural and post-subcultural theories by looking at criminal and deviant subcultures through the prism of mediatization. In a media-saturated society the media have increasingly intertwined with different contexts of society and culture, changing not only the way we communicate, but the way we act.

Inspired by cultural criminology, this article places crime, and more specific criminal subcultures, in the context of culture, symbolism, and imagery. Deviant subcultures, typically defined by expressivity and lifestyle, have often been seen as rebellious and oppositional to mainstream culture. Drawing on 10 in-depth interviews with graffiti writers and skaters, the present study explores how embedding media in their illegal and deviant act has recontextualized and even shaped these underground subcultures. Since media distribute signs and symbols with an ever-increasing intensity, studying deviant subcultures in media-saturated societies cannot be thought of beyond media. Instead of looking at what media do with or say about criminal subcultures, this article emphasizes on everyday media-oriented practices, or what are deviant subcultures doing in relation to media. By posting on a blog, talking on TV or shooting and sharing a YouTube video even underground subcultures have embraced the changing media potentials.

Keywords: mediatization, media-oriented practices, subcultures, crime, deviance.

Word count: 9 603
INTRODUCTION

Criminal and deviant behavior is certainly not a modern phenomenon. Neither is the popular belief that media and (especially violent) crime have a somewhat natural connection (Jewkes, 2004). Although literature reviews typically conclude that there is no such evidence, scholarly debate on media and crime has often associated viewing violent media with aggression (e.g. Anderson, 2002), or has highlighted the power of (mass) media campaigns and images for labeling certain behavior deviant (Hamm & Ferrell, 1994). This labeling perspective has served as a theoretical backbone for cultural criminology- a tradition placing crime and its control in the context of culture, symbolism, and imagery (Hayward & Young, 2004). It is here that the general inquiry on media, culture, and crime merge into one domain of interest, highlighting the existence of the so-called “crimes of style”, or as Ferrell (1999, p. 403) puts it, subcultural criminal behavior “collectively organized around networks of symbol, ritual, and shared meaning” (Ferrell & Sanders, 1995; Kidd-Hewitt & Osborne, 1995).

Existing body of subcultural literature regards criminal and deviant subcultures as rebellious, oppositional, and resistant to mainstream culture and social norms (cf. Hebdige, 1979; Hall & Jefferson, 1993). This in turn is also the attitude towards mass media, as they are being considered reflective of mainstream values and dominant culture. Often, when we think about media, we refer to mass media, such as radio, newspapers, and television. Today, mass media constitute just a tiny piece of the puzzle called media-saturated societies (Lundby, 2009). Certain questions begin to pervade the traditional research agenda of examining what media do with or say about criminal subcultures. The “intensification” of media (Hartmann, 2009, p. 226) and their proliferation across almost all aspects of social and cultural life make it interesting to shift the focus in the opposite direction and to explore what the members of deviant and criminal subcultures do with media, or how they embed them in their “seemingly secretive” illicit worlds (Ferrell, Milanovic & Lyng, 2001). Underground criminal subcultures are typically defined by expressivity and lifestyle, and media, as a dominant distributor of signs and symbols, can be of essential importance for these groups. In this perspective, Greer (2009, p. 377) argues, media and mediatization are integral to understanding criminal cultures and the crimes of style. Mediatization is a concept that has emerged in an attempt to explore how the proliferation of media and communications technologies could influence society and culture. For this reason, this article will examine the various media-oriented practices of criminal and deviant subcultures, such as graffiti writers and skaters. In a mediatized society, questions arise how they are to reconcile their identity, image, and even the lifestyle of underground subcultures, previously reluctant to media exposure and visibility,
with the new communicative environment. Similarly, Pietrosanti (2010) elaborates on further research possibilities: “Does it really matter anymore to see the train running with the piece on it as long as the picture is on the web?”. Drawing on 10 in-depth interviews with graffiti writers and skaters, we would describe how embedding media in their illegal and deviant practices has shaped and transformed their rebellious subcultures. First, we would argue that increased mediatization shifts the focus away from the oppositional and rebellious nature of these underground subcultures to an image of groups that value mostly skills, performance, and even spectacle. Second, the symbols and signs of these subcultures, “bricollaged into lifestyles” (Hayward & Young, 2004, p. 260), have inevitably taken part in the dynamic mediation and remediation, therefore, created the paradox of the underground movement. Instead of being intolerable and in conflict with society, the underground becomes part of the cultural mainstream (Duda, 2010). Third, consolidating post-subcultural discussions (cf. Muggleton & Weinzierl, 2003), the following cases will show that mediatization goes hand in hand with an increasing commercialization of these subcultures, so often making claims of being opposed to corporate values. Our research shows that this process goes beyond subcultural styles freezing in commodification (Hebdige, 1979).

**MEDIATIZATION OF SOCIETY AND CULTURE**

This article is rooted in the premise that mediatization is a meta-process influencing society on a par with globalization, commercialization, etc., but as such, it is simultaneously at work in different contexts of society and culture, therefore, no uniform or linear outcomes could or should be expected (Hepp, Hjarvard & Lundby, 2010). This new paradigm has emerged as a concept that carries the legacy of both medium theory and effects research. It not only adopts the basic assumption that media change and cultural change are related in some (undefined) ways (Hepp, 2009), but also claims that media have the potentials to “twist” society (Hernes, 1978). At the same time, mediatization addresses their **major shortcomings** such as looking for one-directional (causal) relations, focusing on content, and considering media an entirely separate entity (which could influence society). Although scholars still disagree whether mediatization (Hjarvard, 2008; Schulz, 1990), mediation (Couldry, 2008), or medialization (Weingart, 1998) captures better the nuances (cf. Livingstone, 2009), there is a growing consensus that media and communications technologies can no longer be regarded as being

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1 Piece (shorthand for masterpiece) is a large and labor-intensive graffiti painting often placed at a difficult location (e.g. a bridge, train, etc.)
outside society (Hepp et al., 2010). Thus, mediatization is an attempt to study media as an “always present” environment (Silverstone, 2007, p. 5; Schulz, 2004), continuously interacting with culture and society, therefore, shaping human action and communication.

It appears, though, that conceptualizing mediatization in a way that would allow valuable empirical insights to be made is a challenge, taken into account by various mediatization scholars (cf. Hjarvard, 2008; Krotz, 2009; Schulz, 2004). Krotz (2009) defines mediatization as a meta-process that is similar to globalization, individualization, and commercialization. His basic assumption is that communication is the ‘core activity’ (Krotz, 2009, p. 23) of human beings, and an altered pattern of communication leads to changes not only on the micro level of individual behavior but also on macro or societal level. In this regard, mediatization is an ordering principle that serves to classify certain phenomena in relation to media expansion to most aspects of human life. Nevertheless, such a conceptualization threatens the scholarly debate on mediatization by limiting the opportunities for empirical research and by reducing the concept to a “common label” (Krotz, 2009, p. 32) for every issue in contemporary society in which media are embedded, or as Livingstone (2009) argues, practically everything.

Schulz (2004) offers an alternative conceptualization of mediatization as the growing potentials of media (a) to substitute social activities and institutions, (b) to amalgamate with non-media activities, (c) to extend the limits of human communication, and (d) to enhance the willingness of different actors to accommodate to the way the media operate. It is clear that behind these processes of amalgamation, substitution, accommodation, and extension there is more than a simple increase of (use of) media and communication technologies. Along with the quantitative aspect of more media in our society, Hepp (2009) argues, is the qualitative aspect of media and, what Hepp (2009, p. 140) calls, their “moulding forces”, exerting pressure on the way we communicate, therefore, act (Krotz, 2009). In this perspective, media and communications are not understood as a separate actor, but as Hepp et al. (2010) argue, rather as a part of the very fabric of culture. Therefore, Strömbäck and Esser (2009) explain, “if the media permeate and are intertwined with basically all social, cultural, and political processes (…) the logic of separating dependent from independent variables is challenged” and the various media effects theories are either inadequate or insufficient for fully understanding the media-saturated societies (Lundby, 2009, p. 2). By sidestepping the media effects paradigm, research can address social and cultural change, avoiding the traps of causality. But at the same time, the mediatization concept can hide its own pitfalls, such as the idea of certain media logic, often considered a precondition for mediatization (Strömbäck and Esser, 2009; Schrott, 2009). Hjarvard (2008, p. 105) refers to it as the “institutional and technological modus operandi of the media, including the ways in which the media distribute
material and symbolic resources and make use of the formal and informal rules”. Some scholars, though, tend to question whether the concept of media logic could be used as a conceptual core of mediatization, as it is too linear (Couldry, 2008), but also because “the media logic of TV today is not the same as of a decade ago, and the media logic of a mobile phone is quite different for a 14-year old as compared to a 55-year old banker” (Krotz, 2009, p. 26).

This is also why we regard the idea of uniform and linear media logic to be a too weak theoretical basis for such an encompassing concept as mediatization. We would argue that instead of looking for common media logic over various fields, scholarly attention should be focused on everyday **media-oriented practices** or “what, quite simply, are people doing in relation to media across a whole range of situations and contexts” (Couldry, 2004, p. 119). Given the recent proliferation of media and communications technology, we can expect not only an increasing number of media-oriented practices, such as “posting on a blog, talking on TV, sharing a YouTube video” (Postill, 2010, p. 19), but also an increased relevance of these practices for society and culture.

Couldry’s description of practice theory as a “disarmingly simple” new paradigm (Couldry, 2004, p. 117) is an understatement, considering its background in philosophy (e.g. Wittgenstein), social (e.g. Bourdieu, Giddens) and cultural theory (e.g. Foucault, Lyotard), and science and technology (e.g. Latour, Rouse) (cf. Postill, 2010). Practice theory shifts the focus from texts and structures of production to the “open-ended range of practices focused directly or indirectly on media” (Couldry, 2004, p. 117) and these practices, Driessens, Raeymaeckers, Verstraten & Vandenbussche (2010, p. 313) argue, could be a driving force for continuously producing, reproducing, and even transforming society. In this perspective, Driessens et al. (2010) successfully introduce practice theory into the study of mediatization.

To sum up, there is a twofold reason to address the “not yet well-established” practice theory (Driessens et al., 2010, p. 313). First, the media logic is criticized for being too limited (Lundby, 2009b; Driessens et al., 2010). Second, the growing importance of media-oriented practices outweighs the critical consideration that there is no such thing as a “coherent, unified practice theory” (Postill, 2010, p. 6). It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss mediatization and practice theory in-depth but the considerations discussed above will be taken into account for the discussion of the media-oriented practices of criminal and deviant subcultures, increasingly being shaped and re-shaped through their interaction with media. Before discussing how crimes of style are being mediatized, the next section will shortly consider the more traditional aspects of subcultural theory.
CRIMES OF STYLE

The focus of this paper lays on "crimes of style", an expression we borrow from cultural criminology in order to narrow down the notion of crime to a workable approach. Cultural criminologists explore the collective behavior organized around imagery, style, and symbolic meaning (Ferrell, 1996). Graffiti writers, BASE jumpers, joy riders, BMX bikers, gang members, skaters, and even school shooters could be pointed out as examples. Even though recently there is a trend for creating legal zones for graffiti writing, it is still categorized as an offence under “other property damage” as it disfigures public and private properties (Bandaranaike, 2001; Pietrosanti, 2010). Similar, BMX bikers and skaters are often banned or fined for destructing private or public property. Even though vandalism is a more tolerable offence compared to killing people or other acts of aggression, both cases illustrate deviant behavior of groups that share a certain common subcultural style, such as style of clothing or dancing, gestures, slang, manners, etc. To name just a few examples of the subcultural styling: graffiti culture has evolved parallel to underground hip-hop music and dance; skating or BMX biking involves wearing saggy or baggy pants and loose t-shirts. Therefore, these crimes of style could also be characterized as acts of self-expression, which also involve a shared “aesthetic” (Ferrell, 1996, p. 5) of a subculture. From such a point of view, the existing body of literature on non-violent criminal or deviant subcultures should not only be taken into consideration, but also critically examined, given the fact that classic theories on youth subcultures (Hebdige, 1979; Cohen, 1972; Brake, 1985) date back to several decades ago (Pietrosanti, 2010).

DEVIANT SUBCULTURES AS SYMBOLIC FORMS OF RESISTANCE

Central to the analysis of the term "subculture" has been the contribution of one of the leading scholars of the Centre of Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) Dick Hebdige (Thornton, 1995). In his work “Subculture: The meaning of style” deviant subcultures are defined as “symbolic forms of resistance” and protest against society (Hebdige, 1979, p. 80; Hall et al., 1993; Willis, 1977), a definition in line with the Marxist understanding of CCCS of social relations. This view of the members of subcultures as rebels that use their subcultural styles as weapons in the struggle against dominant culture (Pietrosanti, 2010) has been challenged by a.o. Sarah Tornton’s (1995) research on club cultures. Nevertheless, this (countercultural and rebellious) view has marked to a greater extent the research on graffiti, bikers, skaters, and
other deviant subcultures as alternative, resistant and even romanticized (Donnelly, 2008). For Ferrell (1996, p. 369) the “adrenalin rush” of graffiti writing signifies nothing but resistance to authority, “resistance, experienced as much in the pit of the stomach, as in the head”. Throughout the early and mid-1990s this trend spread to sociological research conducted on youth subcultures in sports, such as surfers, BASE jumpers, hang gliders, skateboarders, BMX riders as being rebellious and resistance-oriented (Atkinson and Young, 2008; Maguire 1999).

Now, in contemporary society, it is not only questionable whether alienation could be regarded as a “universal social phenomenon” (Schweitzer, 1991). There is also a growing sense of ambiguity around the position of underground subcultures between elaboration and resistance to society and dominant culture (Daskalaki & Mould, forthcoming). Moreover, Oake (2004, p. 83) holds, subcultural theorists tend to prefer their subcultures to be “far more radical, both aesthetically and politically”. In the same vein, Spinney (2010) argues, an overemphasis on subculture could lead to an “over-theorization of resistance”, whereby other important aspects, such as the importance of media for contemporary subcultural formations, are overlooked. Traditional approaches within the subcultural theory tend to associate media, especially mass media, with a rather repressive mechanism that aims to decrease the potential of subcultural resistance. Oake (2004) holds that the media can just as easily act as a “productive” mechanism.

In this regard, a very relevant question is to what extent media and communication technologies permeate and intertwine with (deviant) countercultures such as graffiti writers, bikers, and skaters. Having in mind the aforementioned oppositional attitude towards traditional (mass) media, it is interesting to observe how the growing importance of media-oriented practices affects the perception of subcultures as “deviant”, “alternative” and “resistant”?

SUBCULTURAL SIGNS, SYMBOLS AND STYLES

As noticed earlier, often behind the idea of resistance to dominant political power and social norms, subcultural theorists put an emphasis on style, or everything that is displayed and performed to the others (Atkinson & Young, 2008; Hebdige, 1979; Pietrosanti, 2010). Style, relating to particular preferences and practices, style of speaking, clothing, dancing, music preferences, etc. creates a common, or shared “aesthetic” (Ferrell, 1996) through which the identity and signs of belonging are expressed (Hetherington, 1998). Both Hebdige (1979) and
Hall (1977) stress the importance of signs and their semiotic value for culture. Hall (1977) maintains that signs “cover the face of social life and render it classifiable, intelligible and meaningful”. But the importance of the “usually flamboyant” style (Atkinson & Young, 2008, p. 55), Hebdige (1979) argues, extends beyond signifying subcultural belonging. It also displays that the dominant social and political codes are challenged, or to put it in Pietrosanti’s (2010, p. 11) words, that the “dominant culture can be used and abused”. To state it differently, a subcultural style is not only an alternative system of aesthetics that supports the (supposedly) underground structures and communities, but also a tool for the ultimate manifestation of opposition and rebellion to mainstream culture and society.

Again, Hebdige (1979) builds his subcultural theory upon a Marxist foundation, criticized among others, for focusing too much on the notion of class, the struggle against the dominant class, and hegemonic culture (Macdonald, 2001). As argued above, in contemporary late modern complex societies, where media distribute material and symbolic resources with an ever-increasing intensity (Hjarvard, 2008; Lundby, 2009a), stylistic preferences that signify in-group cohesiveness and disassociation from dominant culture should be revisited (Atkinson & Young, 2008). One of the aspects, Atkinson & Young (2008) explain, is that the “flamboyant” subcultural styles become fashionable in the larger culture through their widespread mediated distribution and this in turn “minimizes their resistant or subculturally authentic nature through seemingly inevitable mass incorporation”.

Moreover, subculturally created styles may be shared or imitated by a much larger audience or market peripheral to the core subculture (Fox, 1987; Klein, 1985) and may even be imitated and commercialized for mass consumption (Schouten & MCalexander, 1995). Hebdige (1979, p. 100) argues that youth culture is parasitic on subcultural stylization. Schouten & MCalexander (1995, p. 58) make a similar point by claiming that “sanitizing and softening” the symbols of the outlaw Harley-Davidson bikers attach a more socially acceptable and appropriate for merchandising meaning to their subcultural style. This process of commercialization is in contradiction to the deviant subcultures’ ideology of resistance to hegemony. As Ferrell (1995) maintains, deviant subcultures emerge out of the social inequalities and attempts to commodify them were seen as undermining their subcultural identity and cohesiveness, and therefore, heavily fought back.

We would examine the role of subcultural style in a society, where media increasingly distribute signs and become the dominant providers of cultural products. We would explore how the specific media-oriented practices influence the in-group cohesiveness of subcultures and whether they set off a process of commodification of outlaw subcultural signs, symbols, and styles.
METHOD AND DATA

The present study seeks to revisit the previously discussed subcultural theory, looking at criminal and deviant subcultures through the prism of mediatization. We chose to examine the subcultures of graffiti writers and skaters and the way they embed media in their practices. Our ethnographic approach consists of 10 in-depth interviews and a modest time of participant observation. In order to understand and discover more of these subcultures, we also conducted an interview with a member of an organization that supports young graffiti writers and organizes workshops on legal graffiti in Ghent, Belgium.

The sample consists of 10 male respondents- 4 graffiti writers and 6 skaters (3 of them sponsored) - between the age of 15 and 33 years old. The interviews took place between 1st March and 1st April 2011 in Ghent, Belgium. The average duration of an interview was 24 minutes. The semi-structured interviews were built on a topic list around general information about their subcultural activity, media-oriented practices, their feelings and vision about the subculture, and several questions about illegal activities and confrontations with law-enforcement organizations. One of the interviews involved two skaters, instead of one. Nevertheless, they were both able to answer individually to the questions. The interviews were conducted in English and not in the respondents’ mother tongue, which proved to be a problem with one of the respondents.

There is a twofold reason why the methodology combines two different subcultures. First, the aim of this research is certainly not to compare or look for differences, but to examine where the commonalities lie between the two subcultures with regard to their media-oriented practices. This is also where the strength of the concept of mediatization lies. We could trace similar trends across relatively related fields. Second, as our research showed, besides the illicit aspects of their practices, both graffiti and skateboarding subcultures appear to share

2 A skateboarding sponsorship is the act of a skateboard shop, distributor, or company sponsoring a talented skateboarder for the sponsored skateboarder to ride a skateboard for their business organization and thereby promoting it as well. A common belief is that sponsoring is requested by "sponsor-me" video tapes.

3 Although one of the interviews has a limited duration of only 7 minutes, we chose not to exclude it from the analysis, because it offered valuable insights on illegal skating.

4 A copy of the topic list is included in the appendix
much more in common (e.g. a lot of graffiti is done in and around skate parks and popular skate spots\(^5\)).

The collected data was thematically coded into 6 main categories\(^6\), deducted from literature review. Some concepts emerged after interpretation of the transcripts and were added as free nodes. The data was also triangulated with some relevant newspaper articles on graffiti and skateboarding in the major Belgian newspapers. The data was analyzed with the software tool NVivo.

**RESULTS**

The results of our research revealed that the understanding of criminal and deviant subcultures is inseparable from the diffusion via media that make their activities public to wider audiences. Through mediating the underground has become visible to society. This pervasiveness of media practices in illicit worlds, Ferrell et al. (2001) argues, suggests an emerging reconceptualization of deviant and criminal subcultures. Reaching a wider audience, on its turn, has moved the emphasis from deviance and resistance to the core of the activity- in the case of skating and graffiti writing- to artistic skills, aesthetic production and performance. Instead of performing symbolic forms of resistance, or addressing society with a political message, deviant and criminal subcultures have, in contradiction to themselves, embraced the new media potentials to mediate their skills, share knowledge, promote themselves, and convince the world that they are not criminals, but artists, or to put it in the words of our respondent GMBE1- that “they are the next best thing”.

\(^5\) Further e.g. VANS (a leading producer of skate clothing and shoes) is using graffiti artists in their promotions and advertising; one of the graffiti artists had a kick-flip (popular skateboarding trick) tattooed on his arm; another graffiti artist was also a skater; legal zones for graffiti and skate parks are mostly next to each other.

\(^6\) a) Art, performance, spectacle; b) in-group cohesiveness c) mass incorporation d) (life)style e) commercialization f) identity formation
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Indeed, they do show the world that they are the next best thing by posting drawings and photos of their work on the internet, shooting videos and sequences, sharing them online, or via social network sites (SNS), or TV shows and own (niche) magazines. In a way mediatizing these subcultures has taken them from the underground to the surface of mainstream culture, where the “subcultural misfits” (Nelson, 2010, p. 1162) have turned into artists and performers.

Graffiti artists and skaters embed media in order to eternalize their pieces, tags, throw-ups, or in the case of skaters: tricks. A respondent highlights how essential it is for graffiti writers for e.g. to take pictures of their work:

“Graffiti is a one-day art. You do something, you take a picture of it. If you do it illegally, it could be gone the next day because the people will clean it up. And if you do it in a legal place they will go over it.” (GMBE2)

Often, it goes further than taking a picture. Fame, respect and recognition, “the point and purpose of graffiti” (Macdonald, 2001, p. 74) should be earned not only through throwups, pieces and tags, but also online, showing to the whole world “how good they are” (GMBE1), resulting in a constant mediation of their work.

Thus parallel to the “elongation of meaning” (Ferrell et al., 2001) and quest for fame, they have also made their ephemeral illicit acts visible from their point of view. In other words, deviant subcultures manage to change the perspective: they expand the perceptions beyond “crime” and reframe our thinking of deviance in a way that more people begin to appreciate graffiti and skating as something valuable, as something different than property offence. This goes further than the suggested by McRobbie & Thornton (1995) process of self-defense via own niche and micro media. The intense integration of media practices turns subcultures into an active producer rather than a vulnerable group ambiguously defending itself. In this perspective, our data show that not only do graffiti artists and skaters consider themselves non-deviant, but they also hold that more people have begun to appreciate them for being

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7 Skateboard photographs include portraits, actions shots and sequence shots. The sequence shot consists of multiple pictures taken to show a single trick. Mostly they are airbrushed and merged together in one single picture. Examples: http://skateboardpark.com/images/skateboardsequences/

8 Graffiti writers’ names or pseudonyms

9 Graffiti slang for a quick and easy to paint one-color outline
creative and talented as a consequence of the increased circulation of self-produced images. Through their publicly mediated practices illicit “backstage” activities become documents of artistic skills and aesthetic production (Ferrell, 1996). The members of the Graffiti Youth Organization in Gent explain that with the growing media visibility people have opened their mind for graffiti as art, inviting writers to create “a masterpiece” in the bedroom of a 13-year old, or creating a mural, where wedding pictures should be taken. Similarly, skaters count on HD cameras and fish-eye lenses in order to show to the people “how difficult it is, and how many details there are, and how technical you need to be” (SMBE10). Embedding professional video equipment and special filming techniques, such as close-up shots and special lower shooting angels, places the tricks, skills and performance in the limelight. The fact that “when you grind some of the ledges it kind of destroys them” (SMBE6) is of minor importance in that case. One of the most common (preferred) ways to photograph a trick with a still camera is to make a sequence of shots. Such a sequence consists of multiple pictures taken to capture and showcase a single trick, again emphasizing to the subject’s skills and trick.

Several criteria were pointed out by the respondents of when a trick should be filmed: it should be difficult, original and landed properly. One of the respondents (SMBE10) complained that sometimes it could take more than two hours to land a difficult trick in front of the camera, but they would still keep trying and filming because it is important to have it on camera. Moreover, filming and skating have become so interrelated to a point when, as Ferrell et al. (2001, p. 178) claims, an illicit practice becomes “indistinguishable from the mediated representation of it”. This in turn has fueled a further ever-increasing mediatization of skating. As a result, when asked, most respondents could even point out a structure in skating films, or as SMUS9 explains with annoyance: “It begins and you see skating. You would probably see some falling, maybe a clever joke. It depends. At the end will be the great trick that no-one thought you could do”. Again, the emphasis on the trick, its level of difficulty, and the skater’s skills are central in media presentations and representations of skating. Moreover, not only is the focus on the technical performance, but mediatization manifests itself through an evolution in the level of skating. Respondents explain that the level of skating “keeps growing” (SMBE7) and nowadays, because of the ever increasing mediation and remediation, it has reached the “absurd” (SMUS9), the unthinkable level: “Because people see it and they naturally mimic it. What you see in the videos, and what you

10 Fish-eye lenses give the effect of the area being filmed in a circular way and allow more detailed close-up views from a short distance

11 Executed
see in the magazines, is what kids will try next. But then they push it up, so it constantly raises the bar.” (SMUS9)

Similarly, what graffiti writers see online, will be the next thing they would do- learning new drawing techniques and adapting their own style, because “You’re into street art and you know that this guy is really good. So you’re going to adapt a lot of these things in your own work” (GMBE1).

The ability to capture something with your mobile phone and instantly upload it on the internet, or to produce own semi-professional video on a bearable price are just a couple of examples how the variety of potentials inherent to media and communications technologies nowadays allows subcultures to manage their image through media products or messages. This is to a greater degree what Driessens et al. (2010, p. 321) refer to as “retaining control over media”, or deviant subcultures have now a greater ability to decide to what extent they would be visible, and in what way they are going to appear in the public space. In this regard, media-oriented practices are also image-producing practices for illicit subcultures (Dayan & Katz, 1992). Contrary to traditional label theory, now deviant and criminal subcultures could hardly be regarded as a passive victim of mass media but rather as media-savvy individuals that embed media for the purpose of showing their artwork. And despite the underground and subversive nature of graffiti a lot of artists have replaced the anonymity of the tags with a public profile on MySpace, Facebook and Flickr. The graffiti writer GMBE3 explains: “I have over 1500 people on Facebook that can see my work. I think it’s really a good medium for artists or everybody that’s doing something to show to the world”. This dynamic reveals, according to Ferrell et al. (2001), that deviant subcultures are less passive objects of mass media and more active producers of their own image.

The artistic and performative nature of the deviant subcultures are reinforced by the fact that the subcultural practices are not opposed to everyday life and mainstream culture as previously claimed by subcultural theorists but rather integrated in it. Most respondents have turned graffiti writing into a profession, or have combined it with studying graphic design at school. The interviewees referred to graffiti as an art process where creativity, colors, drawing techniques, and making their work finer were of greater importance than to undermine authority or “reclaim public spaces” (Ferrell, 1996, p.35). The illegal world of graffiti is also a part of the more encompassing route to artistic career and exhibitions. In this respect, one of the respondents explains that keeping a photo log of your legal or illegal works is essential, because it serves as a portfolio (GMBE2). Similarly, skaters making “sponsor-me” kind of tapes with their best tricks is the way to get sponsored. We will come back on this later.
It would be irresponsible to claim that this reconceptualization of criminal and deviant subcultures is solely an isolated manifestation of mediatization. Certainly, the increased understanding and acceptance of deviant and criminal subcultures could not be thought of beyond media, but also other aspects of modern society need to be taken into consideration. As we stated in the beginning, mediatization should be viewed on a par with urabanization, individualization, commercialization and other -tion processes that all contribute to “disembedding” social relations from existing contexts, as those of crime and deviance for e.g., and “re-embedding” them in new social contexts (e.g. those of art and performance) (Hjarvard, 2008).

STYLE: IN-GROUP COHESIVENESS AND MASS INCORPORATION

In this section we will consider the manifestations of mediatization with regard to the “flamboyant” style of criminal and deviant subcultures (Hebdige, 1979). As previously discussed, CCCS inspired theorists consider subcultural style to enhance both in-group cohesiveness and disassociation from dominant culture. With the omnipresence of media that have also become increasingly the resources for development of lifestyles across society, it is important to revisit this view. Several scholars, a.o. Donnelly (2008) and Reinhart (2008) support the main argument being made: through mediating and remediating style and subcultural symbols they are no longer authentic and subculturally significant but become more and more a part of the mainstream culture. Or, we argue, the “incorporation myth” (Marchart, 2003, p. 85) is probably not a myth. If most of the youth is wearing baggy pants they can hardly be regarded as a sign of being alternative and oppositional to mainstream culture. The greater visibility and recognisability of these subcultural styles and symbols have in a way recoded the meaning they had for deviant subcultures. In this respect, if the flamboyant style is no longer a sign of resistance, but mass incorporated in mainstream culture, then the question arises whether the second function of subcultural style to enhance in-group cohesiveness could still be relevant?

In this regard, several of the older respondents in our research could easily draw a line between “now” and “back in the days”. “Now” is the time that little attention is being paid to what you wear, what kind of music you prefer, or whether you speak the same way as the other members of the group. “Back in the days” refers to exactly the opposite- times when style was an important part of the subculture. One of the respondents turns with nostalgia to the time when he started skateboarding:
“First, I bought some roller blades and I went to a skate park. I saw a lot of guys skateboarding, and wearing baggy pants and a fool cap. It looked very cool. Also [because of] the game of Tony Hawk’s skateboarding, I thought: I must have a skateboard. I bought one and I never stopped.” (SMBE7)

These were also the times when skating and graffiti began their expansion via mass media channels—previously seemingly not interested in these subcultures, video games (e.g. Tony Hawks skateboarding), and various (niche) magazines (e.g. Skateboard Mag, Transworld Skateboarding), but this was also the time that some of the cult films that became a major impulse for the youth to engage in deviant subcultural practices emerged. GMBE2 indicates that with the rise of MTV programs, dedicated to rap, hip-hop and graffiti and cult films as “Wild Style”12 graffiti became more visible and attractive. The same trend could be noticed for skateboarding and its incorporation in competitions, commercials and TV-shows. SMBE8 explains that seeing skating in the commercials actually makes people “not hating it”, and they to a certain degree, begin to appreciate it. Donnelly (2008) argues that ESPN and the X-Games have shifted the alternative subculture to the mainstream by mediating it. The flamboyant style is becoming fashionable even in the mainstream, therefore, blurring the boundaries of what is outlaw and oppositional, and what is mainstream and fashionable. In the same vein, Atkinson & Young (2008) argue, that the clothing, language, or music subcultures become fashionable in the larger culture through the widespread distribution of style, minimizing the resistant or subculturally oriented nature, and in this way leading to the “seemingly inevitable mass incorporation” of underground, deviant subcultures. In this respect, it is not surprising that our respondents neglect the importance of subcultural style, or label clothes.

“In the ‘70s and ‘80s people were always wearing baggy jeans and baggy shirts, and skateboards were very wide with tiny wheels. And nowadays people [skaters] are more fashionable and are wearing regular or tight pants and medium shirts and punk looks. In the ‘70s and ‘80s you didn’t have that- it was all messed up hair and stuff like that” (SMBE8)

Now, the only common subcultural clothing style of deviant and criminal groups appears to be the “fast-fashion clothing style of H&M”13, as three of our respondents explain: “You can also go skating with clothes of H&M” (SMBE7), “everybody wants to go to shop to H&M”

12 Wild Style (1983) is considered one of the first hip-hop motion pictures. The film depicts several prominent figures from the early hip hop culture, engaging in activities such as MCing, turntablism, graffiti and breaking (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wild_Style)

13 H&M is a Swedish retail-clothing company, known for its fast-fashion clothing offerings for women, men, teenagers and children (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/H%26M)
(GMBE2), or “I always wear Nike’s [shoes], because they feel right to skate with, for shoes. But my pants are H&M. And they feel right.” (SMBE8)

Because of the media appropriation of these subcultural styles (Rinehart, 2008) the sense of outlaw and being outsiders to the mainstream puts into question Hebdige’s (1979) claim that subcultural styles enhance the in-group cohesiveness. When the style of deviant subcultures has been adopted by all layers of society and cultures, it is difficult to claim that these deviant groups could signify belonging through the way they dress, speak, or behave. Through our short observations of graffiti writers and skaters we failed to notice any difference in style that could point out which group the respondents belonged to. It is interesting to mention, though, that skaters expressed their irritation of the fact that even people that have never been on a skateboard wear skate shoes. To skateboarders such essential accessories as slip resistant shoes are more than stylish or going well with jeans and other clothes. In a way, these subcultures have felt robbed from their most important signs of belonging and they had to reach out for new ways to sustain their in-group cohesiveness.

One of the ways to create and affirm their sense of community appears to be through the production and distribution of media texts and products. A commonly recurring theme in the interviews with skateboarders was the skate videos they produce with friends. As previously discussed, there is a common structure in these videos consisting of both montages of individuals, the skilled ones, making the best tricks, and groups of skateboarders. By highlighting both the individual style of each skateboarder and blending them together in group montages, Yochim (2007) argues, the videos suggest that skateboarding is a culture that values not only individuality but also promises “the benefits of cooperation and inclusion in a larger group”. Several of our respondents attest that friends are an essential part of skate movies:

“For making a regular movie you start with an intro, some intro shots. And then you have, the first part- that has to be the part that amazes people- you have the very good skater. And then you have the friends’ part, and then the last part has to be the best.” (SMBE8)

Or if the structure is being abandoned then there are “no parts, just skating together” (SMBE7). By shooting the movies together, skaters catch up for the lost sense of belonging. Sometimes this sense of belonging is also transferred to a crew, or a specific location. One of the respondents explained that they were filming friends and skating “in the streets in Tampa” (SMUS9), while another one pointed out the main reason to shoot a movie is to represent the

14 The fact that the researcher wore skateboard shoes at the moment of the interview was probably an additional motive for this remark.
scene of Ghent (SMBE5). Alike skaters, a graffiti writer also attested making movie with his crew (GMBE3).

In the same line, Furness (2005) has pointed out the importance of own labels, (fan)zines, and distribution networks of deviant subcultures. By creating alternative media texts, or other media products, they create a field for the like-minded to enhance the sense of community that has been partially lost with the mass incorporation of their subcultural signs of belonging. According to Scott Spitz, author of the bike zine Leapfrog “Bike zines can certainly reflect what certain communities are doing, but they’ve also been known to create communities” (Furness, 2005, p. 122). Our respondents have not shown any specific affection towards magazines or fanzines.

“Magazines are cool and TV channels are also cool but I don’t use a lot of magazines anymore because I can see everything on the internet. It’s still charming to have a magazine to look in. It’s fun. But if I hear stories of the older graffiti writers- they knew that in Amsterdam there was somebody that gave out [published] a magazine- long time ago, the first graffiti magazine or something, and they had a trip from here to Amsterdam to just get the magazine. That won’t happen in my life, you know. If the internet crashes maybe but not now.” (GMBE3)

On the one hand, the internet seems to have partially taken over “charming” magazines and their function to create a sense of community. On the other hand, the web pages of these magazines- extensions of the more traditional printed versions- are still a source of information and inspiration for these subcultures. But the potential of internet goes beyond that because it facilitates a simple, cheap and worldwide distribution (Yochim, 2007), it has a short publication lag-time (Nelson, 2010), interactivity, intertextuality etc. Deviant subcultures implement not only popular video sharing sites, such as YouTube, Vimeo etc., but also specialized discussion platforms (e.g. deviantart.com), or for example, a very useful tool for skaters- Trickipedia 15- a sort of “how-to” section for skateboarding tricks. In this respect, social network sites should also not be disregarded, as they have emerged precisely as an attempt to build communities. All respondents were active on various SNS or as one of them noted: “I think, if you don’t have a Facebook you don’t exist” (GMBE3). We even go further and suggest that without the internet and its potentials, deviant subcultures would lack not only a valuable source of information and communication, but also a great deal of their sense of community.

15 Trickipedia is the general education page for skateboarding tricks started by the Berrics (http://theberrics.com/trickipedia.php)
COMMERCIALIZATION

So far this article has investigated (described) how the mediatization of deviant subcultures has been a powerful impetus for their mass incorporation in society and culture, therefore, providing these subcultures with a new set of aesthetic ideals (Hughes, 2009). Generally, the commercialization of these subcultures has had a negative connotation, mostly for the members of it. Yet, most of them acknowledge that the spin on commercialization have also had its benefits—e.g. more money means more skate parks (SMBE10), more free clothing and shoes (SMBE8). Major brands such as ESPN, Nike, VANS, Quicksilver, Redbull, Coca Cola, etc. have turned into endorsers of alternative subcultures and synonyms of sponsorships\(^\text{16}\). In this respect, the mass incorporation of deviant subcultures has only been intensified through the ongoing mediatization and commercialization. Combined, both processes have changed the face of deviant subcultures. Through advertisements and product placement, or what Hughes (2009) argues are mass media outlets of alternative underground cultures, these group begin to appeal to young consumers worldwide, accelerating further the process of their inclusion in the mainstream. The same explanation for the reconceptualization of deviant subcultures offers our respondent SMBE8: “Now, these days it’s getting more appreciated. You see it in commercials and […] people […] are not hating the skating; they actually appreciate what people are doing with their lives, as long as they are happy.”

It thus seems that being open to the corporate interest is no longer a taboo. The seemingly “unwanted nuisance of graffiti” (Hughes, 2009) has evolved into a powerful advertising tool for attracting the attention of the youth. Being recruited to create advertising campaigns for corporations is not uncommon:

“I have a project for VANS OFF THE WALL- the skate brand of the footwear- and I have to do the whole warehouse of Benelux. I have to do an exposition there so I hope I can go further with the graffiti.” (GMBE3)

Not only do media contribute to bringing these deviant subcultures on the surface, but their members also actively embed them to promote themselves. Even though the origins of graffiti and skating are (lay) in the lower-class suburbs, today, the leftovers of resistance to social

\(^{16}\) Not only for providing skilled skaters with free clothes and shoes, but also sponsorship of major events, contests, graffiti jams and different festivals.
inequalities or corporate bureaucracy are scarce. In this regard, unlike the image of rebellious subcultures from “deprived environments” (Dickens, 2008, p. 476) contemporary skaters and graffiti writers are more conscious in their efforts to organize and promote themselves in the more formal art and commercial spheres. Indeed, increasingly members of subcultures embed various media (digital, mass, niche, etc.) in order to take more control on the profitability of their work and performance. Illegal tagging, pieces and throw-ups are seen as a part of a career- *De la rue à la scène* (GMBE2) - you start by exercising on the streets but the ultimate goal is to build a (professional) career:

“A few years ago I painted two times per week. […] That was a little bit different because I have bills to pay now. I’m working more for people than for myself. Because of the period that I had, I put a lot of money in just painting for fun. I could exercise and get better in what I’m doing.” (GMBE3)

One of the graffiti artists explains that embedding media is “a part of the strategies that you have to use to get jobs” (GMBE1) (e.g. painting murals, advertising, graphic design, etc.). Creating a “portfolio” (GMBE2) with your work (e.g. by sharing photos on Facebook, Flickr, or specialized sites such as deviantart.com) is the way to promote yourself and reach major corporations. Similarly, skaters also point out the significance of “sponsor-me” tapes, consisting of their best tricks:

“It is also important, because if you skate a lot, shoes and stuff are expensive. If you reach a certain level with skateboarding, you can have a sponsor. But no shop is going to sponsor you if they can’t see what you can do with a skateboard. So then you have these movies.” (SMBE7)

Producing such “sponsor-me” tapes is thus not uncommon. Although it is not the only way to get discovered, as one of our sponsored respondents argues, it certainly is the most traditional and preferred method. This evolution has extended the importance of skateboarding not only to the skills, trick or technique itself, but also to the visual representation of it, or stated differently, skating and filming are now caught in an endless spiral of mediation, or as we argue- mediatization. Creating videos, pictures, or other media products, in the hope of gaining success, recognition, visibility, sponsorship, etc. is an additional stimulus for the further mediatization of these subcultures Skateboarders have come to consider with great care the formal norms of professional videos, choose carefully appropriate music, and use high definition digital cameras and editing software:

“There’s a little evolution in skateboarding films actually. Back in the days, the quality was not good. But that was also not the intention. You want a series of cool tricks with cool music
on. Now, they also want [to improve] the image- [putting] a lot of attention to montage-cutting and editing, and perfectly [synchronizing] the music with the tricks. It became more professional actually today.” (SMBE7)

What respondents massively criticize is turning the sponsorship in an ultimate goal, the constant “snagging” (SMBE8) to get sponsored, or even worse- skating for the money (SMBE10). SMUS9 has made three tapes, which, unfortunately, did not result in a corporate sponsorship. The attention of corporations and the spin around the more commercial aspects of these subcultures drive the motivation of young skaters not only to skate, but to show it, resulting in an ever increasing mediatization of their practices.

Nevertheless, the attitude towards commercialization is getting more positive. Three of the skaters we interviewed were sponsored by either a big corporation, or the local skate shop. For these members of the subculture the videos and pictures take on a different function. They comprise no longer a means to promote yourself, but to promote the company you skate for. In order to keep the sponsors satisfied and interested, our respondents attest, you need to film your tricks: “When I land tricks and I have it on videos, or when I have photos in magazines, it’s good for the sponsors. Then they are happy.” (SMBE10). Even by making amateur skate movies, it is still good, it still “brings money” (SMBE7) to the sponsors. It thus seems that the previously considered resistant and oppositional deviant subcultures, the ones believed to engage in a criminal self-expression (Manco, 2002) are now actively collaborating with the big industry and corporate world. This is a process when an ever increasing commercialization goes hand in hand with an encompassing mediatization, or as discussed in the beginning, societal and cultural change are often triggered by various stimuli, and the media environment is certainly one of them.

CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS

The central premise of this article is that the media-saturated societies have challenged the capacity of seemingly secretive criminal and deviant subcultures to remain such. By embedding media in their underground practices, skaters and graffiti writers have come to the surface of society and mainstream culture. The pervasiveness of media practices in these illicit worlds has broadened the self-expression possibilities beyond the acts of resistance and rebellion. Along with this, deviant subcultures were handed out the tool to legitimate their activities by changing the perspective of the general public from the image of rebellious and
resistance subcultures to the emphasis on artistic and performance skills. Moreover, mediatization has set off a process of mass incorporation of skaters and graffiti writers through mediation and remediation of their style and symbolic capital. The main signifiers of in-group cohesiveness and disassociation from society have not only been neutralized and naturalized, but also niched to young consumers as oppositional and therefore, fashionable. Nevertheless, skaters and graffiti writers produce their nearly professional videos and photos and share them on the internet in the hope for gaining not only recognition but also to get access to more jobs and commercial projects.

It thus seems that crimes of style have appeared on the surface of mainstream culture to the utmost extent losing the criminal element. Yet, it is still possible that the underground and deviant subcultural members prefer to remain detached from the general public and still they could be influenced by the general mediatization of society. Banksy, an infamous street and graffiti artist carefully guarding his anonymity for years\(^\text{17}\), has recently directed and appeared in an Oscar-nominated movie about underground street art. Despite the fact that Banksy was blacked out in order to keep himself unrecognizable, this documentary is an indication that the world of street art and graffiti, or more generally stated the underground has opened itself to media and exposure. Following graffiti artists at night with a camera suggests that even the underground has not been able to escape the “contamination of society” with media (Schrott, 2009, p. 43).

In this article we have addressed the mediatization of deviant subcultures but we should also reflect on a couple of methodological limitations. First, the selection of participants is not to be considered representative for all underground subcultures. Second, besides the limited number of interviews conducted, there is also an aspect of cultural differences that should be taken into consideration. Our American respondent has pointed out the fact that skateboarding and graffiti are approached much more restrictively by authorities in America\(^\text{18}\). In that context it is possible that more resistance and rebellion is performed than our research shows. Therefore, our discussion could be strictly limited to the context of a West European underground setting. Third, no female respondents have participated in the interviews, but this was also not the intention of this inquiry. It would require a more encompassing and large-

\(^{17}\) Banksy is a British street artist that has managed to keep his anonymity. There have been many claims to know his true identity but none have ever been definitive to date. “Exit Through the Gift Shop” (2010), a movie about street art that he directed, has been recently nominated in the category “Best Documentary”. Despite the nomination Banksy refused to attend the Oscar Ceremony in 2011.

\(^{18}\) Although most of the respondents admitted having trouble with law enforcement organizations, only two of them have been arrested.
scale research to adequately address gender issues in the masculine world of deviance. Moreover, the role of the female researcher in a male dominated world was challenging enough. Being able to earn the respondents’ trust was of great importance. This being said, it is difficult to generalize these research results across cultures or subcultures, but we believe that the increasing mediatization and research upon it have been illustrated properly.

This study aimed to rethink and extend subcultural theory by looking at three major aspects: a) the leftovers of the cultures of deviance and resistance b) the importance of style and symbols and c) the commercialization of these subcultures. Postulated on the basis of literature review, though, there were more aspects that had to be revisited. For example, when discussing criminal and deviant subcultures, questions about identity and identity formation unavoidably arise. The process of identity formation could not be understood beyond the styles of dress, speech and behavior inherent to the established subculture. Further research could elaborate on the emergence of new ways for self-presentation and for management of the “personal front” (Goffman, 1959) in a media-saturated society.
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