

UNIVERSITY OF READING

**The Rhetoric of the Prospectus Image. Deconstructing schools'
visual promotional material in an age of neoliberal inequality.**

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Institute of Education

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Declaration: I confirm that this is my own work and the use of all material from other sources has been properly and fully acknowledged.

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Abstract

In the quasi-market of education in England in 2022, schools are forced to promote themselves in order to compete for pupil intake. This self-promotion enters the field of advertising and the semiotic techniques for decoding the messages and meanings within the images they use can be applied. Parents and pupils are also situated within hegemonic neoliberal discourse with its mythologies of competition and meritocracy. They too are pushed into competition to make ‘wise choices’ around educational investment and choice of school.

Applying the concepts of cultural capital and *habitus* from Bourdieu, my research seeks to examine how the process of school choice can function in cycles of the social reproduction of advantage and disadvantage.

I argue that parents’ choice of schools is influenced by the interpellation of the signifiers of social status present in the images used by schools to market themselves. Images contain calls of “Hey You!” that different audiences, different parents, may respond to. This then acts as a form of Lacanian ‘quilting point’ that anchors the floating signifier(s) in the image into the ideological discourse of parents as ‘entrepreneurs of the self’ making the right choices for their children.

Drawing from an visual analysis of 1300+ images found in a sample of 50 Secondary School prospectuses in the South East of England this thesis employs the semiotic methods of Barthes’ “Rhetoric of the Image” to uncover the signs and mythologies of distinction, social status and educational discourse that can be found saturated in the sample images.

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Chapter 1 | Introduction

Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek likes to recount a joke from Ernst Lubitsch's film "Ninocka" where a waiter unable to provide a customer with a coffee without cream instead offers coffee without milk. Žižek's point is that "it's not the same thing: coffee without cream or coffee without milk. What you don't get is part of the identity of what you get." (Žižek, 2011). It is my contention that England today has an education system where this allegory can be applied to a socially segregated hierarchy of schools and the inequalities reproduced by this.

In 2014 the United Kingdom was the second most unequal country in the European Union according to the OECD (Förster, et al., 2017). Inequality continues to rise at the time of writing (*Household income inequality, UK - Office for National Statistics, 2020*) Over a third of children in the United Kingdom live in poverty (Stroud, 2019). Persistent and rising inequality in the United Kingdom is a problem that obstructs people's life chances from before birth. At every stage of development from antenatal care to Higher Education inequality denies people a level playing field. These persistent, successive inequalities are compounded at each stage of education.

Inequality is, however, arguably the result of specific social, political and economic structures. These structures are produced, and reproduced, by society and thus society also has the power to change them and solve the problem of inequality. Whilst this research will

examine the ways in which schools may be seen to reproduce social injustice, schools can also be part of the solution. Education is a fundamental strand of the social, and schools can have a vital role to play in the “commoning” (Federici, 2018) of education that is needed to help build a better world. As Graeber rightly notes, the human construction of the world we live in means that we also have the power to construct a different, better world (Graeber, 2016).

The mechanisms for the reproduction of advantage and disadvantage at work in schools described in this study work to constrain opportunities for those without the advantage of privilege inherited at birth. These processes are enabled by policy choices. Policy makers and implementers as well as parents, teachers¹ and pupils have the ability to design things differently to challenge, rather than perpetuate, the inequalities of late capitalism.

1.1 | A Matter of Perspective: Introducing the Researcher

This research, taking an interpretivist approach, centres upon the perspective from which the data is interpreted. This perspective, like any other, is orientated from the position of the researcher towards the object of study - in this case social class, inequality and education. As a white, cisgender male heterosexual with British citizenship I am in a position of relative privilege. My discussions and interpretations of class, status and privilege will be from this vantage point and from this position within the social relationships described with the attendant material interests that this incurs. My familial and contemporary class status of ‘precarious middle class’ - with the fears and hopes generated by the mythologies of social mobility both upwards and downwards, situated within the archetype of the so-called squeezed middle created by the retreat of the post-war social contract - both frames and runs the argument presented here about the role of education in producing status and class position.

¹ References in the text to “parents” should be taken to include all those with some parental responsibility whether they are biologically or legally defined parents or not. Similarly references to “teachers” should be taken to include all those working within schools educating children regardless of formal job title.

In terms of this field of Education my privilege is augmented by the accumulation of educational capital in the form of widely recognised credentials and qualifications - I have undergraduate, postgraduate and professional qualifications acquired from my ability to access education and the capitals it offers. In turn, this shapes the material interests that I have in the defence of access to education and the value created by the capitals acquired.

However, this advantage is tempered by aspects of social class relevant to the study of Education in England today. With a provincial, lower middle-class background, a comprehensive schooling and being a first-generation University student my privileges are precarious and limited. This precarity has manifested in life experiences of educational failure (as well as success) and the material consequences of such failure (unemployment, insecure housing etc.) coupled with psychological experience of feeling like a ‘fish out of water’ during periods of upward mobility - often described as imposter syndrome. This experience of social mobility meaning leaving friends and community behind is poignantly described by Reay (2017) and my perspectives are undoubtedly shaped by this story. At the same time, when looking at independent Schools, Policy makers and the reproducers of advantage, my position is very much researching the powerful, and the more powerful than me. This relationship is echoed in my professional position as a teacher (currently) in an Independent boarding school where I witness the reproductive powers of schooling from another angle.

As a teacher, married to a teacher and situated professionally within the field of Education I am clearly in an ‘insider’ position in relation to schools and the Education System more broadly, this offers both advantages and disadvantages but should be explicitly acknowledged here. Indeed, one school had to be replaced within the sample because I used to work there

and would, therefore, be at risk at using this insider knowledge to read the images differently than the others in the sample. At the same time, this also means that I have ‘skin in the game’ and the antagonisms described in this study are also my everyday lived experience.

The design and methods of this research are not just influenced by my experiences of position and status but also by the interests and skills that I have developed over the years. An academic and professional background in Art and Design has enabled me to apply and transfer visual methodologies and analyses more commonly found in the study of advertising or fine art. A history of thinking and working visually lent itself to both the data collected and the methods of analysis employed here.

Finally, the values, ethos and - yes - political beliefs of the researcher will frame and direct the perspective taken in research like this. These views are, themselves, both a product and a framer of position and experience - shaped by (and in turn shaping) time and place. The methodological advantages and disadvantages of this are discussed elsewhere, but in the interests of transparency it is worth explicitly acknowledging here that this research is predicated on the belief that greater equality is ‘a good thing’ and that current systems can, and should, be changed to achieve this. Such a stance is not universally shared, but is taken as the ethico-political starting point for the positions that frame this research.

1.2 | Introducing My Research

My research seeks to understand how these inequalities are perpetuated and reproduced through the messages sent out by school marketing materials such as prospectuses. These materials will be examined through a critical lens applying a semiotic method and examining

how concepts such as *habitus*, interpellation and the *point de capiton* may be present in the processes of reproduction presented in this study.

Researchers who have looked specifically at this subject are limited but some research has been conducted particularly in Australia including the work of Symes (Symes, 1998) and McCandless (McCandless, 2015). These studies tend to argue that the schools' marketing is focussed on projecting a middle-class image to their consumers. Also in the 1990s some work was done by Knight (Knight, 1992) (Hesketh & Knight, 1998) looking at the prospectuses of English schools; albeit using a different lens for analysis. Knight argued that this hegemonic image being promoted led to a lack of diversity in the marketing messages and that therefore this in itself was not leading to increased difference in the provision being made by schools. Looking at the issues in a slightly broader sense a number of researchers (Reay & Lucey, 2000; Reay, 2006, 2013, 2017) etc. and Ball (S. J. Ball, 2003; Jin & Ball, 2019; Maguire et al., 1999; Reay & Ball, 1997). have produced a substantial body of work examining the problems and contexts identified in this thesis.

Debate centres on the issue of the continued existence of a socially segregated school system. The Comprehensive system that during the post-war social contract (partially) replaced the prior tripartite division of schools has been dismantled since the 1990s; the Academies and Free Schools initiatives supplementing the continued existence of private education and selective schools (the remnants of the old Grammar School and 11+ system). Fee-paying schools continue to reproduce privilege (*Elitist Britain 2019*, 2019) and the introduction of market values and processes into the former Comprehensive sector has led to the rise of choice and competition as potential factors for further reproduction of relative advantage and disadvantage between school populations. There is less known, however, about the

ideological and symbolic work done by schools – if any, that is used to transmit key messages, that we see manifested in how schools promote themselves.

My research aims to follow in the footsteps of Reay and Ball (and others such as Kulz (Kulz, 2017a)) in using the lens of Bourdieu to shine a light on the open, yet hidden, reproductive processes at work in the English education system. In a more theoretical sense, this thesis is an attempt to apply insights from the critical tradition such as Barthes's semiotics and Lacan's psychoanalysis onto a new field - that of the neoliberal school.

My contribution to this body of research on the reproduction of inequalities via the education system will be to provide an updated look at the ideological work undertaken in the process of schools' ever increasing need to market themselves in the competition for pupils and thus funding. Since the work of Symes (1998) and others, technological advances have made it much more accessible for schools to create and broadcast visual messaging to a range of audiences. At the same time the quasi market in education has continued to develop, entrench and expand. A critical perspective on these processes as provided by this thesis is vital for those seeking to understand and address the persistence - indeed widening - of socio-economic division in education despite the public appearance of considerable efforts to tackle it. The degree to which these efforts are universal or, indeed, genuine may be questioned as a desire to reduce inequality cannot be assumed on the part of all the actors within the process. Arguably there are also efforts to use educational outcomes as a legitimisation or normalisation of inequality 'as if natural'. This antagonism is always lurking in the shadows of educational discourse.

Identifying the Problem: Inequality and the Role of the School

The August 2020 crisis surrounding the calculation and release of A-level and GCSE results in an academic year where few examinations were held (Lough, 2020) has once again brought discussions about schools' role in enabling social mobility and facilitating meritocracy into the limelight (Jack, 2020) (Turner, 2020). This discussion returns to underlying questions about the scale, nature and causes of inequality in the United Kingdom and the role of education and schools within this.

Concern at the injustice of the United Kingdom's persistent and rising levels of inequality is not limited to those of us approaching the form of late capitalism from a critical perspective. It is a concern shared across the political and ideological spectrum from Conservative Prime Ministers (May, 2016) and Governmental bodies (*State of the Nation 2018-19: Social Mobility in Great Britain*, 2019) Think Tanks (Joyce & Xu, 2019), mainstream economists (Piketty, 2014), and the financial media (Giles, 2019) .

The problem in England today can be described by looking at a number of broad categories. First, the United Kingdom's already comparatively high levels of social inequality show no signs of decreasing (*Household income inequality, UK - Office for National Statistics*, 2020). Secondly, high levels of inequality are linked with reduced social mobility (Krueger, 2012). Whilst, as seen below, the ideology of social mobility is problematic for those seeking a more egalitarian society, its existence remains a key plank in sustaining belief in a fair society that purports to be a meritocracy. As this is challenged, trust in democracy starts to falter with the political consequences described below.

Increasing Inequality

The twentieth century saw decades of decreasing inequality and the share of overall income held by the richest 10 percent decline (Streeck & Schäfer, 2013). This progress in equality began to reverse in the last quarter of the century however, with commentators talking of a “U-turn” in income inequality (Streeck & Schäfer, 2013). Piketty (Piketty, 2014) describes this U-turn noting that inequality has risen sharply since the 1970s and 1980s (p.237) and writes that in the United States inequality has returned to levels last seen a century ago. Crucially for this study, Piketty also suggests that the data he analyses shows no evidence that intergenerational social mobility has been aided by education. These two assertions should cause great concern for those working in education concerned with social justice and the ability to impact upon it.

Piketty’s data reflects the political and economic context within which educators find themselves. Four decades of neoliberalism have seen the steady concentration of wealth upwards in the hands of a small minority of the population and the relentless erosion of the redistributive politics and policies that led to a greater degree of equality in the years following World War II (Piketty, 2014).

Decreasing Social Mobility and the Myth of Meritocracy

Of particular interest to those engaged with, or working in, education is the role that the narratives of meritocracy and social mobility have had in shaping perceptions of this rising inequality. These narratives also underpin the practices of choice and competition analysis in this thesis. There is a substantial body of work critical of these narratives (see (Kulz, 2014;

Owens & de St Croix, 2020; Reay, 2013) for example.) and the work they do in providing an alibi for inequality.

Despite these criticisms, the emergence of increased social mobility during the post-war years has provided an important route out of disadvantage and enabled aspiration in education.

Reay (Reay, 2013) talks of the “totemic role” that social mobility has in Britain. It is central to discourse on inequality on political and policy levels - even as these words are being typed a government minister is giving a speech calling for “true social mobility” (Donelan, 2020).

However, as Reay also notes “ it appears as if the less mobility there is, the more it becomes a preoccupation of politicians and policy makers.” (Reay, 2017), p.101) and this situation of ‘less mobility’ would appear to be a contemporary issue with the OECD placing the United Kingdom at the bottom of its international rankings for social mobility.(Reay, 2013).

Recognition that there is a problem extends to the government with the Social Mobility Commission noting that “being born privileged in Britain means that you are likely to remain privileged..”(State of the Nation 2018-19: Social Mobility in Great Britain, 2019), p.V),

For over two decades increasing social mobility via education has been a policy priority for successive British governments (*Time For Change: An Assessment of Government Policies on Social Mobility 1997-2017*, 2017). The Social Mobility Commission’s 2017 assessment of government policies found that “Schools are not yet the engines of social mobility they should be” (*Time For Change: An Assessment of Government Policies on Social Mobility 1997-2017*, 2017), p.3), further noting that there is currently no prospect of the gap between poor and wealthier children being eliminated at GCSE level or at A level. (*Time For Change: An Assessment of Government Policies on Social Mobility 1997-2017*, 2017)

The Marketisation of the Social

The individualised mythology - in a Barthesian sense (Barthes, 1973) - of a meritocratic path to social mobility dovetails with the rhetoric of the free market which we see materialised in the so-called quasi-market existing in English schools. Its manifestation in the ethos of competition and choice that now fully permeates the school landscape is clearly the foundation for the processes described in this study as taking place in school prospectuses. This marketisation is all pervasive in contemporary English society. As capital seeks new territories for accumulation we see replicated in the social sphere both the relations of the factory (Negri, 2018) and the relations of the supermarket (Baudrillard, 1998; Debord, 1994).

The Enclosure of Access

Expansion of market logic and the rapacious need of capital to primitively accumulate (K Marx, 1970) are recurrent features of capitalism. All of these developments are echoed in history. Federici (Federici, 2018) argues that enclosure is the basic device of accumulation and provides a starting point for capitalist society. She echoes Marx in arguing that enclosure is an ongoing part of the structure of capitalist society. Federici goes on to label the processes of neoliberalism and globalisation as “new enclosures” and we can see how the marketisation of fields such as education, health and social care again commodify the means of social reproduction, segregating and stratifying access dependent upon the ability to ‘make choices’, choices framed and directed by socio-economic circumstance. These forms of new enclosure, as we shall see, are present in the ‘offer’ put by schools to parents for choosing where to send their children and the type or form of education promoted in that offer.

Marx described public debt as “one of the most powerful levers of primitive accumulation” (Marx, 1970, p. 706) and this remains true today. We see, on the one hand, austerity measures prescribed as a response to budget deficit resulting in sweeping cuts to public services whilst on the other, the personal debt acquired in order to access higher education (for example) idealised as investment and ‘wise choices’. This double bind is a consistent thread throughout this research, written - as Marx put it - “in letters of blood and fire” (Marx, 1970, p.669) a story of the relentless attrition of symbolic violence (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990).

The Costs of Inequality

The level of inequality that is being reproduced in Britain today is a problem that impacts across the whole of society. It incurs a cost. A cost that can be measured, if one were to follow the hegemonic logic of the market, in a number of ways. Of particular interest to the readers of this research would be the impact of inequality within education. The potential contribution, made by the visual messaging of *habitus* and cultural capital as a central part of school’s promoted identity or ‘brand’ in today’s quasi-market, to this inequality and its costs in particular is of relevance to the contention put forward here. This messaging and both its sender(s) and receiver(s) will be found not only in the data collected in this study - in the formal messaging of school prospectuses - but echoed and replicated throughout the ‘site’ of education. This perpetual discourse of status, interpellation and symbolic violence carries the cost of attrition alongside the more discrete costs of managing inequalities in, and around, school. It is, however, also worth noting the cost to our health, the economic cost and the social consequences that are taking shape. Schools do not exist in isolation and the material conditions of health and economics directly impact upon the everyday lives of , and in, schools.

i) Health

Growth in life expectancy in England has stalled in recent years as has the gap in both life expectancy and, even more dramatically, healthy life expectancy. Public Health England reports that the poorest men in the country can expect to die 9 years earlier than the richest (7 years for women). This gap has widened significantly since 2011 (*Health profile for England: 2019 - GOV.UK*, n.d.). In other words, rising inequality in England is resulting in the most privileged men living almost a decade longer than the least, and having almost two decades more healthy life ahead of them. People living in the wealthiest areas are seeing their life expectancies growing whilst female life expectancy in the most deprived areas is falling. Preventable deaths occur at a high rate in the most deprived areas, and this inequality is increasing. (Marmot et al., 2020, p.31)

The gap between the richest and the poorest in the United Kingdom cannot be put in any starker terms than this. Yet it does get starker. During the early weeks of the Covid-19 crisis Dominic Cummings, the then senior advisor to the Prime Minister Boris Johnson, was alleged to have described the government's strategy on the pandemic as "herd immunity, protect the economy and if that means some pensioners die, too bad." (T. Shipman & Wheeler, 2020) . The United Kingdom had - at the time of writing - the second worst rate of excess deaths due to the pandemic with over 64,000 excess deaths estimated as of July 2020 (*Understanding excess mortality: comparing COVID-19's impact in the UK to other European countries | The Health Foundation*, n.d.) These excess deaths will have disproportionately hit the poorer sections of society with the Institute for Fiscal Studies reporting that "age-adjusted death rates in the most deprived tenth of areas in the UK were more than double those in the least deprived tenth of areas" (Blundell et al., 2020) This is due to previously existing health inequalities that leave lower-income individuals at a greater risk of having underlying health conditions that leave them more vulnerable to the potential serious consequences of Covid-19

(Blundell et al., 2020, p.19). The report also argues that exposure to the virus is greater amongst those with lower income due to the nature of the jobs of designated key workers. To put it bluntly, government policy is exacerbating the already higher chances of death for the less privileged.

The full impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on schools is beyond the scope of this study, but it has provided the bluntest possible reminder of how issues in public health are inextricably entwined with those in education.

ii) Economy

Whilst it is important not to reproduce the logic of late capitalism by reducing everything to a balance sheet of profit and loss it is nevertheless worth acknowledging that, even according to its own values, the inequalities of capitalism incur an economic cost. The Equality Trust claimed that the “overall cost of inequality to the UK can be estimated as equivalent to £39 billion a year” (*The Cost of Inequality*, 2014) whilst the Joseph Rowntree Foundation reported in 2016 that the cost of poverty in the United Kingdom amounted to £78 billion (Bramley et al., 2016). This same report estimated that the cost to schools in the UK was around £10.1 billion - or 18.5% of English schools’ budgets.

The irony of these findings is that if the contention of this thesis is correct, and the marketing of schools plays a part in the reproduction of inequalities, then schools are in effect paying twice. Once for ever more competitive and professional promotional materials and again in dealing with the consequences of this inequality in the classroom and through interventions aimed at addressing its attendant problems.

iii) Education

Around 30% of children in England were living in poverty in the school year 2017-18. This proportion is rising and is one of the highest rates amongst OECD countries (Marmot et al., 2020). Inequality in educational attainment mirrors the divides described above. In 2016 17% more of the least deprived children gained five or more GCSEs at the equivalent of level 4 or above than amongst the most deprived children (Marmot et al., 2020). According to the latest DfE figures this attainment gap is stable but has grown slightly for two consecutive years despite overall attainment being stable and showing slight improvements (*Latest headline data for pupils at the end of key stage 4*, 2020). This attainment gap based upon (dis)advantage is significantly wider than gaps based upon gender or first language (*The Attainment Gap*, 2017). GCSE grades (and other educational qualifications) do not only function as a measure of attainment but act as a formal form of gatekeeping for entry to further study, apprenticeships and work. The Educational Endowment Foundation argues that these qualifications are necessary for accessing secure good jobs, apprenticeships and higher education (*The Attainment Gap*, 2017) and reports that over half of 19 year olds who had been eligible for free school meals (a common measure of deprivation) failed to achieve “ a good standard of recognised qualifications in English and Maths.” (p.6) and thus face further obstacles in breaking the cycle of reproduction discussed in this thesis.

iv) The Socio-political Cost of Inequality

“A house may be large or small; as long as the neighbouring houses are likewise small, it satisfies all social requirements for a residence. But let there arise next to the little house a palace, and the little house shrinks to a hut. The little house now makes it clear that its inmate has no social position at all to maintain, or but a very insignificant one; and however high it may shoot up in the course of civilization, if the neighbouring palace rises in equal or even in greater measure, the occupant of the relatively little house will always find himself more uncomfortable, more dissatisfied, more cramped within his four walls.” (Marx, 1996, p.39)

The writing of this section is set to a backdrop of images of cities across the United States burning, mounting disquiet in the United Kingdom about an ever rising death toll in the COVID-19 pandemic and scenes of crowds toppling statues linked to Britain's legacy of slavery. The experience of a decade of austerity and increasing inequalities are driving wedges into a society increasingly divided by an economic and political 'hollowing out' and successive exacerbation and manipulation of socio-cultural divides in political campaigns such as Brexit and the 2019 General election. As Nunn and Tepe-Belfrage note, average earnings in the USA have remained flat in real terms for three decades whilst in the UK austerity is entrenched as a permanent feature of the economy. These conditions, they argue, have consequences - anger, resentment and "a breeding ground for populism" (Nunn & Tepe-Belfrage, 2019, p.620).

The issues examined in this research are central to concerns about such divisions, as the inequalities within education - particularly between the elite independent sector and State schools "perpetuate a form of separate development in Britain, or 'social apartheid'." (Park et al., 2012, p.50). This social segregation reproduced and entrenched by the work being done by schools and education policy has consequences that reach far beyond attainment gaps and GCSE scores.

Current research is finding an unprecedented level of political fragmentation in Britain (Goodwin & Heath, 2020) and the same report notes that low-income voters have been central to a succession of recent political 'shocks' - from the Brexit vote to the 2019 General Election results. Whilst the political engagement of these often disregarded voters is to be welcomed, an engagement fuelled by dissatisfaction and distrust of political parties, the democratic system and the direction of the economy - a situation that is likely to worsen in the wake of the unequal impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in the United Kingdom (Goodwin & Heath,

2020) - has thus far been channelled largely into a nationalist populism and away from attempts to envisage a more equitable or egalitarian vision of society. We see instead the spectacle of a movement against elites led by the privately educated and wealthy, and a turn towards so-called 'culture wars' which we may yet see filter down into the signification of status and position analysed in this thesis. We are already seeing ripples of this emerging populism and the so-called 'culture war' it is fighting in teacher discussions on social media (Watson, 2020) which may yet influence policy and practise in schools, as is happening to Universities already.

The distrust and dissatisfaction with our democratic institutions, as identified by Goodwin and Heath above, can be linked to the continued reproduction of social inequality and segregation in the United Kingdom. Links have been made between this 'loss of faith' and growing income inequality (Streeck & Schäfer, 2013). White argues that the gap in background and life experiences between people in leadership positions and the population as a whole "underlines the undemocratic nature of our political arrangements." (White, 2015, p.17). The role of our education system in this is clear. Verkaik notes that of all the British Prime Ministers since 1806 only Gordon Brown both attended a state school and sent his children to one too. (Verkaik, 2018). We will see below the extent of the independent school domination of the British elite across society, but in the context of the growing dissatisfaction of British democratic institutions it is worth returning to White who argues that "The dominance of the privately educated in key posts long predated the 1928 reform, has long outlasted it, and continues to be an obstacle to further democratisation." (White, 2015, p.16).

1.3 | Significance and Outcomes of the Study

“I do not believe educators can survive the negativities of their trade without some sort of “armed love,” as the poet Tiago de Melo would say. Without it they could not survive all the injustice...” (Freire, 2005, pp.40-41)

The demoralisation that may come with the perception that all the time, effort, dedication or resources that we use in education are failing - on a societal level - to reduce inequalities or to improve the life chances of those pupils less privileged through the accidents of birth can be paralysing for those of us committed to education as a force for liberation and social justice.

This research hopes to be, as Freire puts it “an adventure in unveiling” (Freire, 2014). In the “now hidden, now open fight “ (Marx & Engels, 1998, p.219) between classes it aims to examine some of the more hidden aspects of how schools are a site for the reproduction of advantage and disadvantage, which, in turn, perpetuate the inequalities so damningly described above. With Barthes it shares an impatience with the “sight of the ‘naturalness’ with which newspapers, art and common sense constantly dress up a reality which, even though it is the one we live in, is undoubtedly determined by history” (Barthes, 1973, p. 11) and wants to say “what-goes-without-saying”.

It is hoped that in approaching a key issue in education in England today, that of its failure to successfully resolve our problems of imaginary meritocracy and consequent inequality, and by the application of its novel synthesis of critical theory to the problem, that it stimulates interest and further study into its contention.

As seen above, semiotic analysis of school prospectuses and marketing materials is scarce. What has been done is now largely a couple of decades old and much of it conducted in an Australian context. There is therefore a significant gap in the knowledge of the semiotic

processes at work in the promotion of schools in England today. The issues raised by preceding studies have not gone away, rather they have intensified. Stratification, inequality and social immobility are increasing. Schools produce more and more sophisticated images of themselves to promote to others as both marketing technology and marketing necessity advance. Given the economic, political and social change since then - and especially the rapid entrenchment of marketisation in the English education system - new and further knowledge can surely be gained from a fresh application of this lens onto English schools today.

The synthesis of critical perspectives applied in this research also offers an original contribution to knowledge. Whilst Bourdieu remains a common lens through which to approach social reproduction in education, the appropriation of Althusserian and Lacanian processes (interpellation and the *point de capiton*) in combination with the Bourdieusian conceptual frameworks of *habitus* and cultural capital is a novel approach.

Whilst clearly influenced by strands of postmodernism such as the early work of Baudrillard, Foucault's writings on education and so on, the economic base of this research acknowledges its debt to Marx and to the workerist and autonomist traditions of Marxism. In a context where not only Marxism but even the mildest forms of social democracy can no longer sustain an organised political presence then, as Derrida puts it, "we no longer have any excuse, only alibis" (Derrida, 1994, p.14) for shying away from using Marx as a starting point for the investigation of social relations of class in English schools. This revenant Marx, allied with his ageing descendants and bastard offspring, allows this research a degree of originality in the combativity of its stance, the 'armed love' of Freire mentioned above.

1.4 | Research Questions(s)

Overarching Research Question: Can the images used by schools to promote themselves contribute to the reproduction of privilege and disadvantage?

The deconstruction of the rhetoric of school prospectus images is a tool for unveiling meanings and messages about class, status and society broadcast by schools in the South East of England. In order that the critical semiotic lens applied to the issue of schools and inequalities becomes sufficiently focussed to function as a kind of Archimedean ‘burning glass’, the key question posed by this research is ‘Can the images used by schools to promote themselves contribute to the reproduction of privilege and disadvantage?’. The question is less concerned with ‘intent’, and more with ‘function’. To examine this potential function further sub-questions are addressed through the analysis of the data gathered from the school prospectuses.

i) What signification of social status can be found within the imagery of school prospectuses?

First, it is necessary to identify what relevant signs are present within the sample images. Relevant signs for this study will be those which relate to depictions, illustrations or messages about privilege and disadvantage in the form of social class and status.

ii) Can patterns or trends of signification be distinguished between the school sectors (such as between the independent and public sectors)?

For these signs to function in the manner argued here it will be necessary to identify how these are distributed amongst and across different classes and communities via school. A

useful starting point is the blunt division between the known elite population of the Independent school sector (*Elitist Britain 2019*, 2019) and the various forms of state school. Patterns and trends found may provide useful indications about the distribution of classed signifiers and the ideological work they may do within and between different school sectors. For example, differences recorded between Grammar Schools, Local Authority Maintained Schools and Academies may shed light on the roles that they play in the ‘marketplace’ of education.

iii) What might these signs tell us about socially differentiated - or *classed* - approaches to education from these schools?

This ideological work might be found in the deployment of pedagogical or mythological signs as part of classed branding strategies. This might take the form of socially engineered cohorts or in the use of Bourdieusian symbolic violence through the imposition of classed norms by the imagery promoted.

iv) How might classed signs relating to education work within the cycle of social reproduction?

Finally it will need to be argued how what is found fits within the cycle of social reproduction described below in Chapter 2 in order to see how all this might actually *work* in relation to school choice being a mechanism impacting patterns of privilege and disadvantage.

1.5 | Aims and Objectives

“Education has not served as a mechanism for increasing social mobility, rather it has become the means by which advantages have been transmitted intergenerationally.” (Fitz, Evans, et al., 2005, p.75)

It is not yet fully known what impact the expansion of marketisation across the entire education sector has had on schools’ role in the reproduction of social class and inequalities. Specifically, it is not known if the increasingly hegemonic ideology of choice and competition has played a part in accelerating the widening socio-economic gap. This study will focus on one specific manifestation of these trends - school marketing - and unveil the signifiers of distinction in school life promoted within them.

Within schools, educators may be made more aware of the signifying work that is done by school uniform policies, by their extra-curricular offer and by the presentation of the school’s environment. School management and leadership teams might also become more mindful of the social impact of the marketing strategies they have been forced to adopt. Potentially, should this research be picked up by more lay media outlets the kernel of its findings about how the process of choice might function on the basis of interpellation might provoke parents and pupils to refuse this work, moving from what Martell terms ‘misinterpellation’ (Martel, 2017) to a more conscious strategy of what we might begin to term ‘*contrepellation*’

The ultimate aim of this research is change and, should the strategies of *contrepellation* begin to be formulated in response to a widespread dissemination of the findings and ideas in this thesis, it will have achieved its ultimate aim. However, even the more likely consequence of reaching a more restricted audience of interested academics and educators allows a step along this path.

This research starts with the contention that the neo-liberal education system reproduces existing advantage and disadvantage, perpetuating and entrenching a harmful degree of inequality in British society. It locates schools as a site for this reproduction and focuses on one aspect integral to the current marketised processes of school choice, that of the schools' promotional materials and the messages contained within them.

Drawing upon Althusser's concept of interpellation (Althusser, 2008) and Lacan's *point de capiton* (Lacan, 1993) this study uses semiotic analysis to examine the content of school prospectuses for signifiers of status that can be read by prospective parents.

It is important to state at this point that this contention does not seek to imply that this process is deterministic. Althusser himself obliquely acknowledged that his concept of interpellation wasn't 100% successful, writing that "nine times out of ten it is the right one" (Althusser, 2008, pp.48-9). Martel (2015, 2017) built his ideas of misinterpellation upon this 10% possibility of error. The potential for what we might term contrepellation - the *détournement* (Knabb, 1982) of interpellative signs and signifiers - by the readers of school promotional materials may be a fertile area for exploration in countering fears of determinism in the processes researched in this work. as Willis (Willis, 1990) notes, young people in particular are skilled in their creative responses to, and use of, the symbolic resources of advertising.

As we shall see below 'choice' is a highly contested and problematic notion. However this thesis examines one application of choice - that of school - through the process of interpellation and 'quilting', informed by the recognition of, and identification with habitus and cultural capital. There are, of course, other explanations for parental choice and it is important to acknowledge these at this point.

Chapter 2 | Conceptual/Theoretical Frameworks & Provisional Literature Review

This chapter starts with a brief review of the limited literature that has been published addressing questions of inequality and social reproduction using schools' promotional material as a source for data. A wider review of literature related to broader questions at play in this research then follows embedded within a discussion of the conceptual and theoretical frameworks employed.

2.1 Existing Studies on Semiotics, School Prospectuses and Social Reproduction

There is a significant body of work addressing the ideological and reproductive work that the neoliberal school does. Ball (Ball, 2003), Kulz (Kulz, 2017a) and Reay (Reay, 2017) in particular have contributed books, and countless papers, that have significantly influenced the direction of this thesis with their casting of a critical lens, related to the one used here, onto the role of schools in social reproduction during late capitalism.

There are, however, fewer publications taking the approach of this study and using a visual or semiotic method of inquiry on the marketised school. The oldest, yet perhaps the most salient, is Gewirtz's chapter of semiotic analysis of "schooling in the marketplace" (Gewirtz et al., 1995). She recognises the scope of "image production" (p.122) within, and by, schools. Writing 27 years ago, her study notes the increasingly professional production of such images and their use as signs of 'quality' in the emerging marketplace of education. Most significantly the themes she identifies in her research over a quarter of a century ago are strongly echoes in the themes found in this study - the imposition of middle-class values and culture, the use of uniforms, architecture and pedagogical imagery to frame and discipline and the fear (and Othering) of classed, racialised and ableised "undesirables" (p. 142).

There have also been a number of papers investigating school prospectuses in Australia following the work of Symes (Symes, 1998). He begins by noting the shift towards a marketised school that had occurred during the decade preceding his work, a process that - it must be noted - has continued unabated in the decades since his study. Symes found that schools had begun to get involved in 'impression management' with the intention of influencing the new consumer choice that was emerging in education. Nascent digital technologies are acknowledged as he offers the example of schools using photo editing to increase the length of girls' skirts in order to manipulate its significations. Symes cites examples of material and status rhetoric in the photographs included in the prospectuses of elite Australian schools and concludes that these can give an indication about the social status of the school.

More than a decade after Symes, McDonald et al. (2012) returned to the "rhetorical strategies" contained within the prospectuses of elite Australian schools. They, again, situate their analysis within the context of a neoliberal market in education. This, they argue, has created an emphasis on choice for the parents and competition for the schools (McDonald et al., 2012). By employing these strategies of persuasion, they contend, schools' marketing materials such as prospectuses have the effect of "reproducing and reinforcing, hegemonic social and economic discourses underpinning early twenty-first-century education" (McDonald et al., 2012, p.2). A later study published by some of the same authors charts the rise of dedicated marketing specialists (McDonald et al., 2019) within schools as a response to increased importance of these strategies in the competitive education market.

Drew (2013) continued the investigation into the promotional material of elite schools in Australia noting that the emergence of the internet and school websites allows for schools to advertise to potential clients in new semiotic ways (Drew, 2013). He argues that, in itself, this

internet presence (and its deployment of interactive elements) functions semiotically as a sign of status - “a competitive edge in an information age” (p.179), By the 2020s, however, it could be argued that this ‘edge’ has been become obsolete, as all schools now have full internet presences. He concludes, in line with this thesis, that this semiotic function is to “construct narratives of geographical, historical, religious and gendered exclusivity in order to position the schools as locations where elite cultural capital can be attained.” (p.183)

McCandless (2015) noting the prior focus on elite schools in Australia, researched the marketing of schools outside this tier (McCandless, 2015). He found that lower status schools “tend to emphasise hard work or discipline, by displaying students actively engaged in academic work and almost invariably under some form of manifest discipline” (p.809) whilst schools with a more elite status “there is less emphasis on academic school work and a much greater focus on students acquiring the kinds of cultural capital that is available beyond strictures of the classroom.” (p.809).

Whilst these studies are focussed on Australia, they all cite a piece of earlier research conducted in the United Kingdom in 1998. Hesketh and Knight’s paper (Hesketh & Knight, 1998) built on earlier work by Knight (Knight, 1992) that examined school prospectuses in the context of emerging parental right to choice. Given the age of this research some of its findings have been rendered obsolete in the passing quarter of a century. Their comments on the cost of the use of images, colour printing and production material qualities can no longer carry as much weight due to the subsequent ubiquity of access to desktop publishing technology. This may be a factor in why they found that “the images used do not appear to vary systematically according to school type, location or popularity.” (Hesketh & Knight, 1998), p.30).

Returning to the use of images in school prospectuses in 2012, Wilkins notes that by this time school choice is “assembled on the basis of visual iconography and narrative terrains.” (Wilkins, 2012, p.69) in school brochures and websites. Wilkins’ analysis is restricted to the two Girls’ Catholic Schools he researched, but provides an insight into the construction of meaning through images. He notes though that “meanings are constructed with specific audiences in mind and therefore might symbolise different things for different people.” (p.82)

There are, clearly, common themes running through this small body of research. Most importantly the power and growing ubiquity of meaning making imagery deployed by schools. The clear classed content of the messages produced - and the clear classed context of the messages produced - is a shared framing of these studies that is central to the research that follows here.

At the same time, even for such a small body of literature, a key limitation is that of its age. Most of these studies are decades old. The most recent (McCandless, 2015) is now approaching eight years since publication. As all the studies themselves note, both practical (the rise of digital technology) and political (increasing marketisation of education) factors are developing rapidly and these factors have significant impacts upon the nature of the imagery produced by schools.

2.2 | Conceptual Framework & Key Theorists

Appropriation without Apologies

This work, within the broad parameters of critical theory, takes a pluralist approach to its use of theory. Such “Magpieism”, Carter argues, enables a researcher to “contribute an

interpretive reading through an individual lens that mixes any glintingly promising methods” (Carter, 2014, pp.126-127). In the case of this work, this approach is applied less to method and more to the theory that makes up this lens. Whilst largely drawing from Marxist traditions (which in themselves may be in positions of opposition to each other in their own interpretations and applications of Marx’s ideas) it also freely borrows from Feminist and Postmodern ideas.

This appropriative approach is perhaps neatly exemplified by this study’s taking of a theory from Lacanian psychoanalysis (the *point de capiton*) and synthesising it with the Althusserian idea of interpellation and then applying it in a semiotic analysis of Marxist inspired social reproduction using Bourdieusian categories. The aim of this *bricolage* of theory is a process of pseudo-Hegelian *aufhebung*, a simultaneous building upon and destruction (or transcendence) of ideas. As the anonymous author(s) of an obscure Situationist pamphlet of the 1970s and 80s more colourfully put it, this theoretical strategy visits the supermarket of ideas with the intention to “move along the shelves, rip open the packets, take out what looks authentic and useful, and dump the rest.” (Anonymous, 1985, pp.19-20).

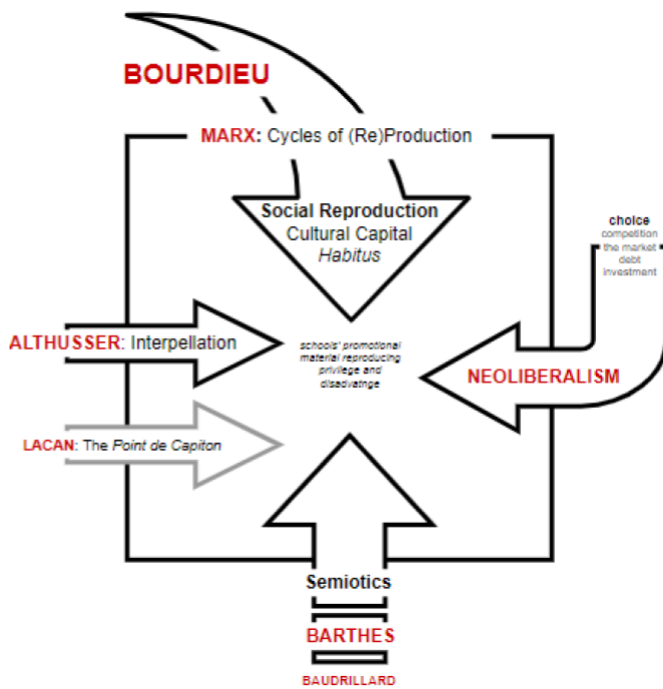


Figure 2.1. Conceptual Framework

2.2.1 | Bourdieu

The work of Bourdieu has been a key influence both upon the conceptual and theoretical frameworks used in this study and upon the literature drawn from (for example the work of Reay). Three key concepts of Bourdieu’s surface regularly in this work; cultural capital, *habitus* and symbolic violence.

Forms of Capital

Cultural capital is one of the forms of capital described by Bourdieu (1986) that appears in much of the literature looking at schools from a Bourdieusian perspective and is a term that has crept into everyday education discourse. For Bourdieu, and in this study, cultural capital refers to those material and symbolic resources that can be drawn upon as a manifestation of

status or 'know how'. In a school context this may come in forms of knowledge - what is known, learnt or inculcated by given pupils in given schools. This may be the ability to express an 'appreciation' of high-culture (Classical Music, Modern Art, canonical literature etc.); ways of speaking, dressing and behaving or in the form of experiences (sport, travel, extra-curricular activities etc.). These are closely linked to educational capital, which in many ways result in the reification of these processes into qualifications and credentials.

Bourdieu's other forms of capital also find their way into the data collected for this study, though less frequently. Social capital, the formation of networks of 'who you know' is perhaps most explicitly associated with schools through the concept of the 'old school tie' and 'old boys' networks' (or less luridly Alumni Associations). Whilst economic capital can be displayed as in the possession of schools (though property, resources and grounds) and in the gift of schools through depictions of pupils' earning potentials and prospects of upward social mobility.

Habitus: The Social Made Body

Habitus is, of course, a key concept within Bourdieu's analysis of class reproduction. It is also central to the thesis presented in this work. The product, and process, of embodied history or as Bourdieu describes it "the social made body" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.127), habitus is both shaped by, and in turn shapes, the lived experience of material conditions producing "the social made body" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.127). This is not a one way street merely imposed from above like some vulgar indoctrination, but instead a "dialectic of the internalisation of externality and the externalisation of internality" (Bourdieu et al., 1977, p.72). Recalling Marx's thoughts on the conditionality within which we make history, we can through *habitus* feel that "the tradition from all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living" (K Marx et al., 2002, p.19) for as Bourdieu notes, *habitus* is a

product of history and a producer of history in turn (Bourdieu, 1992) Such a dialectical process lends itself neatly to the cycle of social reproduction described above.

Schools - or more broadly “pedagogical work” (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p.31) - are a key site as the subjects passing through them are exposed to the process of “imposing and inculcating an arbitrary” (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p.31) over a sufficient timescale, and for sufficient intensity that a persistent *habitus* is produced. Schools provide the ideal location for the internalisation of a cultural arbitrariness, their role and rituals of discipline, routine and training provide the structures upon which legitimate values and practices can be draped. This is, as Bourdieu reminds us, a sustained process that cannot be mimicked in crude interventions such as the teaching of ‘British Values’. Instead, the inoculation of *habitus* does its work “outside of and beyond any express regulation or any explicit reminding of the rule” (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p.31).

The contention here is that it is through, and in, *habitus* that the signs of status and social class displayed as cultural capital in the promotion of schools are interpellated. This ‘hail’ goes beyond the mere advertising of a commodity and, instead, produces not just a consumer but rather a subject who recognises themselves in the *habitus* that is broadcast in the prospectus.

“When habitus encounters a social world of which it is the product, it is like a ‘fish in water’: it does not feel the weight of the water, and it takes the world about itself for granted” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.127)

Bourdieu writes of “choosing according to one’s tastes” (Bourdieu, 1986a, p.229) and we can see how this might manifest in the reading of, and reactions, to advertising and promotional material. The signs deployed within the school prospectus carry messages and meanings of class and status through their imagery of cultural capital on display. This is not, however, a free market where everything is available to everyone. We have already seen how ‘free choice’ is anything but, Bourdieu’s ideas of habitus add an extra dimension to our

understanding of what 'choice' might actually mean in the context of a school prospectus.

Bourdieu describes that, because habitus is produced by - and produces - the limits "set by the historically and socially situated conditions of its production" (Bourdieu, 1992, p.55) any choices presented to us are both "conditioned and conditional". These limits, he argues, are determined by what our *habitus* finds reasonable or common sense for 'people like us' to choose.

Symbolic Violence

Education - or more precisely 'pedagogic action' - is for Bourdieu the primary site for the commission of symbolic violence (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990; Jenkins, 2002). Symbolic violence, argued Bourdieu, is often manifested in the imposition of 'norms' or 'legitimate culture' by those with power and/or status upon those without. Schools - as sites for the inculcation of norms and the training in legitimate culture - have provided material for literature on symbolic violence in the past (for example Reay, 2017). Current debates around standard English, school uniforms, hairstyles and behaviour codes provide fertile ground for the lens of symbolic violence to be used to understand the power relations and status distinctions that may be at play. The embedded values and norms that English Schools draw from in their pedagogies will be present in the messages broadcast in the images analysed here and the concept of symbolic violence as the imposition of these classed (and gendered and racialized) norms may help shine a light on the social reproduction occurring through their work.

2.2.2 | Foucault and Docile Bodies

The work of Foucault on the school's role in the production of docile bodies (Foucault, 1995) grew to become increasingly influential in the analyses of the data found here. Disciplinary methods identified by Foucault such as enclosure, partitioning, ranking, timetabling and even posture were found in the signs present in the data. In turn, these can be contextualised with reference to contemporary educational designates and arguments. Foucault's writing on posture as a disciplinary tool echoes the exhortations to sit up straight in the SLANT methods popularised by Lemov (Lemov, 2010) and this embodied discipline can be found as a pedagogical distinction based upon the policing of working class bodies in a number of the images found in the State school sample.

Some researchers (Friedrich & Shanks, 2023) have made links between Foucault's ideas and school uniform policies as disciplinary practice as part of schools' mission to produce "neoliberal governability" (p.1).

Foucault's work on panopticism as a form of disciplinary gaze is also influential in the analysis presented here and in existing literature (for example the work of Page 2017; Colman 2021; Ball 1990). Themes described by Foucault such as distribution, examination and 'normalising judgement' may be found in the images analysed and the interpretation of these images.

2.2.3 | Barthes and the Rhetoric of the Image

“Thus we cover the universe with drawings we have lived.” (Bachelard, 1994, p.12)

The semiotic methods employed by Barthes in his essay “The Rhetoric of the Image” (1984) where he deconstructed a pasta advertisement were a key influence on the approach taken to the case study images analysed here. These case studies (and indeed the wider visual data from which they are drawn) are not - as Debord argued - simply a “collection of images” but instead “a social relationship between people that is mediated by images” (Debord, 1994, p.12). He argues that “the Spectacle is *capital* accumulated to the point where it becomes image” (Debord, 1994, p.24). Images, and in this case images of school, therefore do ideological work in the process of quilting described above. Horkheimer and Adorno write that “symbols take on the expression of the fetish” (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2007, p.16) and we can see this clearly in the use of school uniform, for example, as a symbol of educational values and practises deployed by schools. This study agrees with Horkheimer and Adorno’s argument that “the dread objectified in the fixed image becomes a sign of the consolidated power of the privileged.” (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2007, p.16). This power will be examined further later, but for now it is enough to recognise this in the work of the image. It is also important to acknowledge, again, that this is not a one way street, but that there is “a struggle within signification: a struggle for possession of the sign which extends to even the most mundane areas of everyday life.” (Hebdige, 1979, p.17-18) that can work as a means of the *contrepellation* discussed below.

Drawing from the semiotic analysis of Barthes it is possible to deconstruct the image beyond simply the symbol and look at the relationship between connotation and denotation - or signifier and signified - at work within it. This relationship produces the ‘sign’ (Barthes, 1973). We are simultaneously immersed in this language of signs and reading discrete signs in

the messages we consume. Baudrillard, drawing from Debord's concept of the Spectacle, argues that this imposes a "coherent, collective vision," (Baudrillard, 1998, p.47) through the incessant flow of signs placed in our environment. For this study this implies an underlining, or reinforcement, of the signs at work in schools. The architecture of a school, its uniform and so on work semiotically on the plane of the image itself and on the plane of representation. This, Frosh argues, enables the photographic image to work both as "object of classification" and simultaneously as an "agent of classification" (Frosh, 2003, p.92).

The rhetoric of realism implicit within the use of photographs provides an ideal vehicle for the production of what Barthes termed "mythologies" (Barthes, 1973). This he argues

"consists in overturning culture into nature or, at least, the social, the cultural, the ideological, the historical into the 'natural'. What is nothing but a product of class division and its moral, cultural and aesthetic consequences is presented (stated) as being a 'matter of course';" (Barthes, 1984a, p.165).

Thus the use of photographic images that purport to illustrate school life, yet function on one level as a promotional tool and on another as ideological signs of status, create and sustain a mythology of the nature of schooling. Myth, Barthes argued, has a 'buttonholing' character not unlike the Lacanian *point de capiton* described below.

2.2.4 | Baudrillard

Materiality

This study uses the atmospheric values and sociology of interior design articulated by Baudrillard (Baudrillard, 2005). He writes that materials, colours, form, space etc. produce values of atmosphere that signify status, in a manner reminiscent of Bachelard's topoanalysis that we will also draw from. Broadly speaking, the hierarchical opposition is between the "natural" and the "functional". This very much echoes Bourdieu's division between the aesthetic and the practical. When applied to materials that may be found within the images in

school prospectuses we can contrast Baudrillard's description of wood as "material that has *being*" (p.38), "evoking the succession of generations", and the connotations of tradition and prestige that this brings, with the mass-produced "whitewood veneer" (p.158) that appears in lower-status atmospheres in "the process of downgrading" (p.159). "The shoddiness of objects" he argues "replaces the scarcity of objects as the expression of poverty" (p.157). This shoddiness should be distinguished from 'wear and tear' which may be itself a signifier of authenticity and the prestige of age. Instead it refers to reproducibility in cheaply mass-produced, synthetic, materials. Baudrillard's analyses, drawn from his earlier work on symbolic exchange referred to above (Baudrillard, 2019), therefore provides a useful additional lens through which to examine the status significations of elements within the images presented by schools of themselves.

Atmosphere and Topoanalysis

"How concrete everything becomes in: the world of the spirit when an object, a mere door, can give images of hesitation, temptation, desire, security, welcome and respect. If one were to give an account of all the doors one has closed and opened, of all the doors one would like to re-open, one would have to tell the story of one's entire life." (Bachelard, 1994, p.224)

Whilst photographs flatten and freeze lived history into image, the layers of meaning and signification in these images can be uncovered almost like a form of semiotic archaeology.

Bachelard named this process "topoanalysis" - a systematic study of the sites where "the stage setting maintains the characters in their dominant roles"(Bachelard, 1994, p.8).

Bachelard writes of the phenomenology of corners, roofs, doors and other elements of intimate spaces and of the dialectic between these and exterior space, the "void" of which he suggests can signify "the raw material of possibility of being" (Bachelard, 1994, p.218).

Baudrillard, meanwhile, writes of the elements of interior design such as colour, texture and material producing "structures of atmosphere" (Baudrillard, 2005). These will provide useful

semiotic information about the settings depicted in the images under analysis, as will Barthes' work on clothing (Barthes, 2006a) and Vandebroek's work on embodied distinction (Vandebroek, 2017). As Bourdieu notes these "sign systems" (Bourdieu, 1986a, p.168) can be read as markers of the "vulgar" or the "distinguished" and as such a "life-style" is a "systematic product of *habitus*".

2.2.5 | Processes of Social Reproduction

"If workers' labor produces all the wealth in society, who then produces the worker?" (Bhattacharya & Tithi, 2017, p.1)

In order to understand the cycle of social reproduction at work through the processes of schooling it is necessary to take a step back and look at the concepts of reproduction within which it falls. These ideas are drawn initially from Marx's writing and developed by autonomist and feminist applications of theories of social reproduction.

"The conditions of production are also those of reproduction" wrote Marx, "flowing on with incessant renewal, every social process of production is, at the same time, a process of reproduction." (Marx, 1970, p.531) and it is these processes of reproduction that are being investigated in this study. This means, as Marx noted, that if the conditions of production are those of capitalism, and in this case the neoliberal paradigm of late capitalism, then this will also be the case for the conditions of reproduction. That is, the conditions that lead to the production of inequality will - unless changed - also inevitably lead to the reproduction of these inequalities. Marx goes on to describe the social dimension of this reproduction. "It is the production and reproduction of that means of production so indispensable to the capitalist: the labourer himself" (Marx, 1970, p.537). The reproduction of labour power engages even those "not directly engaged in the labour process", he argues, in this process of reproduction

as it seeks fresh labour every day. “Capital is dead labour, that, vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks.” (Marx, 1970, p.224).

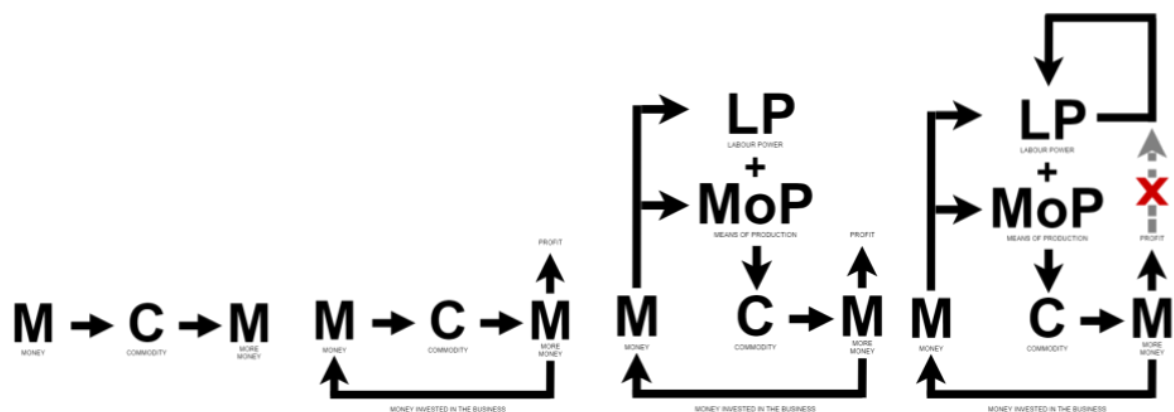


Figure 2.2. Circuits of (Re) Production

Marx described the basic circuit of capitalist production as money generating increased money, in the form of revenue via the production (and sale) of commodities. However, he argued in order for capital to be incentivized into entering this circuit, surplus money, in the form of profit, needs to be extracted from the cycle.

The amount of profit that can be extracted from the circuit depends, in part, upon how much money needs to be reinvested into the business in order to sustain the circuit to a position of reproduction. Two of the main sources of expenditure at this point are on the ‘means of production’ - factories, machinery, land, tools, infrastructure, raw materials etc., and ‘labour power’ - workers to turn all of this into saleable commodities.

This labour power needs to be reproduced to ensure a constant supply. It needs to be trained, skilled and disciplined in order to undertake the work needed to produce commodities. The family and - key for us - the school are the main sites for this reproduction to take place,

Cleaver notes that for Marx “the most important, of course, is the reproduction of labor-power, the recreation of a labor force able and willing to be put to work with all the other elements” (Cleaver, 2019, p.407). He goes on to argue that from the perspective of capital this reproduction must always be present in the individual consumption of commodities.(p.410). This, therefore, neatly illustrates dialectically the relationship between the provision of education as an individualised commodity and its role in the reproduction of capitalist social relations. However, hinting at a central antagonism we find in the field of education, Cleaver returns to Marx’s note that “The fact that the worker performs acts of individual consumption in his own interest, and not to please the capitalist, is something entirely irrelevant to the matter.” (Marx, 1970, p.537) to argue that within this cycle of reproduction the workers (or in our case the pupils and their parents) have their own interests in pursuing the same activities or acts of consumption (Cleaver, 2019, pp.413-414) and that this therefore produces a conflict of interest at the point of reproduction - such as a school - leading to an ongoing cycle of struggle in this sphere, for as Tronti points out “...the act of producing capital, is contemporaneously the moment of the working-class struggle against capital” (Tronti, 2019, p.219)

Central to this process of reproduction was the idea that in reproducing itself labour consumes the resources (gained via wages) that it needs to sustain itself so that the need to sell its labour power in exchange for further wages is ever present. Later feminist theorists have built upon this in developing what is known as Social Reproduction Theory. Ferguson puts it succinctly saying “once a means of supporting life, work became a means even of dominating life as well.” (Ferguson, 2019). This domination of life through reproductive labour, she notes, has

fallen largely upon women who are responsible for the bulk of the work required to reproduce labour power.

We can, therefore, see education (and schools) as a site for social reproduction in two forms. First, it reproduces labour power needed by capital in the form of a skilled and trained workforce, but simultaneously reproduces - through its reproduction of different strata within (and around) this workforce - the social relations of capitalism. As Fitz et al. note, social class, and its hierarchy of status originate in this division of labour (Fitz, Davies, et al., 2005). They go on to say that some argue that schools have been “assigned a key role” in this by theorists of social reproduction via schools’ power to;

“...define and distribute legitimately recognised credentials, modes of thought, cultural and social attributes and networks of association that crucially regulate who goes where within the hierarchy of occupations, positions and careers that define the labour market.” (Fitz, Davies, et al., 2005, p.64)

This capacity to reproduce class divisions encompasses the inculcation, as we can see, of educational capital, social capital and cultural capital as drawn out by the work of Bourdieu. This can be illustrated in a simplified way using the diagram below.

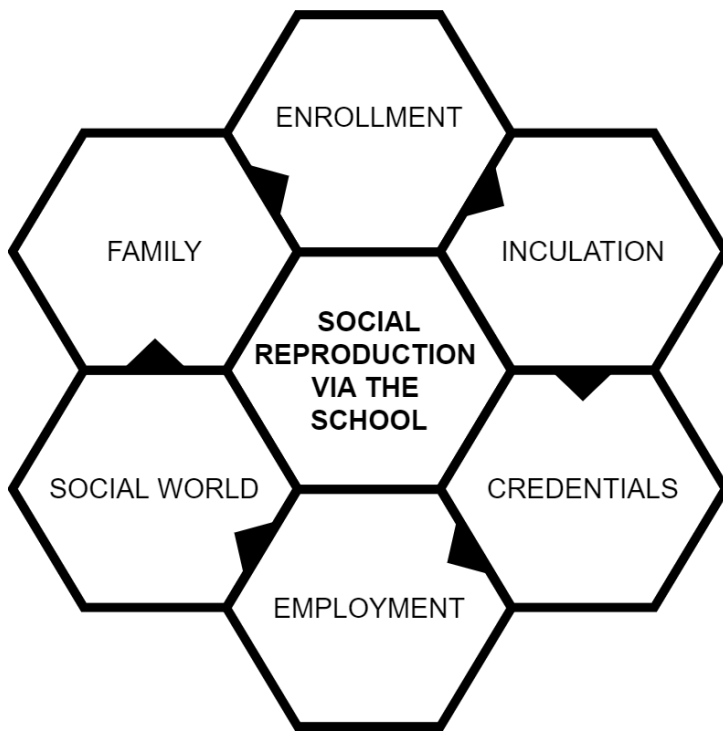


Figure 2.3. Social Reproduction via the School

This cycle of reproduction is perhaps more clearly explained by Malvina Reynolds in the folk song popularised by Pete Seeger - ‘Little Boxes’:

“And the people in the houses
 All went to the university
 Where they were put in boxes
 And they came out all the same
 And there's doctors and lawyers
 And business executives
 And they're all made out of ticky tacky
 And they all look just the same
 And they all play on the golf course
 And drink their martinis dry
 And they all have pretty children
 And the children go to school
 And the children go to summer camp
 And then to the university
 Where they are put in boxes
 And they come out all the same
 And the boys go into business
 And marry and raise a family
 In boxes made of ticky tacky
 And they all look just the same” (Reynolds 1962)

Schools’, Bourdieu wrote, “essential function always leads them to self reproduce as unchanged as possible” (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p.32). This self-reproduction requires the reproduction of the conditions of their existence - just as with capital - that is the social relations and material conditions that produced them.

However, at this point it is, perhaps, worth heeding Bourdieu’s warning to avoid viewing this ahistorically as a mechanistic process (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Both Bourdieu and Marx note the dynamism within the reproductive process, bringing us serendipitously back two and half thousand years to the Heraclitean idea of constant flux (Heraclitus, 2003), we could claim that a worker cannot set foot in the same factory twice, for it is not the same factory and they are not the same worker.

The word “factory” is notable for its repeated appearance in the literature across the fields touched upon in this research ((Frosh, 2003; Kulz, 2017a) for example). This is no mere literary metaphor, rather it echoes the ideas developed by theorists associated with autonomist Marxism and workerism in Italy during the 1960s and 1970s - primarily that of the ‘social factory’ - “the position of the socialised worker [*operaio sociale*] in the metropolis parallels that of the mass worker in the factory” (Negri, 2018, p.vii). The relations, social and economic, of the factory have colonised all aspects of everyday as capital seeks to sate its rapacious appetite for labour to create profit and thus:

“turns even unwaged activities (e.g., home life and school life) into the work of producing and reproducing the commodity labor power. And that unwaged work, by holding down the value of labor power, increases surplus value and through it the imposition of ever more work.” (Clever, 2017, p.83)

A key point of the extension of the social relations of the factory to social reproduction for this study can be seen when it is remembered that:

“Capitalism is the first productive system where the children of the exploited are disciplined and educated in institutions organised and controlled by the ruling class” (Dalla Costa et al., 2019, p.21)

These institutions therefore, and the processes in and around them such as the act of choosing a school, are integral part of the capitalist system and cannot be analysed in some idealised autonomy from it.

2.2.6 | Signs as choice anchors: Althusser, Lacan and Žižek

Interpellation

Althusser introduces his work on ideology by writing that “the ultimate condition of production is...the reproduction of the conditions of production” (Althusser, 2008, p.1). He goes on to illustrate this with the example of what children learn at school (p.6). In examining Marx’s theories about reproduction, he investigated the state’s role in these processes and developed his theory of “Ideological State Apparatuses” (Althusser, 2008) arguing that the limit of Marx’s writing was that “the dimension of reproduction and the functions of the state are reduced, in derisory fashion, to those of intervention, and, ultimately, brute force”. (Althusser et al., 2006, p.99). Althusser, therefore, focuses on how the reproduction of labour is not just confined to the reproduction of skilled labour, but also inextricably linked with the reproduction of the power relationship between capital and labour, the “reproduction of its subjugation to the ruling ideology” (Althusser, 2008, p.7)

There is no need to go into detail on Althusser’s theory of Ideological State Apparatuses except to note that he specifically identifies schools as having “the dominant role” (Althusser, 2008, p.29) and that schools reproduce the relations of production (p.22) by ensuring that the strata of pupils it produces are “provided with the ideology which suits the role it has to fulfil

in class society” (p.29). What is of more interest for this study is a process, identified by Althusser, whereby this ideology is reified or made concrete within a subject. Althusser termed this process interpellation.

Mouffe uses this perspective to regard ideology as “a practice producing subjects” (Mouffe, 1979, p.171) arguing that in this sense the subject produced through interpellation. Mouffe continues by linking this work of ideology to Gramsci’s concept of hegemony (Gramsci, 1975). She argues that Gramsci’s analysis of ideology and hegemony dispels the notion of ideology being a form of false consciousness and instead that ideology is materialised via practices. Lewis (2017) contends, building upon Gramsci’s and Althusser’s identifications of education as a key site for this task, that pupils become “subjects of capitalist ideology” through a process of interpellation in schools (Lewis, 2017, p.305). This study argues that one of these practices is the reading of images in school prospectuses by prospective parents and pupils, and that their interpellation by the ideological messages contained within them is an example of the hegemonic work identified by Gramsci.

So what then does Althusser mean by interpellation? He writes that its function is a form of “ideological recognition” (Althusser, 2008, p.46). He stresses that this function is not a one off, unique, occurrence. Rather, we are incessantly being interpellated, we are - he says - ‘always already’ subjects, but we can unearth the sites and moments where this mechanism occurs. Althusser describes interpellation as a process of ‘hailing’ (p.48). He illustrated this hailing using the scenario of a policeman shouting “Hey, you there!”, the interpellative moment is then when an individual turns around in response to this call “because he has recognised that the hail was ‘really’ addressed to him, and that ‘it was *really him* that was hailed ” (p.48).

This returns us to Lacan's assertion that "a letter always arrives at its destination" (Lacan, 2006, p.30). For the purpose of the contention in this study the 'Hey, you there!' is shouted by the signs of class/status within the images of school promotion, and the interpellation is that momentary recognition that what is read in that image is what the reader - the subject - always-already identifies as/with.

Towards a theory of *contrepellation*

"No, you clearly don't know who you're talking to, so let me clue you in. I am not in danger, Skyler. I am the danger! A guy opens his door and gets shot and you think that of me? No. I am the one who knocks!" (Hutchison & Slovis, 2011)

The monologue above, from the hit TV show 'Breaking Bad', illustrates the revolutionary transformation of the subject - in this case the fictional Walter White, a High School Chemistry teacher who becomes a methamphetamine dealer known as 'Heisenberg' - that might occur at the moment of 'hailing' if instead of being interpellated the respondent instead 'counter interpellates'. The allegorical police officer is chased by, rather than chasing, the newly (yet always-already!) formed subject as a consequence of shouting 'Hey, you there!'.

Doing the calling, rather than being called, has a subversive potential (Martel, 2017). This reversal of hailer and hailee is "unexpected, even unwanted" (Martel, 2015, p.497). This notion of misinterpellation, as Martel calls it, offers more a tantalising glimpse into how the process of interpellation need not fall into mere instrumentalization.

In her description of the moment of interpellation Butler also steers us towards doubts over the determinism of this process. She writes that the "subject is hailed , the subject turns around, and the subject then accepts the terms by which he or she is hailed." (Butler, 1997), p.106). This notion of 'accepting the terms' suggests a degree of complicity, and with it

agency, in the moment of interpellation. At this instant then, there is perhaps a chance of a rupture in the mechanism. Not just that, to return once more to Lacan's metaphor (Lacan, 2006), the letter is not "always arriving at its destination", but rather the recipient may 'return to sender'.

It might be suggested that strategies of *contrepellation* are 'always-already' present in what Willis (1990) describes as the "profane common culture" of the young (p.128) noting, for example, that young people are particularly skilled at "appropriation [that] entails a form of symbolic work and creativity as young consumers break the ordered categories of clothes" (Willis, 1990, p.85). As Hebdige notes, mundane objects can be made to mean and mean again through "the construction of a style, in a gesture of defiance or contempt, in a smile or a sneer. It signals a Refusal." (Hebdige, 1979, p.3). As Hall and Jefferson argue, the legitimate or hegemonic culture of the dominant class will always face resistance, negotiation, modification and attempts at its overthrow as a part of continual class struggle (Hall & Jefferson, 1975).

An example of how this translates into gestures of refusal and creative *détournement* of the aesthetic mythology of the school uniform deployed could be seen when a group of male pupils protested their school uniform's proscription of shorts during a hot Summer by wearing school skirts (Morris, 2017). The work that the school uniform does in the field of social reproduction as argued in this study is well documented in Kulz's ethnographic study of a school (Kulz, 2017a) whilst the use of clothing as signifiers of resistance is notably documented in works on youth subcultures (Hebdige, 1979). Further ethnographic studies of how this *contrepellation* intersects with "working class counter-school culture" (Willis, 1978, p.2) could provide a valuable subject for contemporary ethnographic research in the schools analysed in this study.

The *Point de Capiton*

However, in another nod to Heraclitean flux, it might be noted that the processes of interpellation, and *contrepellation*, are ongoing alongside the free flow of signs and signifiers. This being the case, what then distinguishes the momentary interpellation that can occur when the images in a school prospectus are read. To answer this we can draw from Žižek’s use of the Lacanian *point de capiton*, or ‘quilting point’, and appropriate it for use at this moment of interpellation.

Lacan acknowledges this state of flux, writing that “the relationship between the signified and the signifier always appears fluid, always ready to come undone.” (Lacan, 1993, p.473) and it is this ‘coming undone’ - the *contrepellation* described above - that leads us to the analogy of ‘quilting.’ Lacan uses the illustration of “the upholsterer’s needle” (p.484) performing a *point de capiton* to describe the point where signification in a discourse is made concrete and fixed.

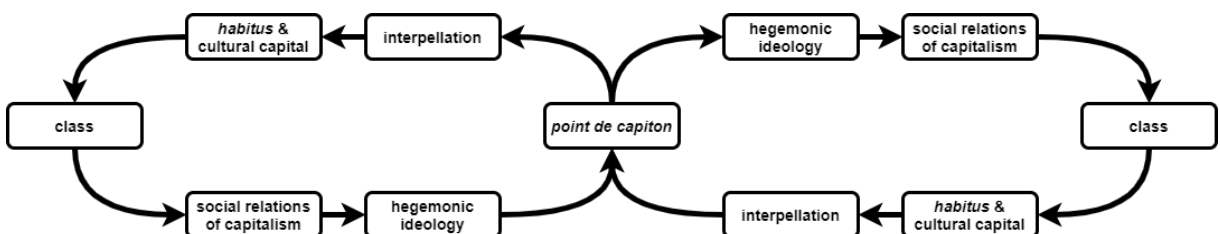


Figure 2.9. The *Point de Capiton* in the Cycle of Reproduction

Žižek sees this *point de capiton* acting to stabilise” the cohesive power of ideology” (Žižek, 2009a, p.37). In the contention of this study this is the reification of the ideological work undertaken by the images in the school prospectus, the moment where they become material circumstances in the form of school choice. This choice, mediated and framed by the interpellation of the signs of status (signified by markers of cultural capital and so on) acts as

the convergence of ideology around this single *point de capiton*. Badiou also refers to the notion of a ‘point’ where a choice or decision crystallises the “transcendental” into the “corporeal”. For him, this point acts “as choice and as place” (Badiou, 2019, pp.341-344). Similarly, the point, described by Debord as a “magical device” (Debord, 1994, pp.153) is, he argues, “the materialisation of ideology in the form of the spectacle” (p.150) where the system of (re)production achieves concrete success. The seeds of choice sown in the reading of these promotional images is a central ‘event’ in the process of social reproduction through the education system. This *point de capiton* can be illustrated in the figure below.

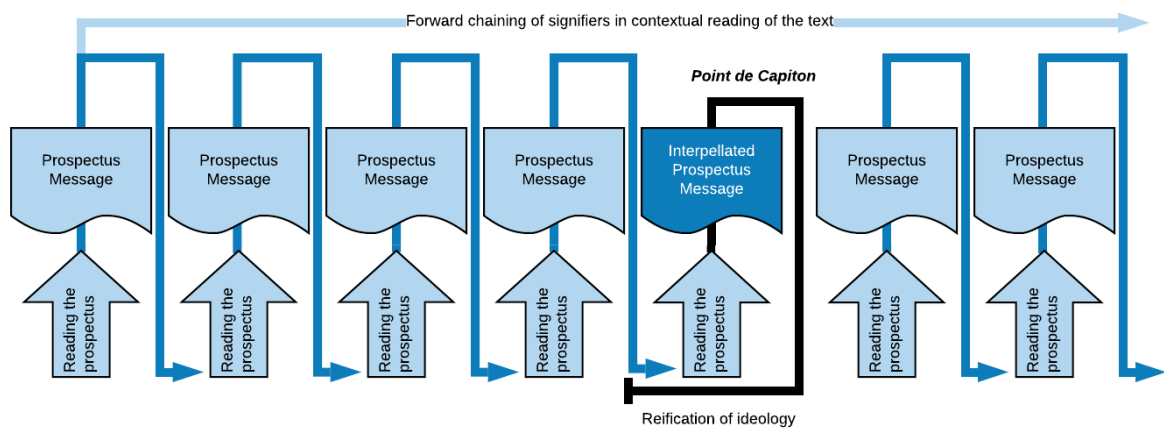


Figure 2.10. The *Point de Capiton* in the Reading of Prospectuses

2.3 | The School in this Theoretical Framework

2.3.1 | Material Conditions and the Research Context

As stated above, this research does not take place in a vacuum. There are specifics of time and place that locate and shape the questions asked and the conclusions drawn. As Marx famously said, people “make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make

it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already.” (Marx et al., 2002, p. 19) These circumstances fundamentally shape the research undertaken and are therefore a central part of it. These material conditions are the product - and the producer - of the economic and social relationships of late capitalism in South East England.

The remnants of the post-war Keynesian compromise and the welfare state it produced are being swept away by the “new spirit of capitalism” (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2007) associated with the neoliberal economic model. Over the last decade since the financial crisis of 2008 we have seen a period of imposed austerity and an emerging tension between neo-liberal and neo-conservative socioeconomic models proposed by capital.

During the three year period of this research the material conditions which ground the perspectives and subject matter have been dominated by successive crises - Brexit, Covid-19, the invasion of Ukraine, the arrival of long predicted climate change and so on - that simultaneously accelerate neoliberal ‘shock doctrine’ (Klein, 2008) reforms whilst at the same time enabling the increasing volume of populist and neo-conservative rhetoric to dominate the political agenda. Education, including both the schools that form the population of this study, and the University system within which the research is being produced, find themselves caught by both.

This study reflects the waves of social and material change, starting with a focus on the impact of neoliberal policies on schools but with an increasing acknowledgement of the influence of neo-conservative influence as the analyses progress.

2.3.2 | Independent Schools and the Education Market

Whilst the penetration of market conditions and values into the education system has accelerated to a near hegemonic state under neoliberal reforms, some origins of the calls for schools to be face the free hand of the market can be traced to resistance to the expansion of universal State education at the start of the 20th century (Currie-Knight 2019) with a continuity of pro-market thinkers building upon the work of others into ideas of Friedman (Friedman 2002) which have now become so influential, however this resistance to State funded education points us towards a perhaps more powerful blueprint for market forces under examination in this study, that of England's historic private education sector - the Independent Schools.

As described by Verkaik (Verkaik 2018) the history of fee-paying education in England stretches back to the tutors employed by the Romans - and Diocletian's legal structure of fees - but the origins of today's fee-paying Independent schools lie the charitable mission of the provision of (originally ecclesiastical) education for the 'poor'. From the establishment of the first public school, King's College Canterbury through to 1400 and 1500s this mission remained central. The wealthy were explicitly barred from the public schools, one school (*P14* in this study!) set a parental salary cap on admissions to protect their charitable intent. By the C14th however, some of the nobility were seeking to take advantage of the opportunities offered by this education and by the 1500s arguments were being made to educate the rich away from the poor. Increasingly fee paying students from wealthier strata of society began to outnumber those poorer pupils on scholarships.

By the early 1800s this system was becoming increasingly unviable. Low pupil numbers coupled with complaints about profiteering led to pressure for the public schools to become more competitive and to the convening of the Clarendon Commission to address these

concerns which ultimately led to the Endowed Schools Act of 1869 which lifted the historical restrictions upon admitting fee-paying students. Further competitive forces appeared with the emergence of the hybrid Grammar School at the start of the 1900s which provided an affordable alternative for the growing middle classes leading to increased doubts about the long-term survival of many public schools.

However, the Great Depression hit this newly expanding State sector hard, cuts to their funding provided an unexpected saviour for the public schools, a pattern repeated across successive economic crises. Cuts and funding squeezes in the state sector decreased their competitiveness with Independent schools as the choice for wealthy middle-class parents. This trend has been exacerbated on occasion through Government action to encourage enrollment in the independent sector, ostensibly to relieve pressures on a stretched State education system, such as the Direct Grant system, the Assisted Places Scheme and the aborted attempt to introduce a voucher programme in the early 1980s (Verkaik, 2018).

The voucher programme attempted by the then Education Secretary, Keith Joseph, was part of the 1979 Thatcher government's 'rolling back the State' agenda in education. A key plank of this, and successive, Governments' approach has been the introduction of market values such as choice and competition into the Education system. The 1980 Education Act enshrined the ideal of parental choice of school into law (Ball, 2008), and in 1991 the Parents' Charter was launched with the intention of publishing information for parents to use when making this choice. This was swiftly followed in 1992 with the publication of the first school 'league tables'. The Labour government elected in 1997 continued many of these ideas with the aim of having State Schools competing with Independent Schools for middle-class intakes (Ball, 2008). The Independent sector, however, in turn responded with a price fixing cartel (via the so-called 'Sevenoaks Survey') involving 51 schools (Verkaik, 2018), the appearance of of a

lower-cost, but for-profit chain (GEMs), and an increased reliance upon the recruitment of international students to boost numbers and income.

As the economic crisis launched by the financial crash of 2008 and exacerbated by austerity programmes, a global pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine continues, history suggests that the Independent sector will once again receive a boost in its ability to compete with a State sector suffering from funding cuts and over-stretched resources. After decades of neoliberal government parents, inculcated in the ideas of choice and competition have also seen the normalisation of fee-paying in education through the cost of preschool child care and the entrenchment of University fees as a life-long financial ‘investment’.

2.3.3 | Neoliberalism and late Capitalism

The contention of this study centres upon a machinery of choice, in this case the opportunity for parents in England to choose a school for their children. Whilst we have, above, looked at this choice as a pivotal moment (and site) of interpellation, it is equally integral to this work that choice is a key component of neoliberal ideology and practice in the English education system.

The Obligation of Free Choice in Neoliberal Societies

“Economics are the method; the object is to change the heart and soul.”

(Thatcher & Butt, 1981)

With those words Margaret Thatcher proclaimed the relentless “ideological assault” of the rhetoric of the neoliberals (Harvey, 2007). Freedom of choice is, as Žižek notes, at the heart of neoliberal ideology (Žižek, 2001) , but this choice is mandatory as we are “ordered to embrace freely...what is anyway imposed” on us (Žižek, 2009b, p.36).

The economic argument is that choice leads to competition which in turn incentivises efficiency and improves the product or provision. This has been a cornerstone of neoliberal drives towards the privatisation of previously state or social domains such as education, healthcare and infrastructure. Choice as a neoliberal doctrine emerged from the economists of the Chicago School (Chernomas & Hudson, 2017) the theory being that rational choice (by the public) is a more effective process for the effective functioning of the market than government intervention. Therefore, choice goes hand in hand with deregulation - another key element of neoliberalism that we are seeing being implemented in education policy in England. As Dardot and Laval (2017) point out, the imposition of choice is not only a means to strengthen existing competitions but a means of creating new ones where they previously did not exist. They too point to the example of Friedman's advocacy of voucher schemes in education as an example of this construction of competitions. For them, 'freedom to choose' would be better termed "the obligation to choose" (Dardot & Laval, 2017)

There are other notable theories examining the role of individual choice and decision making in late capitalism that need to be acknowledged, if not endorsed or explored in detail, at this point. Goldthorpe and Breen developed what they called 'Rational Action Theory' to explain how educational choices contribute towards "class differentials in educational attainment" (Goldthorpe, 2000, p.182) citing differences in resources, expectations of success and relative risk aversion as factors influencing the decisions that generate these differences. Beck, meanwhile, takes a view on risk as a factor in choice that is closer to the models of investment and debt described below. He views choice as a sort of self-produced biography (Beck, 1992, p.135) which individualises risk as "personal failure" or the consequence of 'bad choices'.

Documenting the emergence of these neoliberal values, Toolan records a notable shift in the language used in The Times newspaper and in the manifestos of British political parties from

1971 to 2011 with the word ‘choice’ becoming increasingly prominent.(Toolan, 2018). This reflects the success of the political project undertaken by the neoliberals “ to re-establish the conditions for capital accumulation and to restore the power of economic elites.” (Harvey, 2007, p.19). Whilst Toolan’s work illustrates the change in language that was being produced, Piketty has notably charted the material and financial ‘restoration’ - “hyperconcentrated wealth” being one example - (Piketty, 2014, p.336) that has occurred since the 1980s. We have already seen above how the widening gap in inequality produced by this restoration of elites manifests in Britain today, but here we note its cultivation in the logic and values of neoliberal hegemony and the dismantling of the post-war Keynesian compromise.

Debt, Investment and the Entrepreneurship of the Self

The desire by the new neoliberal hegemony to distance itself from the *ancien régime* of European Social Democracy is nicely illustrated by the urban legend that reports US President George W. Bush as saying ‘the problem with the French is that they don't have a word for entrepreneur’. Whilst the intended humour in this fable tends to focus on poking fun at Bush, the underlying framework within which the joke works is one of the substitution of a competitive individualism replacing the post-war socialised interventions that characterised European economies.

This focus on the entrepreneurial spirit was not confined to a purely economic blueprint but, as the proclamation by Thatcher above shows, is about the internalisation of these values. As Lazzarato notes:

“It then becomes unnecessary to create one's own small business in order to become an entrepreneur; one need only behave like one, adopt the same logic, the attitudes, the ways of relating to the world, to oneself, and to others.”
(Lazzarato, 2012, p.94)

This notion of the ‘entrepreneurship of the self’, of course, echoes Foucault’s idea that our lives themselves “must be made into a sort of permanent and multiple enterprise.” (Foucault, 2008, p.241). This, Foucault argues, means the internalisation of the economic model of capitalism and its relationships of supply and demand, of profit, cost and investment (p.242) and their application in our social worlds. Our choices, therefore, are governed by these laws of capitalist economics. We make them according to individualised logics of investment, and debt, in order to extract surplus value at a later point. A logic of accumulation that applies not just to economic capital, but capital in its social, cultural and educational forms as identified by Bourdieu as well (Bourdieu, 1986b). Lazzarato lists “poverty, unemployment, precariousness, welfare benefits, low wages, reduced pensions, etc.” (Lazzarato, 2012) as the products we are expected to manage as a consequence of our administration of these capitals in the world of the entrepreneur of the self. (p.51). Federici describes this as investing in the reproduction of our own exploitation as capital has shifted the moral and financial burden of the reproduction of the socialised worker squarely onto the shoulders of the workers (waged or not) themselves, along with the consequences of the failure of these investments. (Federici, 2018, p.64)

“The lone voyager armed with cunning is already *homo oeconomicus*, whom all reasonable people will one day resemble: for this reason the Odyssey is already a Robinsonade. Both these proto-typical shipwrecked sailors make their weakness—that of the individual who breaks away from the collective—their social strength. Abandoned to the vagaries of the waves, helplessly cut off, they are forced by their isolation into a ruthless pursuit of their atomistic interest. They embody the principle of the capitalist economy...the possibility of foundering is seen as a moral justification for profit.” (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2007, p.48)

As Horkheimer and Adorno picturesquely describe above, this entrepreneurialisation of society and the social is also an individualisation. We can see this repeated across neoliberal society with communities replaced by families, mass factories replaced by the ‘brand me’ gig

economy (Fleming, 2017), and the enclosure of remaining communal spaces such as high streets, libraries and pubs.

Inextricably linked to the idea of investment is that of debt. As Federici (2018) describes, the neoliberal project has been accompanied by the incessant message that since the 1980s, proclaims “borrowing from banks to provide for one’s reproduction as a form of entrepreneurship” (Federici, 2018, p.64) ,fully in line with the doctrine of the entrepreneurialism of the self. Class relations - the social relations being reproduced by the mechanisms used in schools studied here - she argues, are mystified as we “self-manage” our exploitation (p.64). This ideology has been imposed materially through what Federici describes as the “financialization of reproduction” (p.62), the dismantling of the State and Social sectors and their replacement with market based provisions which function as “immediate sites of capital accumulation”. This returns us to Cleaver’s point above highlighting the necessity - from the perspective of Capital - of ensuring that reproduction and consumption are inseparable. It is this phenomenon we are locating in the site of school marketing.

There are also class differences regarding the idea of investment in education, Weiss (Weiss, 2019) argues that the moral valorization of investment is a central part of the constructed middle-class ethos, Reay and Ball “suggest that working-class decision-making in education is infused by ambivalence, fear and a reluctance to invest too much in an area where failure is still a common working-class experience” (Reay & Ball, 1997, p. 89). Bourdieu, in discussing the concept of investment, argues the act of investing “implies at once an *inclination* and an *ability* to play the game” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.118), these he says are not natural or intrinsic to people but are “socially and historically constituted”.

The hegemonic value of personal investment in educational capital has enabled a new stream of income for *rentier* capitalists - in return for qualifications/credentials student loans provide a guaranteed rental income for decades afterwards. As Graeber notes attending college now entails being in debt “peonage” for at least half of one's adult life. (Graeber, 2010) The sheer scale of this can be seen in the fact that the \$1 trillion value of student loans in the United States as of 2012 was greater than all other forms of unsecured debt added together (Soederberg, 2014, p.104). In the United Kingdom the value of student debt currently stands at over £140 billion and this is predicted to rise to £2 trillion by the 2060s (Bolton, 2020, pp.15-16).

The same report suggests that, although comparisons are difficult, the United Kingdom has a greater proportion of students in debt, borrowing larger amounts and subject to higher interest rates than elsewhere (p.24) Such high levels of debt are portrayed as ‘wise choices’ and a form of investment fully in line with neoliberal values as Harris et al. note: “In England, prevailing public discourses champion student-borrowers with language that deflects from personal indebtedness and focuses instead on ‘choice’ and ‘ambition’” (Harris et al., 2020, p.3). The rapid indebtedness of students since the 1990s follows hard on the heels of Thatcher’s 1980s “crusade” (Francis, 2012) to increase rates of home ownership (and consequently mortgage debt) that ran in tandem with wide-ranging privatisations of the economy that laid the foundations for the current marketisation along neoliberal lines of education and schools.

2.3.4 | The Neoliberal School

“Governments could require a minimum level of schooling financed by giving parents vouchers redeemable for a specified maximum sum per child per year if spent on "approved" educational services. Parents would then be free to spend this sum and

any additional sum they themselves provided on purchasing educational services from an "approved" institution of their own choice. The educational services could be rendered by private enterprises operated for profit, or by non-profit institutions.” (Friedman, 2002, p.89)

Originally written in 1962 these words provided the blueprint for the end game of neoliberal education reforms, many of which, as we have seen, have already come to pass through the actions of successive British governments over the last four decades.

Whilst ostensibly many arguments in defence of the marketisation of education have extolled the economic virtues of efficiency and productivity as Kulz notes “neoliberalism asserts a move from qualities to quantities, yet quantities also have qualities.” (Kulz, 2020, p.4). These qualities were explicitly recognised by Thatcher when proclaiming economics as the method for changing the soul and indeed have always been present in ideas that have shaped the neoliberal project. Echoing the themes of today’s so-called ‘culture wars’, another key architect of today’s neoliberal ideology Ayn Rand wrote in the mid 1970s of state ‘progressive’ education indoctrinating children into a “mob spirit” alongside her belief in an economy based on individualised competition (Currie-Knight, 2019, p.62)

From the outset education, and schools, were at the forefront of the neoliberal dismantling of the Keynesian compromise, a key stage for what Hall describes as the rolling back of this post-war settlement and the restoration of the territories of private capital (Hall, 2011, p.707). In the context of capital’s response to the failures of the post-war Keynesian compromise we saw the aggressive implementation of neoliberal policies in the United Kingdom following the election of Margaret Thatcher in 1979. Ball argues that “ the processes of democratisation which were at work within parts of comprehensive education became increasingly intolerable, a new set of rules were set in place – competition and choice.” (Ball, 2003, p.29). One key

move as identified by Glennester (1991) was the implementation of a “quasi-market” in schools following the Education Reform Act of 1988.

Market values such as choice and competition have colonised previously private spheres and, indeed, became increasingly hegemonic in the ideological work they were doing. In education this quasi-market has been maintained and expanded by successive governments and policies. Ball notes this commodification occurring at both the level of the State and in the “market in educational solutions” emerging from the new climate created by these reforms (Ball, 2018). In turn, Ball argues, those finding new opportunities for the profit-making business in the edu-market have a material interest in “colonising and re-forming the meaning and practices of education” (Ball, 2018, p.588) through the direction of travel of reforms.

Choice

A fundamental strand of these changes has been the reification of choice in education. Most spectacularly (in the Debordian sense) is the promotion of parents’ right to choose their childrens’ schools. Functioning as a form of commodity fetish in late capitalism the values ascribed to this choice, as we have seen above, mask both the ideological and economic work being done by this change in relations.

An early expression of this came in Pinochet’s Chile, a regime that acted as an unrestrained laboratory for the neoliberal economic ideas that have followed across the rest of the world (Valdes, 2008). In 1981 the regime implemented a universal school voucher system.

Glennester made the connections between the introduction of a quasi-market and these ideas shortly after the Education Reform Act came into force noting the resemblance between the new parental ‘right to choose’ and the voucher schemes advocated in the works of the

neoliberals (Glennister, 1991).

Whilst no form of voucher scheme has yet been introduced into mainstream Secondary schooling in the United Kingdom - although a limited trial was attempted in Kent in the 1980s (Ball, 2008) - Reay (Reay, 2017) notes that Governments from both major UK political parties have engaged in educational reforms that pave the way for the potential introduction of charges at the point of use, which could then be funded through vouchers issued to parents - or 'personal budgets' in the manner exemplified in the Children and Families Act of 2014 (*Special educational needs support: families to be given personal budgets - GOV.UK*, n.d.). Verkaik (Verkaik, 2018) further notes that the Thatcher government considered "outright privatisation" of state education in the early 1980s.

The idea of voucher schemes is only the most transparent manifestation of the emerging role of parents as individual consumers engaged in a commodity relationship with their children's education. The other side of this commodity relationship is the changing role of schools as competing providers of product. Ball notes how this emerging relationship is a dynamic one shaped by, and shaping, the relative advantages that some parents possess (Ball, 2003) "Ideals of equitable provision for all have been left behind" argues Kulz, "with parents reconfigured as consumers and schools as small businesses competing for survival." (Kulz, 2017b, p.87)

This aspect of the marketisation of education, its commodification and the changing role of parent-as-consumer provides one side of the processes analysed in this study. The other side as we shall see below is the schools' increasing interests in advertising themselves to these newly defined consumers. Of course, promotional and marketing material are not the only sources of information that feed into parental choice as Ball notes "the grapevine, the under life of the school can, to some extent, be unlocked, and in ways that specifically address issues that

parents are especially interested in, but ones that, in their publicity, schools may well choose to ignore. The grapevine is a powerful way in which parents can circumvent professional control over information and the resulting selective public presentation” (Ball & Vincent, 1998 p.382) but of course “There are many different grapevines and an individual's access to them is structured primarily by class-related factors” (Ball & Vincent, 1998, p.382) and here too we may find *habitus* and interpellation at play as they “derive from and reproduce people's 'cultural scripts'” Ball & Vincent, 1998, p.382).

Returning to Bourdieu for a moment, it can be seen how school choice resembles what he terms a “rite of institution” (Bourdieu, 1991, p.118), it is an act “solemnly marking the passage over a line which establishes a fundamental division in the social order”. However, whilst the act of choosing a school legitimates social divisions, these divisions already exist. The act of choice is an act of recognition that functions to consecrate this established social order. As he wrote in ‘Distinction’ “...choices always owe part of their value to the value of the chooser, and because, to a large extent, this value makes itself known and recognized through the manner of choosing.” (Bourdieu, 1986a, p.84). A key means for this recognition to work is via *habitus* which is shaped by, and shapes in turn, “the impossibilities, freedoms and necessities, opportunities and prohibitions inscribed in the objective conditions” (Bourdieu, 1992, p.54) In practice, Bourdieu argues this leads choices - such as those around the site and nature of schooling - are inclined (not determined) to “make a virtue of necessity” and to limit the range of choices to the “thinkable” and exclude prior even to the act of choosing paths that are “anyway denied”. So the elite no more consider their local Comprehensive School as one of their choices than the overwhelming majority would enquire as to the application process for Eton College. As noted above, the durable dispositions of *habitus* that determine the constraints within which parents and children make these choices

may be described in terms of “taste or vocational sense” yet they still “ indicate the roundabout effects of objective conditions,” (Bourdieu, 2011, p.34)

Segregation

Both neoliberalism’s advocates and opponents argue that the emphasis on choice creates a situation where school enrollment can be made according to social and cultural preferences - in Friedman’s words “a market permits each to satisfy his own taste” (Friedman, 2002, p.94). A logical consequence of this is that there will be “systematic differences in how schools choose to market themselves, and that this depends on the social class the schools are understood – by the recipients of their marketing materials – to be servicing.” (McCandless, 2015, p.809). These audiences will, in turn, be targeted by school marketing “ with symbolic and emotional messages,” (Wilson & Carlsen, 2016, p.24) designed to appeal to the tastes associated with their social position. So, far from providing access and opportunity to all, the machinery of choice can lead to entrenching difference and producing socially segregated schools. This is recognised by the Government as an issue with the Social Mobility Commission reporting that “School admissions processes need to tackle social segregation in schools.” (*Elitist Britain 2019* , 2019, p.9). Reay (2017) draws attention to the fact that “schools in England are among the most socially segregated in the developed world.” (p.30).

Bourdieu (1996) writes of schools standing in for older forms of inherited privilege. He argues that - what we in England refer to as ‘the old school tie’ - takes over (or perhaps supplements) the role historically played by familial nepotism and strategic marriages in the reproduction of privilege (Bourdieu, 1996b, p.285). The “school and corps solidarity”(along with new familial and marital ties being forged within it) that Bourdieu writes of has made

the news during the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic with accusations of “Chumocracy” (Conn et al., 2020) directed towards the British Government. The school-based “strategy of reproduction” (Bourdieu, 1996b) relies for its success upon mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion both within the school setting and in school entrance procedures.

Studies have found that school choice “exacerbates patterns of segregation along lines of race and class” (Wilson & Carlsen, 2016, p.25) with practices of “cream-skimming” and the neglect of less privileged potential entrants (Schuetz et al., 2013/2013 p.127). Reay (2020) argues that such segregation is both endorsed and, crucially, legitimated by the mythologies of meritocracy we live within today. This segregation, she contends, in turn reinforces and reproduces itself. Increasingly segregated classes have less meaningful contact with groups outside their own bubble and the increasing othering that this produces leads to “sanctioning prejudice and denigration” towards the disadvantaged groups from the privileged (Reay, 2020, p.3).

Marketisation

“The same situation exists on the side of the consumers or buyers. Again the knowledge they are supposed to possess in a state of competitive equilibrium cannot be legitimately assumed to be at their command before the process of competition starts. Their knowledge of the alternatives before them is the result of what happens on the market of such activities as advertising, etc. and the whole organization of the market serves mainly the need of spreading the information on which the buyer is to act.” (Hayek, 1996, p.96)

Kulz (2020, p.16) describes how she encountered “a passion for neoliberal rationality” when interviewing the CEOs of Multi Academy Trusts. She recounts their desire for their employees to identify with, and internalise the values symbolically promoted by their brand.

Danesi (2002) describes how advertising is embedded into the “social mindset” using “positioning” and “image creation” (Danesi, 2002, p.183) thus what is commonly viewed as

‘branding’ deploys, echoing *habitus*, a functional dialectic between internal and external identification.

In the terrain of competition schools, like any other commodity, are compelled to target different ‘market segments’ with this marketing. McCandless argues that “there are systematic differences in how schools choose to market themselves, and that this depends on the social class the schools are understood – by the recipients of their marketing materials – to be servicing.” (McCandless, 2015, p.809). This marketing, he acknowledges, must appeal to the *habitus* of the target market. Bourdieu himself wrote that advertising draws from an “inherited cultural fund of words and images” (Bourdieu, 2005, p.23) that enables the consumer to “recognise themselves” in the advertisement and “feel at home”.

Competition

Competition in the neoliberal school is instituted both between schools fighting for market shares of the same body of consumers, but also between those forced to become consumers, the parents and pupils. This “academic struggle for one’s life” (Bourdieu, 1996b, p.110) as Bourdieu notes, where the “cult of the winner” is enshrined (Bourdieu, 1999, p.102), requires for success “competitors to invest themselves completely in the competition” (Bourdieu, 1996b, p.110). In a literal sense this compels parents and children into the entrepreneurship of the self and the debts this accrues as discussed above. It also generates “complete adherence to the game and all the values that, being produced by the game, seem to found and justify it”.

As noted in the passage by Horkheimer and Adorno cited above “the possibility of foundering” is the necessary obverse of this cult of the winner (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2007). For some to win others necessarily have to lose in this world, but in a competition framed by

the paradigm of individualised meritocracy this has “profound consequences for the way in which the losers in the hyper-competitive game that education has become, both view themselves and deal with their inferior status”. (Reay, 2020, p.3). This is symbolic violence *par excellence* that enforces participation and the logic of choice, investment and debt that follows. As Reay forcefully argues positioning failure in this educational competition as individual responsibility enables inequality to be justified and encourages a climate of “looking down, disliking and expressing contempt for those who have not been given the opportunity to succeed.” (Reay, 2020, p.7).

Nowhere is this more crudely illustrated today than in the grotesque media spectacle of photographs of the pitiful scraps of food - euphemistically titled ‘hampers’ - being provided to children in receipt of free school meals (Blackall, 2021) during the third national Covid lockdown. The move away from vouchers to parcels was spurred on by the rhetoric of the ‘undeserving poor’ failing to make the right choices, such invective at its most hyperbolic is illustrated by Conservative MP Ben Bradley’s suggestion that those in receipt of such vouchers might use them to obtain ‘crack’ cocaine (Walker, 2020). The circulation of these images, whilst generating outrage, also sustains a disciplinary function - the consequences of failure laid bare: *pour encourager les autres*. Reay describes the “permanent sense of dread, fear and anxiety about having to go without, never having enough, and constantly making do.” (Reay, 2013, p.667), imposed feelings that undermine, yet underpin, the “sense of worth” of those unable to ‘triumph’ in neoliberalism’s competitive meritocracy.

Chapter 3 | Methodology

This chapter provides an overview of, and rationale for, the ontological, epistemological and methodological positions taken in this research. It aims to give transparency to the processes adopted in the design and execution of the study and to consider the ethical implications and questions raised by an unashamedly interpretivist and critical piece of research.

3.1 | Paradigm Rationale

At the time of writing, angry voices on the television claim victory both for Trump and at the same time for Biden in the 2020 Presidential Election. As observed by Trayner (Trayner, 2020) this has been characterised by the two sides deploying ‘alternative facts’ in what has been described as a post-truth political climate. Signs of this post-truth climate have been seen here in the United Kingdom. During the Brexit referendum campaign Michael Gove, former Education Secretary and current member of the British Government, was quoted as saying “I think people in this country have had enough of experts” (Colville, 2016). Such sentiments have continued to be expressed by some close to government during the Covid-19 pandemic with former Conservative leader, Iain Duncan Smith, writing of “giving in to the scientific advisers” who, he says, believe their “advice to be more like commandments written on stone” (Duncan Smith, 2020).

For social scientists, and those of us from a critical tradition, there is a, perhaps uncomfortable, connection between this post-truth terrain and elements of postmodernism (Fuller, 2017). Yet these connections, potentially, position qualitative researchers in a unique position to navigate and dissect power in a post-truth age (Trayner, 2020). Baudrillard - arguably anticipating such developments in his writings on simulacra and simulations notes “...the impossibility of staging an illusion. Illusion is no longer possible, because the real is no longer possible” (Baudrillard & Poster, 1988, p.177) . He claims, instead , that we should

focus on the political problem of offensive simulation. Whilst it may seem that Marx was right that “all that is solid melts into air” (Marx & Engels, 2002, p.223) we still remain “compelled to face with sober senses” our real conditions of life.

Two distinct methodological traditions can be observed within the social sciences (Pring, 2015) that are often labelled Positivism and Constructivism. These two broad camps are often portrayed as philosophically at odds with each other (Moses & Knutsen, 2012) and as the source for fundamental disagreements between social scientists. These two strands of thought manifest as very real contestations of the validity of types of research and the findings it generates. Questions of truth, objectivity and the absolutism of facts and knowledge are raised by these traditions. As the idea of ‘evidence based practice’ is presented as adding rigour and validation to policy in education, in politics and beyond, the legitimacy of evidence claims may be examined with reference to the arguments contained within the schools of thought adhering to the Positivist and Constructivist traditions. A recent digital ethnography of the divide between ‘Progressives’ and ‘Traditionalists’ amongst some teachers on Twitter (Watson, 2020) argues that an allegiance to positivism is a form of politicised opposition to “‘pseudoscience’ - or what is sometimes portrayed as postmodern or relativist approaches“ (p.11), in some ways echoing the polemic of Sokal and Bricmont (Sokal & Bricmont, 1998) and their critique of “abuses that are currently fashionable in influential intellectual circles” (p.13).

For researchers, and those seeking to apply the findings of research within their practice, these arguments that flow through methodology into research methods and the types of data gathering and analysis undertaken will only increase in scrutiny as knowledge claims become more central in public life. Researchers will need to be able to situate their methods and methodology within these traditions and to be able to justify the path they have taken when

presenting their findings. This is, of course, already the case within academic review but the spotlight is increasing.

Moses and Knutsen describe the Positivist, or Naturalist, tradition as having been drawn from the Natural sciences, although some have described this as a “naive faith” in the natural sciences (Corbetta, 2003), and their assertion of a “real world” that exists independently of the researcher or their experience of it. Pring describes this view as holding that there is an objective reality that can be observed. Experimental observations can be made and the results drawn from this create a body of knowledge that reflects the world as it is, Mose and Knutsen similarly describe this approach as producing observations that can be tested and result in empirical verification. The tradition often known as Constructivism, however, argues that this independence of the object is not possible. There are multiple realities (Pring, 2015) and these realities are socially constructed, Thus research findings, knowledge and so on are created rather than discovered. Whilst Pring describes the divide between the two traditions as “false dualism” (Pring, 2015) and seeks to reconcile the two strands the antagonism can be traced back to philosophers such as Descartes, Spinoza, Hegel and beyond and continues to provoke disagreement and argument to this day.

Methodological Choice and Decision Making for the Researcher

The “spectres of Marx” (Derrida, 1994) echo repeatedly through my research in its framing both theoretically (in the critical tradition) and conceptually in forms of reproduction and social relations under examination. The production and reproduction of material conditions through social relations is a central theme of my work. Such motivations are not without precedent in educational research. Cohen et al. describe researchers whose “expressed intention is deliberately political - the emancipation of individuals and groups in an

egalitarian society” (Cohen et al., 2000). This political purpose, however, leads to a significant area of criticism.

A key objectivist critique of a constructivist standpoint within educational research is that its subjectivity is attractive to those such as myself with a political agenda (Shipman, 1998). This, it is argued, could cast doubt on the validity of the research. Shipman notes that during the 1970s both Willis and Scharff were engaged in research in similar areas but as they took an interpretive approach in their research this led them to draw different conclusions from similar bodies of data. This, Shipman suggests, demonstrates that a subjectivist stance allows the preconceptions of researchers to determine the findings they produce (Shipman, 1998). This challenge to the validity and reliability of research with an interpretive stance could undermine the impact of the research and thus defeat its very purpose. When undertaking research from a constructivist position therefore significant defences of its reliability and validity must be available.

The stance of the researcher on epistemology versus ontology thus informs, and is informed by in turn, not only by the researchers motivations but the practice of their research.

Methodology, methods and ethical concerns are all dependent upon this philosophical position. In my case, there is an ethical duty of transparency and reflexivity regarding the political intentions of the research and the philosophical underpinnings of this position. (Kimmel, 1988). This duty, however, of revealing the “conscious partiality” of the research need not be seen as a weakness, but instead can be celebrated (Bryman, 2012) and embraced.

Smith argues that “writing in a style of "thick description" can be encouraged in our portrayal of the visual encounters we observe.” (Smith, 2005) and this perspective aligns with the Barthesian approach to the semiotic analysis of images that will be employed in this study.

The Influence of Feminist Methodologies

Harraway (2003) argued that “myth and look mutually constitute each other” (p.23) and insisted (1988) upon the “embodied nature of all vision” (p.581). It is impossible, she contends, for knowledge to be disembodied. There can be no ‘God Trick’, no “conquering gaze from nowhere” (p.581). Drawing from Harraway, this means that not only that what becomes known through this research is shaped by the positionality of the researcher but that this positionality - and what I “can know” (Harraway, 2003, p.200) - is shaped in turn through this research, through the embodiment of the gaze I cast.

Such a method of analysis chimes also with Lykke’s feminist take on what she calls the story telling practice or narrative function of scientific enquiry (Lykke, 2010). She echoes Foucault in situating Science as discourse, a kind of dialectic between the knower and the known, in a process that much like the *point de capiton* described above both frames and anchors. Lykke argues that “the knower will always be anchored” (p.127) - bodily, socially and historically. This, she says, allows for a “Postconstructionist Feminism” that creates “a mobile multiplicity of partial perspectives” (p.135) of which this study is just one. Lykke argues that such a methodology is situated, partial, multiple, ‘from below’ and neither relativised nor universalised. This methodological approach, adopted here, is also echoed in the processes identified in the data and the situated *habitus* both on display and at work.

Research Approach

“Social space” Jameson argues, “is now completely saturated with the culture of the image” (Jameson, 1998, p.111). This study chose to focus on the visual dimension of the neoliberal school through its promotional images contained within school prospectuses and brochures. In late capitalism this visual dimension is ever present in our daily life, in previously private and social spheres. Goldman (2011) starts his work by noting that “Advertisements saturate our

social lives. We participate daily in deciphering advertising images and messages” (p.1).

Barthes notes that advertisements provide optimal opportunities to read images for meaning because “if the image contains signs, we can be sure that in advertising these signs are full”. (Barthes, 1984b, p.33).

Beyond that, over the last half a century or so we have seen these images and messages “merge into a common stream” (Debord, 1994) so they no longer form merely a “collection of images” but rather “a social relationship between people that is mediated by images”. This ‘Spectacle’, Debord argues, has transformed the image(s) into an objective, material force that produces, and - central to this study - reproduces the social relations of late capitalism (Goldman, 2011). Žižek (2009) refers to the cult sci-fi film ‘They Live’ in his discussion of the power of vision in ideology:

”...once you put the glasses on and see directly the Master-Signifier, it no longer determines you. Which means that, before you see the ideological injunction through the glasses, you also saw it, but were unaware of the fact. To refer to the fourth missing term of Rumsfeldian epistemology, the injunctions were your 'unknown knows'. This is why really seeing them hurts.” (Žižek, 2009b, p.xii)

Žižek argues that “our natural sight is ideological” (p.xiii) and this function of images creates a ‘plague of fantasies’. Williams (1976) draws attention attention to the tensions inherent in the image by returning to its root word *imago* and noting that “the significations of imagination and especially imaginary are kept well away from the mC20 use of image in advertising and politics” (p.131) the “manipulative processes of image as perceived reputation’. Žižek explains that the tension between this manipulation and the imagination in images plays out in fantasy.

”To put it in somewhat simplified terms: fantasy does not mean that when I desire a strawberry cake and cannot get it in reality, I fantasize about eating it; the problem is, rather: *how do I know that I desire a strawberry cake in the first place? This is what fantasy tells me*” (Žižek, 2009, p.7)

The “impossible gaze” (p.22) required by this fantasy, Žižek argues, functions as a kind of *point de capiton* to create “depoliticized (re)narrativization”. In this study I shall argue that the plague of fantasies contained within the images found in school prospectuses act in this way, as a *point de caption* for neoliberal ideologies of choice and competition and the consequent reproduction of privilege and disadvantage. The images analysed here work ideologically. The image interpellated by the viewer:

“simultaneously closes the actual span of choices (fantasy renders and sustains the structure of the forced choice, it tells us how we are to choose if we are to maintain the freedom of choice”(Žižek, 2009, p.39)

For this reason this study focussed on the image as data, and visual methods of analysing it whilst adhering to Mannay’s caution that this should be “embedded in the narratives of its inception, reception, interpretation and impact.” (Mannay, 2016). The reception of the images under analysis here is worthy of its own research beyond the scope of this study, but I attempted to interpret their inception and potential impact by applying a critical theoretical lens upon them as objects of inquiry in their own right (Mannay, 2016). The aim being, as Hall puts it, to “unmask” the essential relations contained within them. (Hall, 2003, pp.115-116). This unmasking should not be taken as the patronising reveal deployed by a conjuror of cheap tricks but, as Sandoval argues, a part of a methodology of liberation.

“As Hegel had already pointed out, the methodology that allows one to read forms of domination as “artifacts” is a familiar behavior among powerless subjects, who early on learn to analyze every object under conditions of domination, especially when set in exchange with the master/colonizer (what is his style of dressing? her mode of speaking? why does he gesture? when do they smile?) in order to determine how, where, and when to construct and insert an identity that will facilitate continued existence of self and/or community. Throughout the de-colonial writings of people of color, from Sojourner Truth to Tracy Chapman, this profound commitment to sign reading emerges as a means to ensure survival.” (Sandoval, 2000, p.85)

Methodological Context

The broad(est) context to this study is the ongoing expansion of late capitalism's neoliberal market processes and relations into previously social domains. Whilst this has been an ongoing project for half a century, this 'enclosing' has picked up pace and mass since the global financial crisis of 2008 and the years of austerity policies that have followed. At the time of writing the Covid-19 pandemic's disruption of these processes has thrust fields such as education and health care into the limelight.

This study examined how these market paradigms manifest in processes of individualised choice and competition which through the (re)organisation of "cultural hegemony" (Gramsci, 1988) reinforce schools' roles as "ideological state apparatuses" (Althusser, 2008) enabling the reproduction of privilege (Bourdieu, 1996b) and disadvantage.

3.2 | Research Design

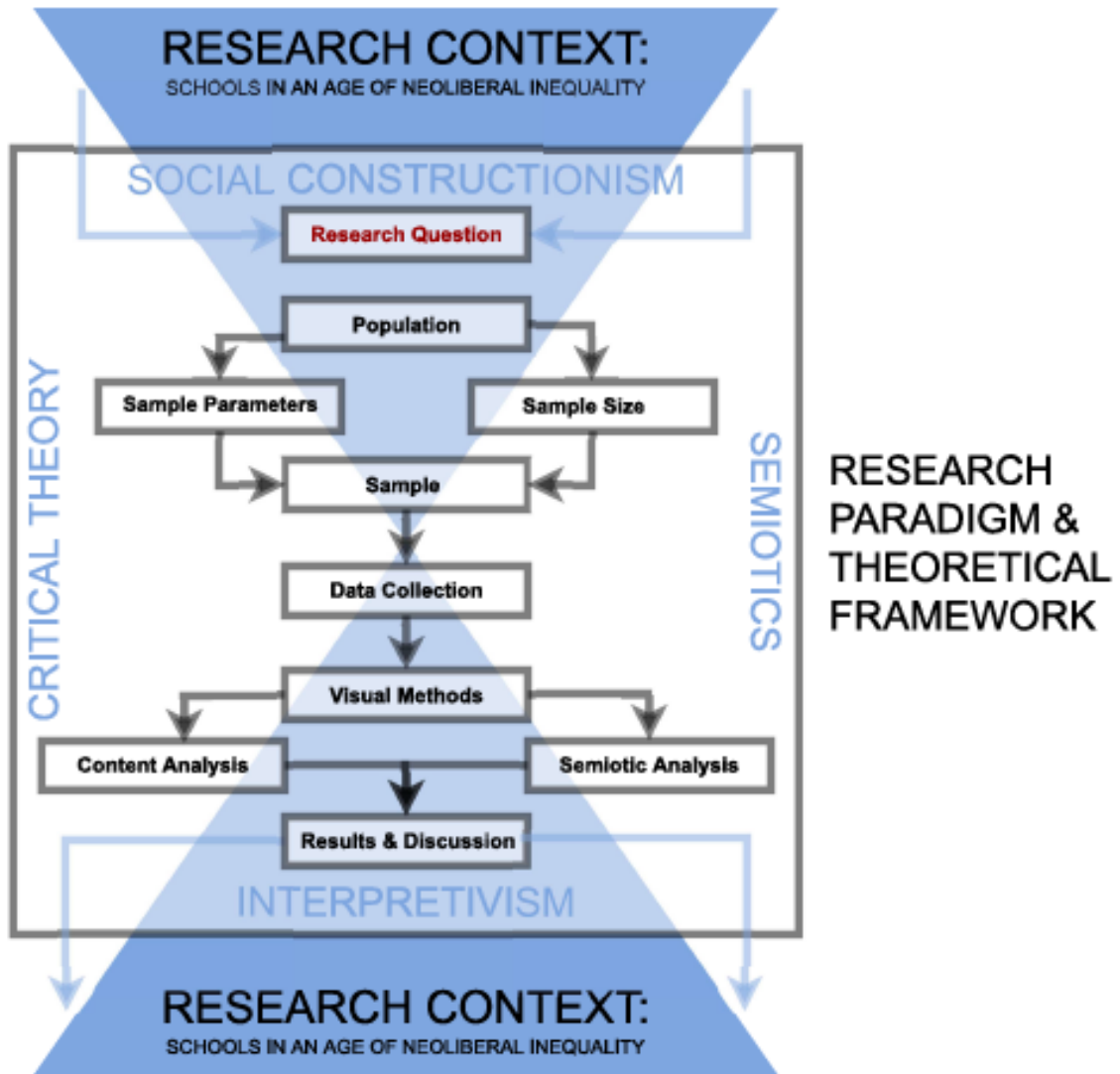
The key aim of the research design was to distil what could be, and is, an almost infinite array of questions posed by the problem of inequality and the school in a neoliberal environment (and the subsequently almost infinite approaches to answering them) into a single, visually focussed, angle.

After reflecting upon the theoretical, conceptual and methodological frameworks within which the research would be situated (as detailed here and in Chapter 2.3) a research design could be sketched out that was both 'fit for purpose' in exploring schools' role in social reproduction but also true to research(ers') ethos and philosophical standpoint.

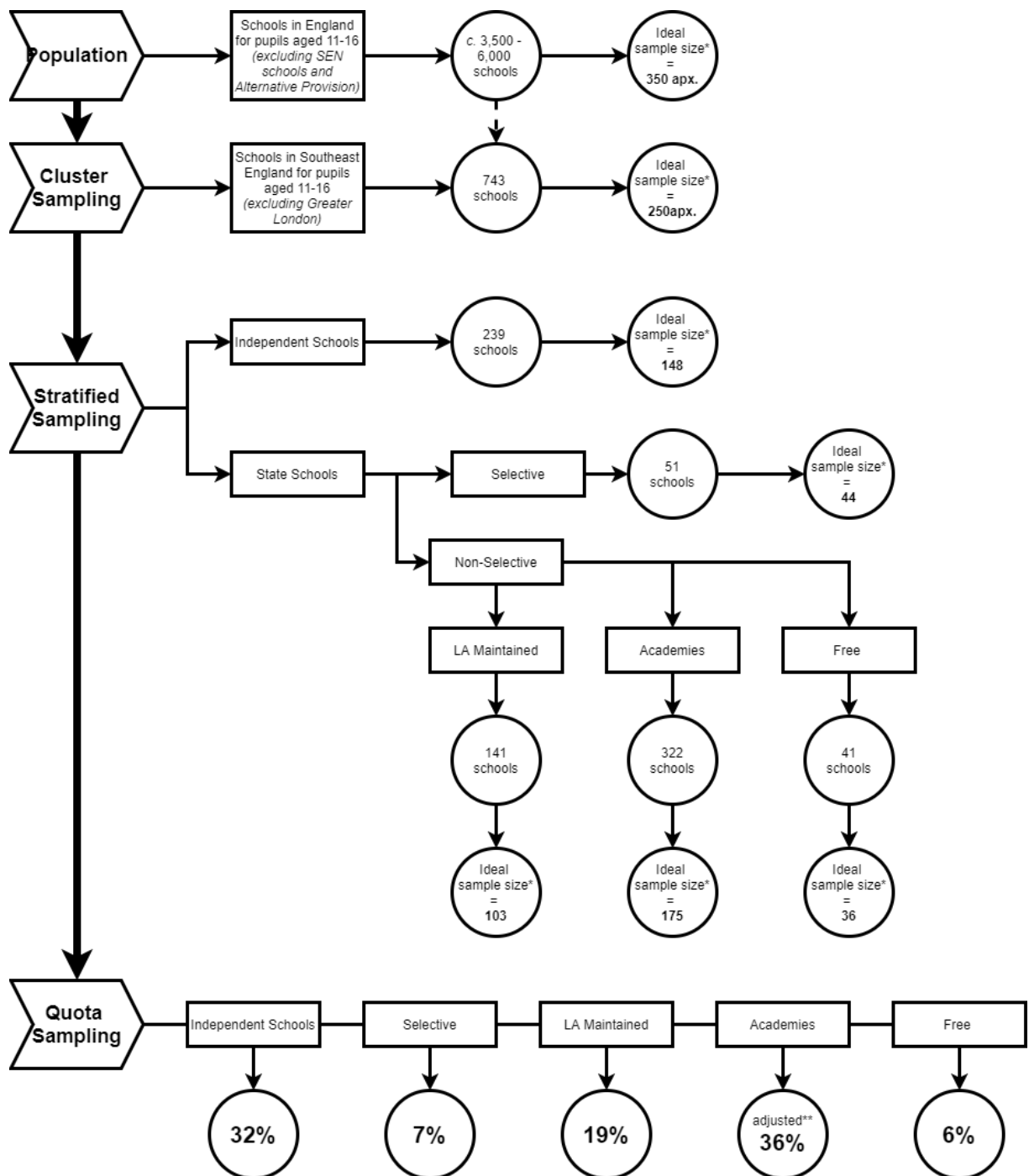
The design (see Figure 3.1 below) enabled a strategic response to the question(s) in a number of ways. The use of visual methods builds upon the researcher's skills and experience in the Visual Arts, enabling the use of pre-existing skills and knowledge of composition and deconstruction. Focussing on photographs kept the data within defined parameters that allowed a larger population and sample size than in a pilot study that analysed both text and images within prospectuses.

The decision to use only online, publicly available data - whilst made because of the conceptual focus on 'promotion' - streamlines data collection, and in a time of pandemic can be conducted remotely.

Figure 3.1 Research Design



Research Population and Participants



* (Cohen et al., 2000) (p.94)

** Adjusted to account for Academies already included in the Selective category

Figure 3.2. Sampling Process Employed

Whilst the issues raised in this study are applicable across the field of education from Early Years childcare to Universities and Higher Education for reasons of both brevity and familiarity this research focused on the stage of Secondary School, and in particular those

points of transition whereby a Secondary School is entered. This is typically at age 11, but there are also significant entry points at 13 and 16 which will also often be contained within the data collected. For further brevity and familiarity the participant schools were restricted to the region of the South East of England, excluding London. Schools with personal connections to the researcher are excluded as are 'faith schools'. Noted in a pilot study, faith schools employ a large number of religious signifiers that both skew the data obtained from them and introduce issues beyond the scope of this study. This sampling process is illustrated in Figure 14 which shows the successive methods used to obtain a representative sample from the population. The strategy employed an array of sampling methods; cluster, stratified and quota in order to reduce data quantity to a manageable level.

This study did not look at the readers of the messages contained within these images but instead "face upwards" (Alvesalo-Kuusi & Whyte, 2017, p.139) and treat the schools themselves as the research participants, albeit in the reified form of their promotional material.

Participating schools were selected from the 743 open Secondary schools listed by the Government (<https://get-information-schools.service.gov.uk/>) as being within the 19 local authorities comprising the South East of England - this being the cluster sampling stage of the process. Then using stratified sampling, these schools were categorised as being either Local Authority Maintained, Academy or Free Schools. A further distinction between selective State Schools (i.e. Grammar Schools) and non-selective State Schools were made. Independent Schools are not listed at this site so a similar search was made on the Good Schools Guide website (<https://www.goodschoolsguide.co.uk/school-search/>) for the same local authorities using a filter of schools that cater for the age range 13-16 (to account for the

peculiarities of the Prep School system) producing a population of 239 Independent Schools.

This resulted in a total population of 743 Secondary Schools in the South East of England.

Local Authority	Total	Ind.*	Total	Non selective	Selective	LA maintained	Academies	Free
			State Schools**					
Bracknell Forest	10	3	7	7	0	3	3	1
Brighton & Hove	18	8	10	10	0	7	2	1
Buckinghamshire	49	13	36	23	13	6	27	3
East Sussex	41	15	26	26	0	9	16	1
Hampshire	95	27	68	68	0	37	31	0
Isle of Wight	10	3	7	7	0	4	2	1
Kent	132	31	101	69	32	22	72	7
Medway	21	3	18	12	6	1	16	1
Milton Keynes	15	1	14	14	0	2	10	2
Oxfordshire	78	36	42	42	0	1	34	7
Portsmouth	15	4	11	11	0	2	8	1
Reading	17	7	10	8	2	1	6	3
Slough	18	3	15	11	4	2	9	4
Southampton	17	5	12	12	0	7	5	0
Surrey	101	44	57	57	0	11	42	4
W Berks	17	7	10	10	0	3	7	0
W Sussex	55	15	40	40	0	20	17	3
Windsor & Maidenhead	19	9	10	10	0	1	8	1
Wokingham	15	5	10	10	0	2	7	1
Totals	743	239	504	447	51	141	322	41
Averages	39	13	27	24	3	7	17	2
Sample No.	40	13	27	24	3	8	17	2
* obtained from https://www.goodschoolsguide.co.uk/school-search/								
** obtained from https://get-information-schools.service.gov.uk/								

Table 3.1. Population of Study

From this stratified, cluster sample a further quota based sample was randomly selected to provide the final working sample for the study.

Data Collection

The data for this study was the images extracted from school prospectuses for the sample. In this case images were primarily photographs (although it is possible to image some drawings and illustrations being included) and compositions consisting primarily of text (word clouds, diagrams, tables etc.) were excluded as they would have required a textual analysis of these words alongside the visual analysis that was the focus of this study. Prospectuses for the schools in the sample were downloaded from the schools' websites. For inclusion in the study the prospectus must have been publicly available - not, for example, as found for one school during the pilot study, only available upon request for prospective parents. 'Prospectus' for the purpose of this study was defined as a document (it could be in pdf, doc or html format) consisting of text and images that provides information about the school aimed at the public. Whilst this is a somewhat nebulous definition, it was in place to exclude those documents that may exist to provide purely logistical information for those already at the school (timetables, rules and so on) and to include those documents presenting the school to an external audience. Studies have however also been done on documents for an internal audience (Maguire et al., 2001).

Noting that in key semiotic texts such as "Decoding Advertisements" (Williamson, 1978) and "Reading Ads Socially" (Goldman, 2011) the authors omit to disclose how they have selected the images they have chosen to analyse, Rose argues that "semiologists choose their images on the basis of how conceptually interesting they are, it seems" (Rose, 2006). This method of

selection seems equally applicable to work by Barthes (1973), Berger (1973) and Cook (1992). Rose notes this lack of concern for ensuring that images are “statistically representative” and contrasts this focus on exemplary images as (almost) case studies with other visual methods such as content analysis. An example of this latter approach in proximity to this piece of research can be seen in the large(r) samples of prospectuses used in papers (Hesketh & Knight, 1998), (McCandless, 2015) using content analysis as the main research method. Some researchers analysing images in prospectuses (Macarthur et al., 2019) applied selection criteria to include/exclude images. In another case, (Drew, 2013), criterion sampling was used to determine the sample drawn. More semiotic approaches such as that used by (Wilkins, 2012) echo Rose’s description above with images selected by the researcher “on the grounds that they appear to be eliciting similar structures of religious feeling through the framing of people, places and objects, and on the basis of themes of localism and globalism or cosmopolitanism.” (Wilkins, 2012).

A pilot study for this research used a combination of approaches with randomised proportional selection within categories similar to those described above) to ensure a representative sample amongst the population studied used for a content analysis of the images whilst specific “conceptually interesting” images were selected for semiotic analysis. This approach to data selection was replicated in this study with the addition of further reference to themes identified through the wider content analysis of the data when selecting images for semiotic analysis. This allowed for illustrative analysis of themes (such as curriculum, uniform or ‘atmosphere’) identified across the sample.

Data Analysis

The images collected were subjected to a visual content analysis. A selection of those that emerge as the most thematically interesting were then subjected to further semiotic analysis via diagrammatisation and written investigation. This succession and combination of interrogative processes created a form of procedural triangulation around the data.

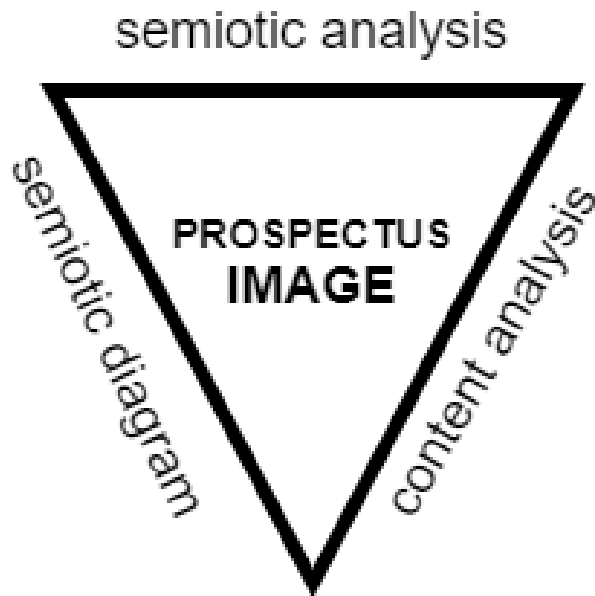


Figure 3.3. Methodological Triangulation

The aim of this triangulation was not, as may often be the case, to increase the objective validity of my findings. Rather it was an attempt to examine both the internal consistencies *and* inconsistencies of my interpretations in order to add transparency and credibility to the readings I made of the data.

Operationalising Status Signification and Cultural Capital

Similarly, it is important to illustrate the process of operationalisation at the heart of these readings and interpretations.

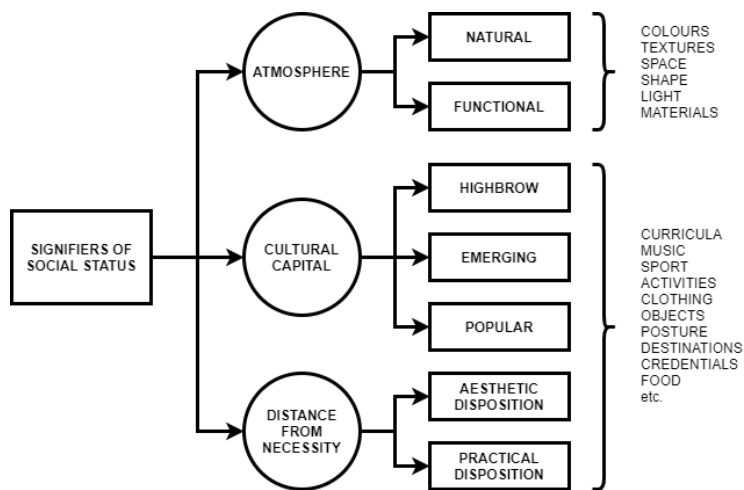


Figure 3.4. Operationalising Signifiers of Social Status

The operationalisation of the signifiers of social status and cultural capital is central to the analytical processes used in this study. Content analyses and semiotics allow us to extract and interpret the data present within the images in school prospectuses, but it is important to be explicit about how this data is being ‘measured’ for status. Broadly speaking the starting point for this operationalisation is Bourdieu’s work on taste and distinction (Bourdieu, 1986a) and the subsequent application of these ideas onto focussed forms, such as the body (Vandebroek, 2017). From this we have taken Bourdieu’s idea of the “distance from necessity” (Bourdieu, 1986a, pp.46-48) as a key indicator of status.. The signs analysed can be classified as signifying an aesthetic disposition or a practical disposition. A relatively straightforward example of how this may be found within school prospectuses is in the depiction of curricular subjects; Fine Art would be classified as signifying an aesthetic disposition, and a greater distance from necessity than Design Technology. According to this schema, therefore, Fine Art would signify a higher status than Design Technology.

Bourdieu’s differentiation between “highbrow” and “lowbrow” culture provided another starting point for operationalising the signifiers of social status. However, classifications drawn from research in 1960s France does not provide an ideal or exact template to work

from in 2020s England. Recognising this, I also drew from the work of Savage et al. (Savage, 2015) who identify two strands of division of cultural capital. The first being that of cultural engagement (p.104) and the second being the opposition between “highbrow” and “emerging” cultural capital focussed on (relative) youth and ‘knowing’ eclecticism (p.110). This does not provide a clearcut binary hierarchy however, as emerging cultural capital occupies a fluid position that does not in itself map directly onto a class based high versus low culture, nor does it equate to the “middlebrow” tastes identified by Bourdieu. To find those tastes that relate to the “lowbrow” requires some digging into what Savage et al. term the “new snobbery” (p.361) to identify evidence of low status cultural capital signifiers still in circulation. With these as our starting point it was possible to classify status signifiers into three camps. First, the “Highbrow”, which remains largely unchanged from Bourdieu’s day and continues to indicate established legitimate tastes, again using the example of the depiction of curricular subjects in the school prospectus, this included traditionally elite subjects such as Latin or Classics. Secondly, the fluid category of “Emerging” which could be exemplified by technology and media related subjects. Finally, the category of traditionally lower status tastes. Using curricular subjects as the example, would often be vocational (linking to the practical disposition described above) and the target of snobbery - such as Hair & Beauty.

Baudrillard's ideas of the status denoted, and connotated, in materiality and atmosphere noted above in Chapter 2.2.4 also allow for an operationalisation of the data found in the images through the coding of materials and their qualities (natural versus synthetic for example) as markers of distinction and class signification.

It is, of course, worth acknowledging that many of the signifiers of status can be contested, appropriated, manipulated and contextually determined. A game of rugby pictured by a school

in the Rhondda Valley would likely carry a different signification to a visually similar picture of a game of rugby pictured by a school in Surrey. The use of semiotics addresses this through its emphasis on both signifier and signified in the creation of a sign. As the prospectuses studied are saturated with signs we will be able to draw conclusions from the trends and patterns identified within these signs rather than being misled by isolated differences in signification.

Content Analysis

The initial content analysis was applied to all images in the sample. The first aim of this was to draw out common and contrasting themes within and between sample groups. The content identified was then subject to a process of coding built upon Bourdieu's ideas of cultural capital, legitimate culture and "distance from necessity" (Bourdieu, 1986a). This was supplemented by further readings on status signification - for example (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2002); (Foucault, 1995); (Dilnot, 2018); (Badiou, 2016; Baudrillard, 2005; Bleazby, 2015)

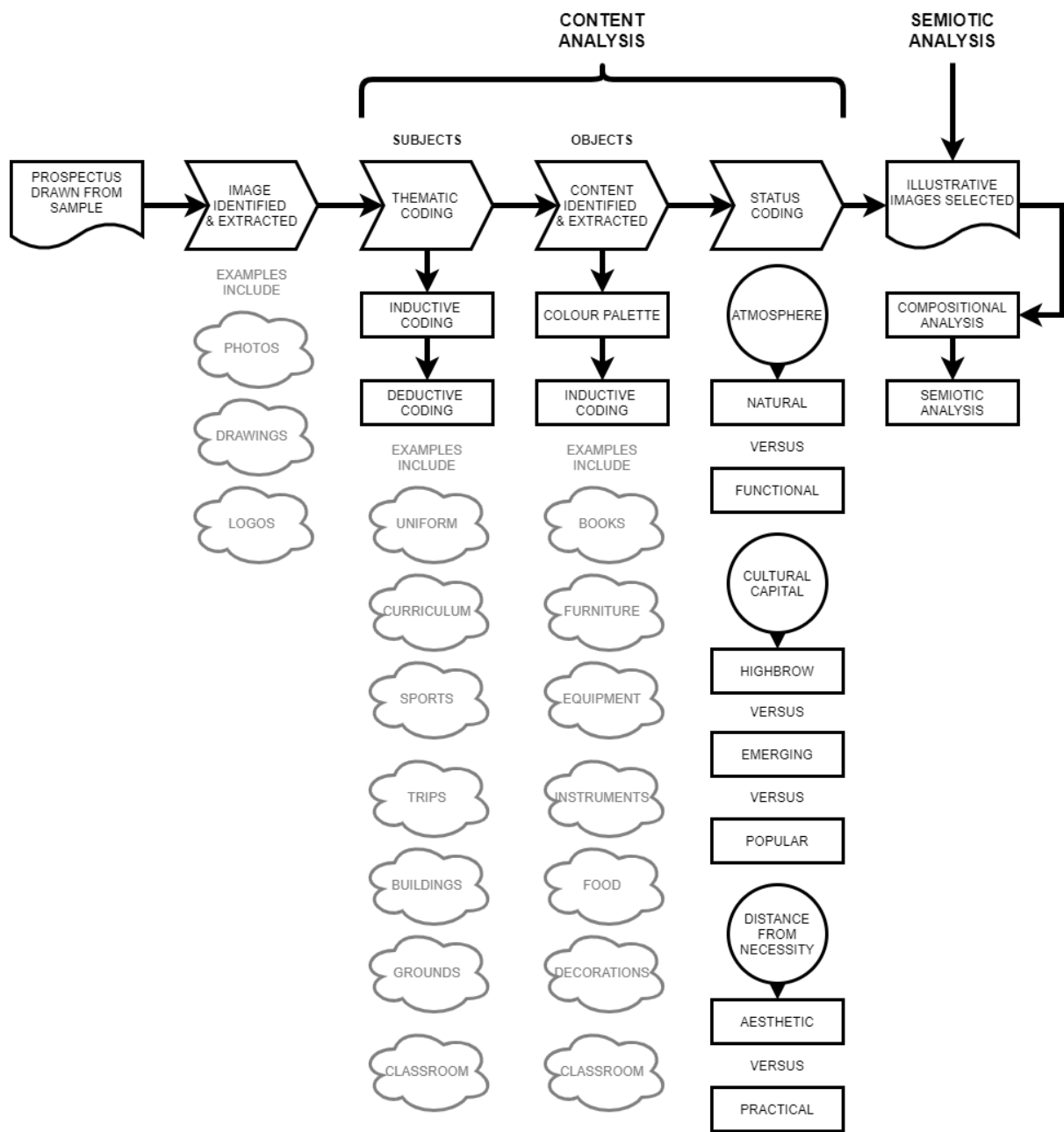


Figure 3.5. Coding and Analytical Process

This coding process enabled the production and application of categories that are approaching the criteria of being exhaustive, exclusive and enlightening (Rose, 2006). As nuance may have been lost if potentially reductive elements of this process control the analysis (Rose, 2006) an ongoing reflexivity and flexibility was adopted to allow the

expansive readings of the data and it was also balanced by depth to which the later stages of analysis went to in selected images.

Diagrammatic Semiotic Analysis and Compositional Interpretation

Select images were then subject to a semiotic diagrammatisation adapted from, and informed by, a combination of semiotic flow charts (Goldman, 2011), cumulative given-new structures (Kress, 1996) and the dimensions of visual space (Kress, 1996).

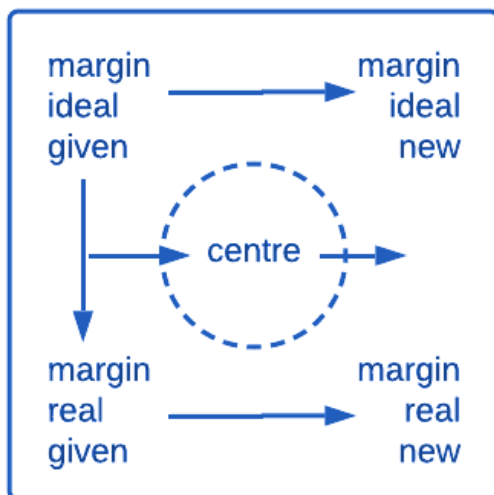


Figure 3.6. The Dimensions of Visual Space - (adapted from (Kress, 1996))

These diagrams may not form part of the reporting and discussion of all case study images, but rather they formed part of the analytical process undertaken to identify meaning.

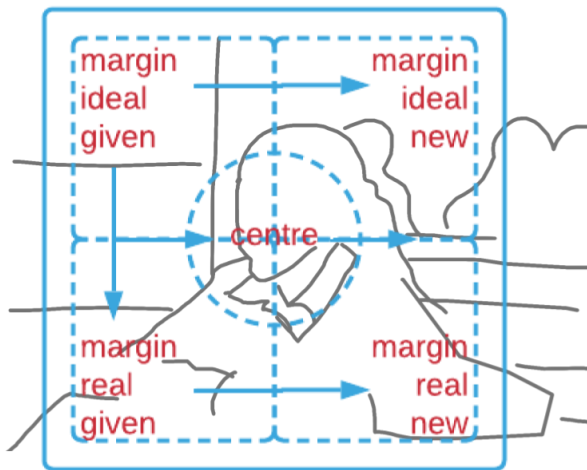


Figure 3.7. Semiotic Diagrammatisation of Visual Space

This first diagrammatisation (Figure 3.6) enabled an illustration of the conceptual movements engaged in reading the image. A further annotated diagrammatisation (Figure 3.7) located key signifiers within the movement of reading.

This method is a form of “compositional interpretation” (Rose, 2006, p.35ff). This approach, she argues, emerges from the discipline of Art History as a way of describing an image that critically acknowledges its power as an image itself. Of course, as Rose notes the limitation of this methodology is that “visual images do not exist in a vacuum” (p.39) but used, as it is here, as a supplementary approach alongside those more focussed on social meaning it can be a powerful tool for looking carefully at the visual qualities of the image being analysed. Rose suggests the following criteria for compositional interpretation (p.40-51): content; colour; spatial organisation; light and expressive content. These criteria built upon the dimensions of visual space schema. Of course, some of these compositional criteria (such as light and colour) contained their own atmospheric (Baudrillard, 2005) or semiotic messages which were analysed during the final, and deepest, stage of data analysis.

Semiotic Analysis

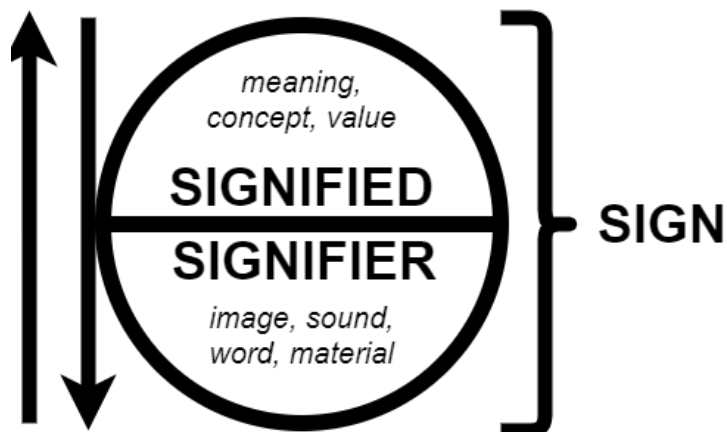


Figure 3.8. The Sign

Figure 3.8 illustrates the basic semiotic structure of a ‘sign’ as employed in this research.

Elements of the data - the contents of the photographs - contain numerous signs. A simple example would be an exercise book and pen as signifier, school work as the signified and thus the image of an exercise book and pen works as a sign of school work contained in that photograph.

Each photograph in the sample had, of course, a lot more ‘going on’ than a single, simple sign. It is therefore worth taking a longer look at signs and semiotic analysis.

As Lazzarato notes “Capital is not only a linguistic but also a "semiotic operator." The distinction is fundamental because it establishes that flows of signs, as much as labor and money flows, are the conditions of "production." (Lazzarato, 2014, p.39) As this study is concerned with the reproduction of the social relations of capital through the production of meaning in school promotional images this flow of signs will require a semiotic analysis. Lazzarato’s later description of this flow as an “assembly line” neatly illustrates the expansion of the relations of the factory into social and aesthetic life. Sandoval argues that semiotic

analysis can be a tool for “revealing the rhetorical structure by which the languages of supremacy are uttered, rationalised—and ruptured.” (Sandoval, 2000). Thus, semiotics is the ideal approach for the unmasking of “as if natural” displays of status and unequal social and economic relations.

“Semiotics, the study of signs, which stems from the early work of Saussure, invites us to study hidden meanings and critique the power relations inherent to visual representations, for this reason applying semiotics is particularly useful when exploring advertising and promotional media.” (Mannay, 2016)

Saussure’s linguistic division between *parole* and *langue* laid the foundations for the central semiotic relationship between signifier and signified in the production of signs (Hawkes, 1977). However, the image saturated world of late capitalism has created a complexity of meaning and message that is more complex than can be analysed simply through the relationship between signs and signifiers (Hawkes, 1977) leading to the production of what Barthes termed “mythologies” (Barthes, 1973). Myth, he argues, is the “overturning of culture into nature” (Barthes, 1984a, p.165) where the aesthetic products of class divisions are “presented as a matter of course”. Barthes describes how in the semiological chains of meaning in this mythology signs can become “mere signifiers” in themselves (Barthes, 1973, p.123). He called this “second order signification”. Thus when undertaking semiotic analysis of data within this study it is necessary to acknowledge second order signification within that process. Below we see an illustration of this process with the example of the depiction of school uniform within a photograph.

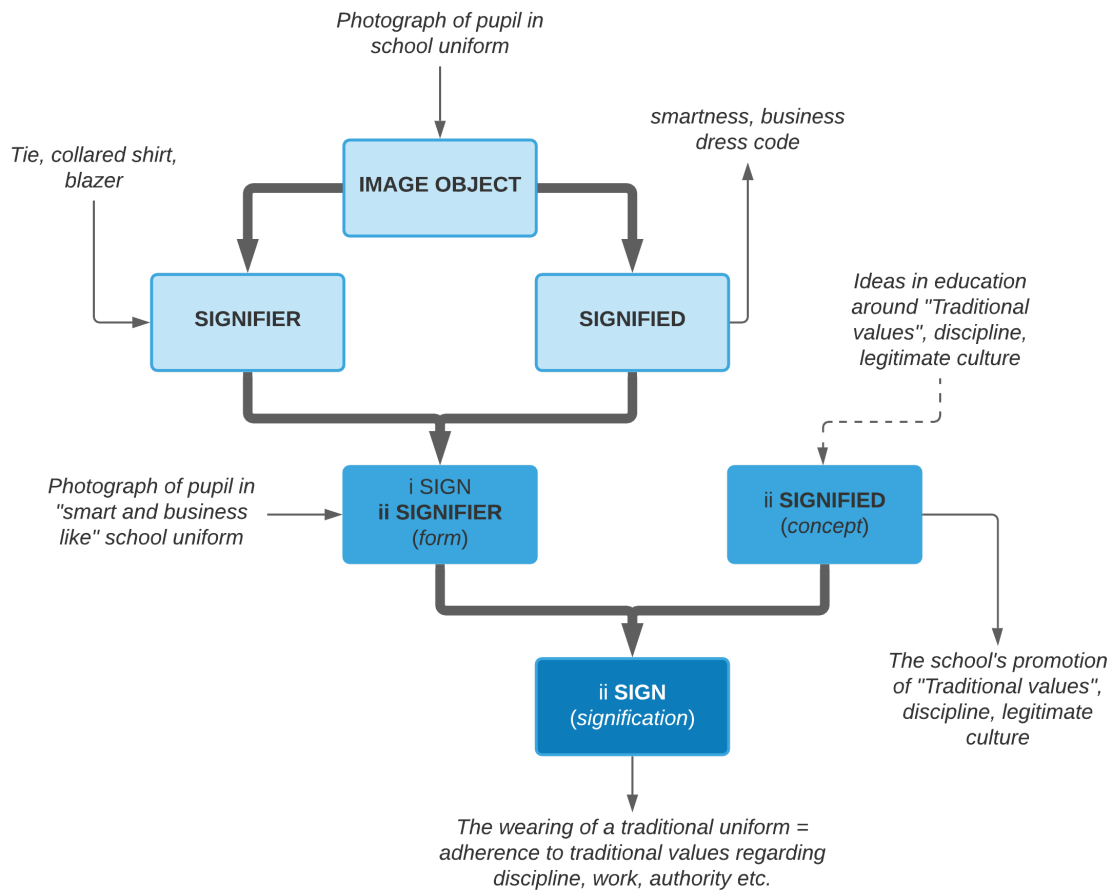


Figure 3.9. Second Order Signification and Semiotic Analysis

As the data analysed was collected in the form of prospectus images there were structures and networks of meaning layered both within and between the photographs where the relationships between signs took on the semiological chains of meaning as seen in second order signification and beyond.

Quality Criteria - Ensuring the Rigour of the Research

Validity & Reliability vs. Credibility & Trustworthiness

For a qualitative study using a broadly interpretivist approach to data analysis questions of validity and reliability contain a fundamental ontological difference to those that may be

posed of quantitative research. This research worked on the premise that reality “is not a single, fixed, objective phenomenon waiting to be discovered, observed, and measured ” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The methodology here is, as Geertz wrote ‘not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning’ (Geertz, 1973). Therefore, it can be argued that in the context of this work the “traditional terminology of validity and reliability” must be recognised as contested (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Rather than a rigid adherence to criteria suited to positivist approaches to knowledge this work instead sought to “present insights and conclusions that ring true to readers, practitioners, and other researchers” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015)

This does not mean that this research is consequently absolved of accountability to any criteria of quality. On the contrary, qualitative research perhaps faces greater requirements in this regard. Merriam and Tisdell identify a number of criteria that may be used to judge qualitative research; trustworthiness, “rich” rigour, sincerity, transparency of methods, credibility, resonance, making a significant contribution, ethics and “meaningful coherence” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). They also write that triangulation is a key strategy for ensuring the validity of a study.

Crystallisation: Beyond Triangulation?

Denzin proposed four types of triangulation based upon the use of multiples in method, data, investigator or theory (Denzin, 1978). This study approached triangulation through the application of multiple methods (illustrated above) - content analysis, diagramisation and compositional interpretation and semiotic analysis. It also used multiple sources of data in the sense of “triangulation using multiple sources of data means comparing and cross-checking data collected through observations at different times or in different places (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

At the same time, this work in building some of its perspective from the postmodern lens acknowledged the potential limitations of triangulation in postmodernity and the emerging post-truth environment described above, as Settlage et al. ask - “perhaps triangulation isn’t enough?” (Settlage et al., 2005) . Vik and Bute report that Ellingson’s principle of crystallisation offers a strategy that “rejects the notions of positivist ideologies of objectivity and Truth. Seeing Truth as partial and socially constructed is a paradigm reified by crystallization.” (Vik & Bute, 2009). Crystallisation, they argue, includes “deep and thick description” in response to the “complexity of interpretation” Drawn, largely from the field of autoethnography but emerging elsewhere in qualitative research (Ellingson, 2008) crystallisation is described thus

“Crystallization combines multiple forms of analysis and multiple genres of representation into a coherent text or series of related texts, building a rich and openly partial account of a phenomenon that problematizes its own construction, highlights researchers’ vulnerabilities and positionality, makes claims about socially constructed meanings, and reveals the indeterminacy of knowledge claims even as it makes them.” (Ellingson, 2008, p.4)

Whilst this study does not claim to fully practise the strategy of crystallisation, it shares, to a degree, with crystallisation a stance that “eschews positivist claims to objectivity and a singular, discoverable truth and embraces, reveals, and even celebrates knowledge as inevitably situated, partial, constructed, multiple, and embodied.” (Ellingson, 2008, p. 13) whilst “acknowledging that knowledge is never neutral, unbiased, or complete” (Ellingson, 2008, p. 13).

Returning to more traditional strategies to ensure the rigour of qualitative research, a particular challenge in the approach to visual research adopted here was to ensure the “balance between inductive forces – allowing the collected data to speak for itself, and

deductive forces – structuring, ordering principles derived from theoretical models and concepts.” (Spencer, 2010). The combination of methods being deployed in this study allowed for this balance with the initial content analyses involving inductive coding whilst the latter semiotic method required a more deductive engagement.

These multiple methods also allowed for “adequate engagement in data collection” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p.245) each successive stage of analysis enabling further saturation in the data. (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Such saturation also provided the ability to create the “rich, thick descriptions” which will allow readers to determine the extent to which their situations match the research context, and, hence, whether findings can be transferred.” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) and to start to answer the question of “whether the results are consistent with the data collected.” when the research is read through a different lens by others (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Finally, when talking about the validity of qualitative research it is worth reminding ourselves of Wolcott’s response to its “absurdity” (Wolcott, 1994) and the imperative for research to contain “something else, a quality that points more to identifying critical elements and wringing plausible interpretations from them, something one can pursue without becoming obsessed with finding the right or ultimate answer, the correct version, the Truth” (Wolcott, 1994)

A Matter of Perspective: Reflexivity & Researcher Positionality

This research, taking an interpretivist approach, centred upon the perspective from which the data is interpreted. This perspective, like any other, is orientated from the position of the researcher towards the object of study - in this case social class, inequality and education. As

a white, cisgender male heterosexual with British citizenship I am in a position of relative privilege. In the field of Education this privilege is augmented by the accumulation of educational capital in the form of widely recognised credentials and qualifications. In a wider sense the social and cultural capitals acquired through the processes of reproduction, within which this position places me, add further privilege to my status. However, this advantage is tempered by aspects of social class relevant to the study of Education in England today. With a provincial, lower middle-class background, a comprehensive schooling and being a first-generation University student when looking at independent Schools, Policy makers and the reproducers of advantage, my position is very much researching the powerful, and the more powerful than me.

As a teacher, married to a teacher and situated professionally within the field of Education I am clearly in an ‘insider’ position in relation to schools and the Education System more broadly, this offers both advantages and disadvantages but should be explicitly acknowledged here. Indeed, one school had to be replaced within the sample because I used to work there and would, therefore, be at risk at using this insider knowledge to read the images differently than the others in the sample.

Finally, the values, ethos and - yes - political beliefs of the researcher will have framed and directed the perspective taken in research like this. The methodological advantages and disadvantages of this are discussed elsewhere, but in the interests of transparency it is worth explicitly acknowledging here that this research is predicated on the belief that greater equality is ‘a good thing’ and that current systems can, and should, be changed to achieve this. Such a stance is not universally shared, but is taken as the ethico-political starting point for the positions that frame this research.

Positionality, Authenticity and Intersectionality

Recognition of this positionality and the - relatively - privileged status I held as researcher in this project led to a focus on social class as a marker of distinction and status. Viewed through a lens of intersectionality, this was a 'spoke' where I felt situated or anchored methodologically in Lykke's Postconstructionist Feminist (Lykke, 2010) sense. There remains a danger that, in doing so, not only are important power relations centred around race, gender etc. are not given due consideration but that my positionality slips into claims of 'authenticity' - based upon selective aspects of my identity. However, this was challenged during the course of the research as these identities shifted and were reconstructed (internally and externally) as I moved between insider and outsider positions in schools and academia, as my own sense of social class became increasingly insecure and as Heraclitean flux made its presence felt in yet another aspect of this project. This fundamental instability in my own class positionality needs to be a reminder to caution against the reification of other categories at work in an intersectional approach. Just as social class was, and is, a (potentially) shifting relational position rather than an innate identity, then it is also important to remember that gender, race etc. are also not stable, fixed 'eternal' entities, but are instead socially constructed identities.

As aspects of race, gender and disability were found in the data (and in the interpretation of it) the methodological decision to focus on social class was challenged. However, the recognition drawn from Lykke (2010), that this research, and the knowledge produced by it, is both 'partial' and 'mobile' allowed a 'looser' approach than sticking to a rigid focus on class in a Marxian sense. Whilst position in relation to the means of production remained the key lens through which messages of status were viewed - because of the embodied and social situation of the knower - the acknowledgement (if not exploration) of other - partial and mobile - categories in an intersectional lens became necessary.

Ethical Issues

This research involved no human subjects and all data collected was in the public domain. Ethical approval was sought from University of Reading (please see appendix). In addition ethical guidance from the British Educational Research Association (*Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research, fourth edition (2018) | BERA, 2018*) and (due to the methods employed in this research) the International Visual Sociology Association (*IVSA Code of Research Ethics and Guidelines » International Visual Sociology Association, n.d.*) have been consulted and followed.

Principles

This research conforms to the ethical principles set out by the University of Reading. It strives for excellence and is conducted with honesty and integrity in a spirit of cooperation and openness. It sought transparency about the methods used and their limitations and about how the position of the researcher may have framed the work undertaken,

Training on skills for research has been undertaken, and continued to be undertaken at the time of writing by the author. All research was undertaken with safety (of the researcher and of the participants) as a central consideration. Researching during an unprecedented pandemic necessarily introduced new concerns. This study was, however, conducted entirely remotely and in a Covid safe manner without any physical interaction between researcher and participants.

The specific nature of the research methods used in this study raises a couple of ethical dimensions worthy of passing comment. First, is the question of confidentiality. Whilst this

work took measures to maintain the anonymity of its participants the very public nature of the data being collected suggests (according to the International Visual Sociology Association) that this was not an ethical requirement:

“ Confidentiality is not required with respect to observations in public places, activities conducted in public, or other settings where no rules of privacy are provided by law or custom. Similarly, confidentiality is not required in the case of information available from public records. (*IVSA Code of Research Ethics and Guidelines* » *International Visual Sociology Association*, n.d.)”

Whilst, due to the measures being taken in this study such as the use of pseudonyms, random sampling from a large population and the omission of potentially identifying data (such as photographs direct excerpts from prospectuses, this point is somewhat moot; it does lead into the related question of informed consent. The IVSA code of ethics goes on to say that;

Visual researchers may conduct research in public places or use publicly-available information about individuals (e.g. naturalistic observations in public places, analysis of public records, or archival research) without obtaining consent. (*IVSA Code of Research Ethics and Guidelines* » *International Visual Sociology Association*, n.d.)

The data for this piece of research was deliberately drawn from the public domain. Indeed the argument presented is based upon the fact that the data has been produced consciously *for* the public domain. Spiker (2011) argues that this situation does necessarily mean that research such as this has implicit consent but rather that it is:

“morally irrelevant, because the information is beyond the rights of the individual to control. This is the main answer to the allegation that covert research denies research subjects the opportunity to be informed, to consent, or to withdraw from research. If they are in the public domain, they have no such rights.” (Spicker, 2011)

In addition to this, on the face of it this research’s lack of human subjects simplified its ethical considerations somewhat. However, an interrogation of the literature around visual research

ethics and other papers of interest in the context of this research opens some potentially useful ethical considerations.

Whilst ethically, and let us be frank, - logistically, the identification of the subjects of this study as ‘non-human’, as publicly distributed artefacts, is one that avoids some of the difficult concerns of research involving human subjects it does at the same time point to an interesting ethical concern. Viewing, and reading, the material gathered for this study as mere documents creates a kind of disembodiment where the “datafication of the research subject reinforces an ‘instrumental view’ of data, in which they are seen as a public resource or commodity, ready to be harvested, warehoused, analyzed, and disseminated” (Corple & Linabary, 2020). This allows for the structural racism, sexism etc. of the dominant paradigms to lead to the re-embodiment of datafied subjects according to these biases “when they turn back into ‘flesh’—they materialize as white, Anglicized, and male” (Corple & Linabary, 2020, p.157). The nature of the analyses used in this study may prevent this occurring in practice here, but it is an ontological separation that is worthy of consideration.

Image Inclusion: Transparency, Fidelity or Anonymity?

A practical and ethical tension that is produced by the use of semiotic case studies is that of image inclusion. A number of competing ethical values are in play in the decisions made about including the images being analysed.

The first, and most important of these is the prevention of harm to any person featured in the images. This means ensuring their anonymity is retained by ensuring that no identifying details were shown or included in the study. A similar concern regards the removal of identifying details of the schools included. If the photographs were included this would necessitate the redaction of faces, distinctive uniforms, logos, buildings and so on. Whilst

these could be technically achieved through the use of digital editing techniques such as blurring, pixelation and cropping this raises its own ethical concerns regarding the fidelity of the image included. Many of the identifying details would be discrete signs under analysis. There were also questions of potential vulnerability to techniques such as reverse image searching and residual photographic metadata which are beyond the technical scope of this study to fully mitigate.

A minor, but noteworthy, corollary to the issue of anonymity relates to the norm of crediting the authors of images included. Such credits would undermine efforts to preserve the subjects' anonymity.

The 'safest' approach would have been to omit the images under discussion entirely and rely upon written description of their contents. This was trialled in a pilot study and, although functional, raised an ethical question of its own. It removed a layer of transparency from the methods. The inclusion of an image allows the reader to follow the researcher's deconstruction and provides an opportunity for challenge and alternative readings to be made by the reader whilst following the researcher's analysis. This transparency is vital to support the credibility of the interpretivist approach undertaken here.

Ultimately a compromise was necessary. For this study line drawings made by digitally tracing the case study images were used. This provided the reader with the content and compositional information necessary to follow the decoding of the original image, whilst at same time avoiding the use of it.

Researching the Powerful

As noted above this research included a conscious decision to direct the researcher's gaze upwards. However there are implications in focussing on the more powerful members of a hierarchical social relationship.

This research, for a number of reasons, restricted itself to the analysis of publicly available data. Data, in the form of promotional images, that school leaders and managers have elected to share and distribute. This is not without caveat however;

“Although the ‘powerful’ tend to be publicly visible and seemingly easy to contact (e.g. via information published on websites and social media online), they have remained secretive, placing high value on privacy and exclusion. Gathering data from interviews, observations, and other forms of ethnographic techniques using human subjects or the gathering of quantitative forms of data is, therefore, a difficult process... and access can be denied without argumentation since they enjoy almost complete rights of ownership to information about their activities.” (Alvesalo-Kuusi & Whyte, 2017, p.138)

This, Alvesalo-Kuusi and Whyte argue, enables those in positions of/with power to “repel” critical researchers and to manipulate and influence research through being able to act as gatekeepers of data in the research process. They describe this as a reversal of the usual power relationship between researcher and subject that informs ethical considerations (Alvesalo-Kuusi & Whyte, 2017).

The Problem with Ethics?

“Ethics confirm the absence of emancipatory projects. Ethics are the servant of necessity i.e, the logic of capital.” (Badiou, 2012)

One noted aspect of late capitalism that is increasingly felt in education is that of ‘managerialism’ and some authors have argued that this has led to an “ethics creep” which is creating a “conservative climate [that] has been identified as particularly detrimental for research involving visual methods)” (Pitt, 2014) with the central, and powerful, role

institutional ethics committees might have as gatekeepers of legitimate research. This is not, however, uncontested. Some “who have framed regulative ethics as parasitic/patriarchal/colonising, for instance, have encouraged researchers to reorient towards alternative feminist and communitarian principles” (Dowling & Whiteman, 2020) and this perhaps, in echoes of Freire’s call for “armed love” in education (Freire, 2005):

“...educational researchers should take up the challenge of becoming public intellectuals, individuals who recognize that the perceived contradictions between reason and passion are false dichotomies, and that a search for rational solutions to pressing social problems can be pursued within a framework of commitment to the public good and caring for those in need.” (Emihovich, 1999)

Limitations

Philosophical

There is a scene in the movie *The Matrix* where a character named Cypher is eating a steak in the simulated world of the matrix. Whilst ‘eating’ he says “You know, I know this steak doesn't exist. I know that when I put it in my mouth, the Matrix is telling my brain that it is juicy and delicious. After nine years, you know what I realize?” He pauses before taking another bite and answers his own question.... “Ignorance is bliss.” (Wachowski, L., & Wachowski, L., 1999). If we, rightly, reject the notion that the process of ‘quilting’ suggested in this study is automatic or deterministic, that the interpellators have agency, then we may need to consider the possibility that the ‘unmasking’ sought in this study may be both unnecessary and futile. Perhaps, like Cypher, we are all complicit in the maintenance of a comforting fantasy. As Žižek notes “Take away the illusion and you lose the truth itself. A truth needs time to make a journey through illusions to form itself” (Žižek, 2014, p.106). For Fisher, drawing from Žižek and Lacan, such ‘capitalist realism’ illustrates the distinction (and indeed conflict) between Lacan’s idea of the Real and what we term ‘reality’ (Fisher, 2009). The Real in Lacanian terms, Fisher argues, is “an unrepresentable X, a traumatic void”

(p.18). Clearly such psychoanalytical problems, despite this study's appropriation of the Lacanian *point de capiton*, lie beyond the limits of this argument.

Methodological

Leaving aside the more ontological problems with questions of the Real, reality and the nature of truth there were more mundane, yet at same time more tangible, limitations to this work.

The use of content analysis for a part of the analytical process raised the potential for the results to be viewed as weak quantitative data by both researcher and reader. Rose notes that whilst numbers are generated through this process they “do not translate easily into significance” (Rose, 2006, p.72). She cautions that the quantity of occurrences within the sample is not necessarily an indication of the strength or weakness of the phenomenon being recorded. In this study this limitation was managed through the subsequent deeper, richer analyses of key phenomena. Turning to the these rich descriptions produced by a semiotic analysis, whilst noting that “semiology fulfils all the criteria for a critical visual methodology” (Rose, 2006, p.103), Rose suggests that the use of a limited number of images from the sample, or case studies, raises questions about how representative these selected images are of the sample (and the population). This question introduces limitations regarding bias, which whilst addressed by researcher reflexivity are not eliminated. It also casts doubt on the replicability of the research. From the perspective of this work, alternative interpretations of the data would be welcome to aid a dialectical progress in understanding(s) of the role of the image in education's role in the reproduction of privilege and disadvantage. It needs to be acknowledged, however, that this position will not be shared by all.

The key limitation of this study is, however, logistical. It was restricted, of course, in the size of population, sample and selected images. More importantly it only addressed the image and

what could be found inside it - the ideological work it can do. It did not seek the voice of either the addresser or the addressee (nor those who may be caught in the “crossfire” in this transfer of meaning) (Cook, 1992). We cannot test Lacan’s assertion that “a letter always arrives at its destination” (Lacan, 2006, p.30) nor Derrida’s response that “the condition for it to arrive is that it ends up and even that it begins by not arriving.” (Derrida, 1987, p.29) and the resulting ‘misinterpellation’ (Martel, 2017) that may prevent the *point de capiton* from taking place.

We can see therefore that this research is already begging for future research; into the addressers - interviews, case studies and so on of school leaders, of designers, to seek their voice(s) on this process and their role in it. Equally, seeking the voice of the addressees to investigate what meanings they read into the messages they are sent within these prospectuses. Are there patterns of misinterpellation that can be discerned in the reading of these images? Furthermore it could be crucial to investigate the potential of resisting or subverting this process through developing a theory of *contrepellation* and the ways this might occur through conscious subversion and *detournement* of status bearing signs or through a Žižekian “I would prefer not to” (Žižek, 2009c, p.196n) response (maybe as part of a ‘strategy of refusal’ (Tronti, 2019). Rich data in the form of the practices and perspectives of parents, pupils and teachers may exist to develop this theory and avoid a deterministic reading of this current study.

Chapter 4 | Results I | Content Analysis

Following a brief overview of the qualities of the data collected and what might be read from that, this chapter reports and discusses the findings of the content analysis of the sample images. It is important to note that the charts included below are for illustrative purposes only. The temptation to inadvertently shift towards a quantitative interpretation of the data must be dismissed, the charts have been created in order to help visualise the trends and patterns being discussed and have not been tested for their statistical significance.

4.1 | Data Overview

To produce the target sample of 50 schools 94 school websites were visited after being randomly selected from the stratified population. Two schools were found to have closed. One school was excluded from the sample due to personal connections with the researcher. Eight schools were either duplications of previously drawn samples or were found not to fit in the category they were drawn in (this was primarily the case with selective schools being drawn in the Academy category). Of the remaining schools, the vast majority were found to have produced a prospectus, though the rate of production varied between sectors with the Academy and Local Authority Maintained categories having the lowest rates of prospectus production (see Figure 1 below).

Availability of Prospectuses

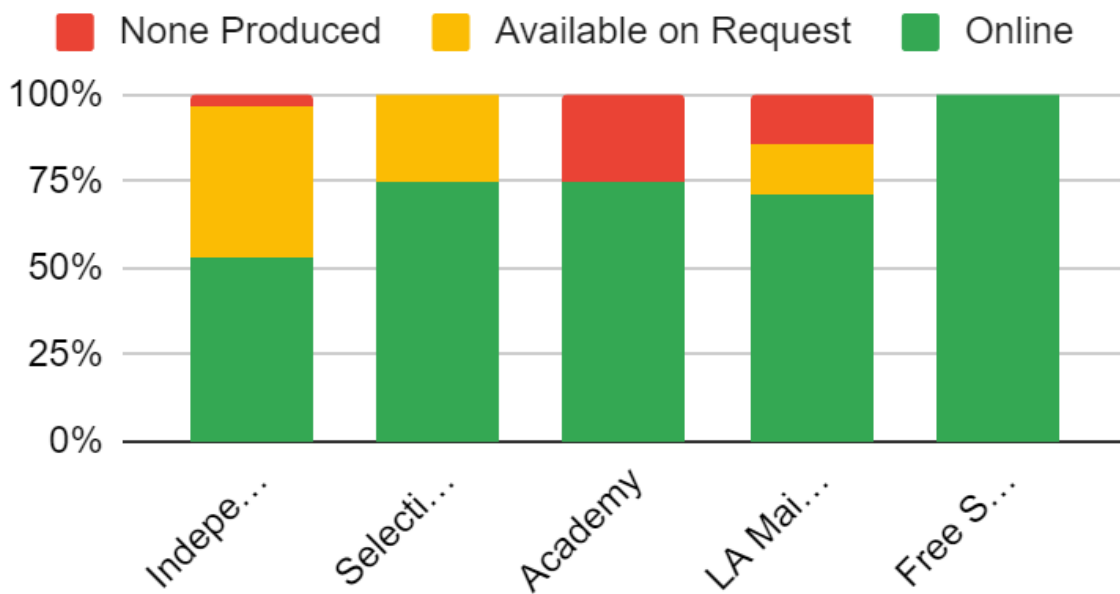


Figure 4.1. Availability of Prospectuses by Sector

One pattern in prospectus availability worth noting is the increased likelihood of having to email the school to actively request a copy of the prospectus found on the websites of the Independent Schools initially selected for the sample. Whilst this requirement did appear in the other categories, it was notably less frequent (see Figure 4.1 above). It is likely that the primary reason for this lies within the marketing departments of these schools and their need to establish direct contact with potential customers in order to open up a channel by which they can actively sell their product - the school - to interested parents. The use of customer data for targeted selling is also apparent in the phenomenon of advertisements for a number of schools whose websites were visited during this research appearing in my social media feeds afterwards. It may also be worth considering the gatekeeping role this requirement might have such as the demands to provide details such as ‘son/daughter’s current school’

Regarding the design and format of the sample prospectuses there is an enormous shift since Hesketh and Knight were able to distinguish between those with cheap formats and those that

were “professional looking” (Hesketh & Knight, 1998). 92% of the sample was, superficially at least, ‘professional looking’. Only three prospectuses were produced as simple text based documents, whilst one was an upload of a slide based presentation - the rest adopted a common glossy brochure aesthetic. All were in full colour, including full colour photography, with one striking exception which utilised highly stylized black and white photographs with the appearance of high dynamic range effects.

Format of Prospectuses

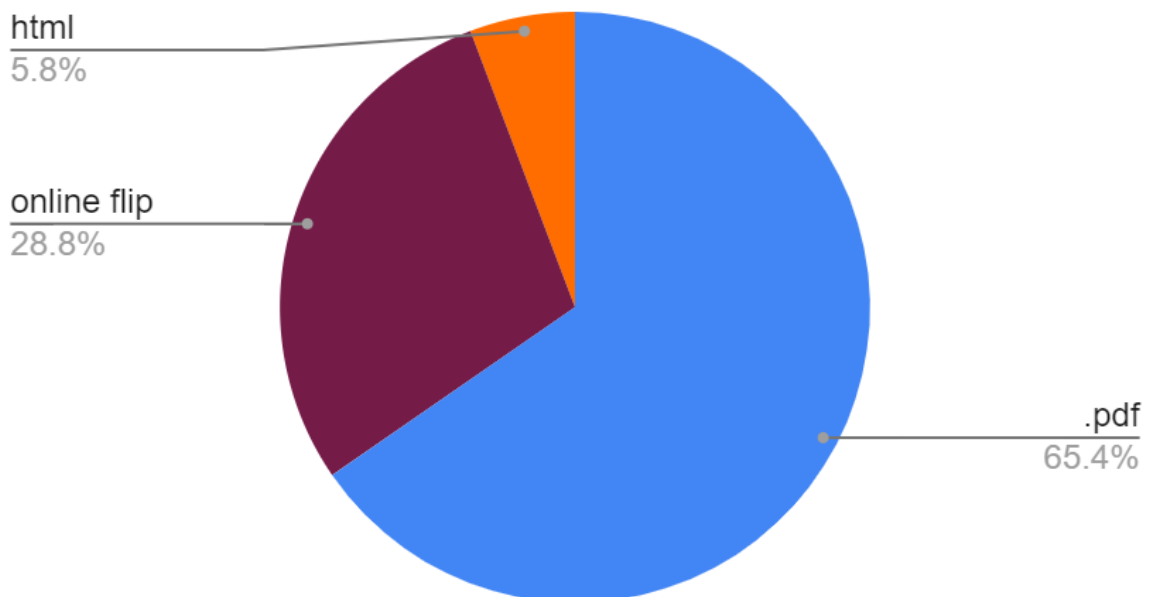


Figure 4.2. Format of Available Prospectuses

The majority of prospectuses were presented in the .pdf format, paginated and designed as digital facsimiles of physical, printed prospectuses. A significant proportion used platforms such as Issuu or Flipsnack to embed their prospectuses as digital magazines complete with page turning animations and effects as a further simulacrum of the printed brochure. This was concentrated, but not exclusively, in the Independent sector. A small number of prospectuses were presented in .html as web pages.

Length of Prospectus

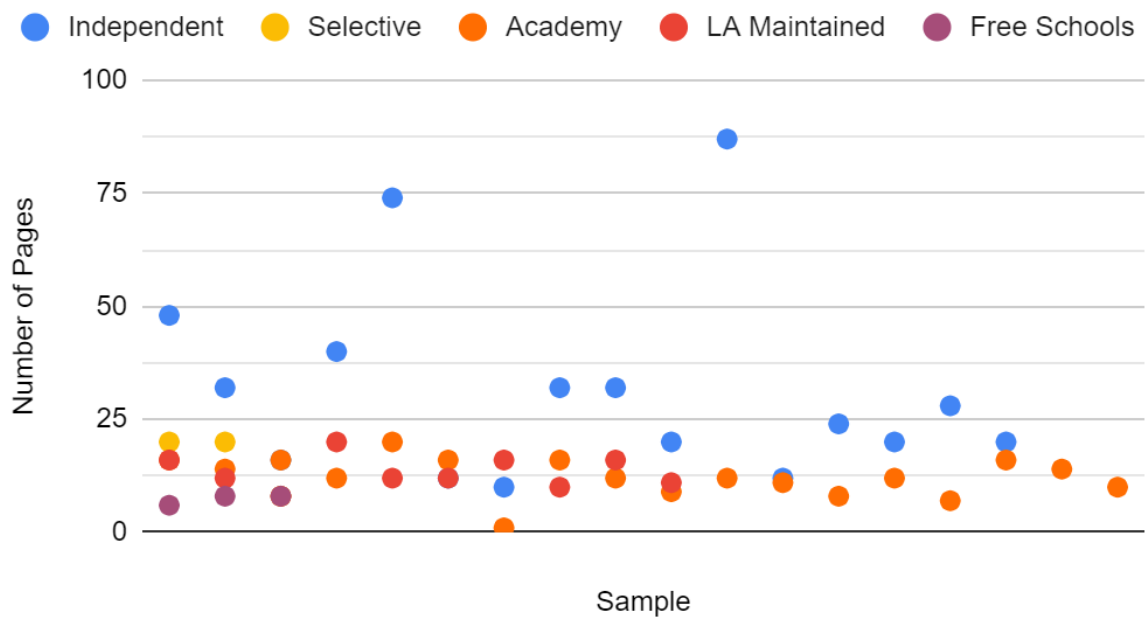


Figure 4.3. Length of Prospectuses

There was a considerable range in the length of the (paginated) prospectuses. The shortest being a mere 6 pages long, whilst the longest clocking in at 82 pages. The greatest variety in length came from Independent Schools, who also tended to be longer (see Figure 4.3 above).

Number of Images in the Prospectuses

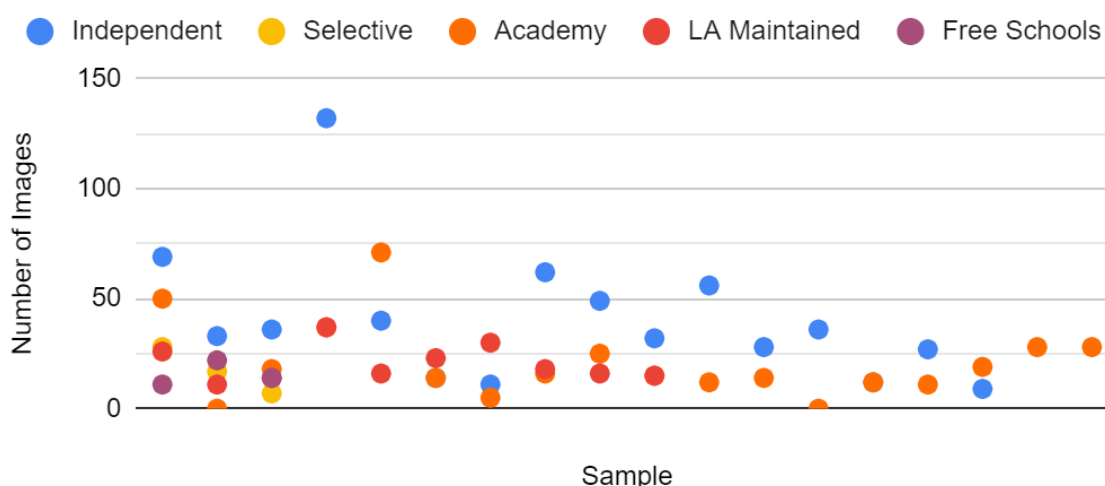


Figure 4.4. Numbers of Images

Overall 1326 images have been catalogued within the sample. Only two schools did not include images in their prospectuses whilst across the rest of the sample the numbers of images included ranged from 5 to 132. However, meaning drawn from the quantity of images in isolation should be taken with extreme caution. One prospectus (*G3*) contained only 7 images yet these images were so heavily saturated with signs and mythologies that they are able to do more semiotic work than dozens of less crafted images could. It is also worth noting the relationship between number of images and number of pages. Figure 4.5 below shows the images per page ration between the different categories. With the exception of the handful of text based documents sampled, the lower ratio of images per page comes from using single large images, often full page, as opposed to fitting larger numbers of small images on a page.

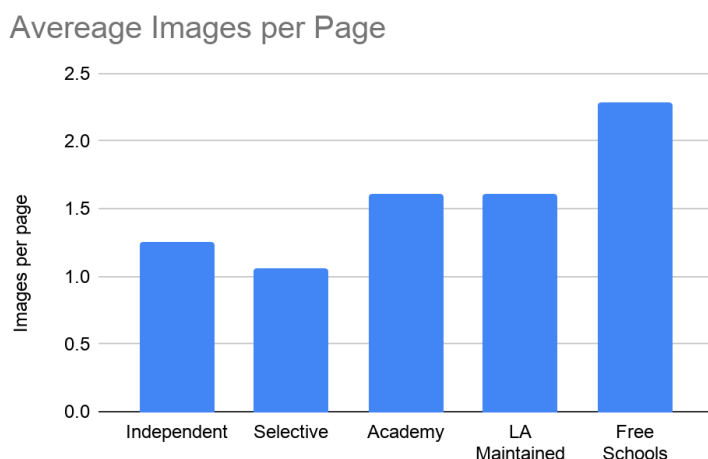


Figure 4.5. Images per Page

Larger, single, images have more visual impact than a collection of small images on the same page. Any signs within the large image are amplified in comparison to those within small images. However, this should be balanced with any potential cumulative impact that may come from the presence of multiple images within the same page. It is interesting to note that - in general - the Independent and Selective State (Grammar) schools tended to have fewer images per page and that these images were generally large photographs, whilst the rest of the State schools - in general - are more likely to use multiple, smaller, images on a single page.

4.2 | Content Analysis

4.2.1 | Inductive Analysis of Themes

An inductive analysis of themes found within the images in the sample was carried out. The subjects contained in the images were recorded and grouped together into thematic categories. Figure 4.6 (below) shows the ten most commonly depicted themes identified.

10 Most Depicted Themes

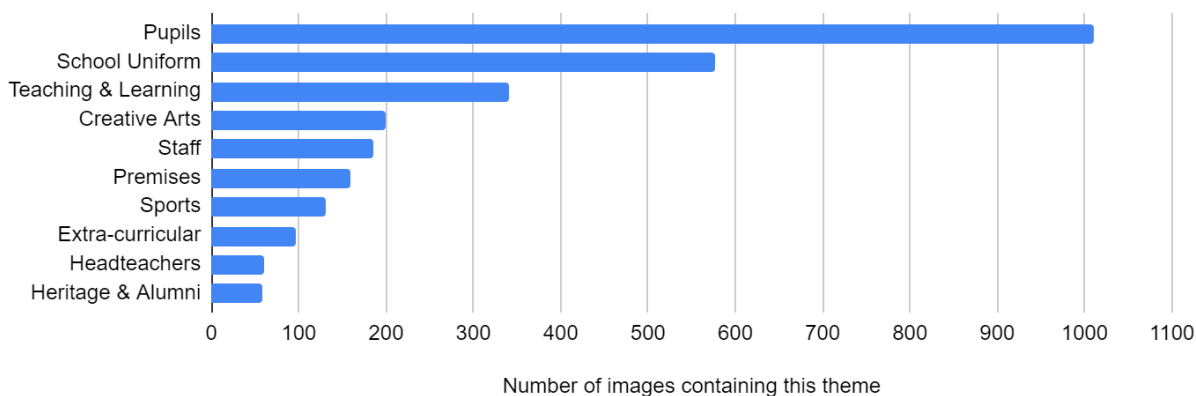


Figure 4.6 Themes found in the images

These themes were then subject to a further deductive analysis below.

Some less common themes discovered that may prove of interest included the depiction of pupils receiving certificates or awards. This appeared with similar frequency in both the Independent sector and amongst Academies and Local Authority Maintained schools. It often, but not always, appeared in some variation of the trope of celebrating students receiving their exam results, illustrating the transactional relationship between school and the acquisition of credentials or educational capital. However, whilst relatively common it did not feature regularly enough - within this sample at least - to feature in the deductive analysis that follows. Instead it will feature in the semiotic analysis of case study images.

Another theme that occurred occasionally, but not commonly, was that of ‘newness’, exemplified most clearly in image *FI.1* which depicts the Headteacher ‘cutting the ribbon’ to open a new school or school building. Given that themes of heritage also appeared within the sample images it was anticipated that there may have been an interesting comparison to be made between those schools depicting ‘newness’ and those focussing on ‘heritage’ (or as in the case of school *P23* trying to explicitly juxtapose signifiers of both on the same page).

However, there were few further images where the contents overtly signified newness as a discrete theme (in contrast to those depicting heritage which were usually doing so unambiguously).

4.2.2 | Deductive Analysis of Themes

The Pupils

The schools' pupils were, unsurprisingly, by far the single most depicted subject across all sectors and schools in the sample. Pupils were directly depicted, in one form or another, in over 1000 of the images analysed. Every single prospectus with images included multiple photographs of the school's pupils. In many of these images further signs and significations are present and these will be examined below, but the presence of pupils *themselves* as a subject can be analysed for meaning.

Looking at whether the pupils were depicted alone or in groups (Figure 4.7 below) it might be possible to examine the extent to which the hegemonic individualism described earlier permeates the portrayal of the pupils.

Depiction of Pupils

Proportion of pupils shown as individuals versus in groups

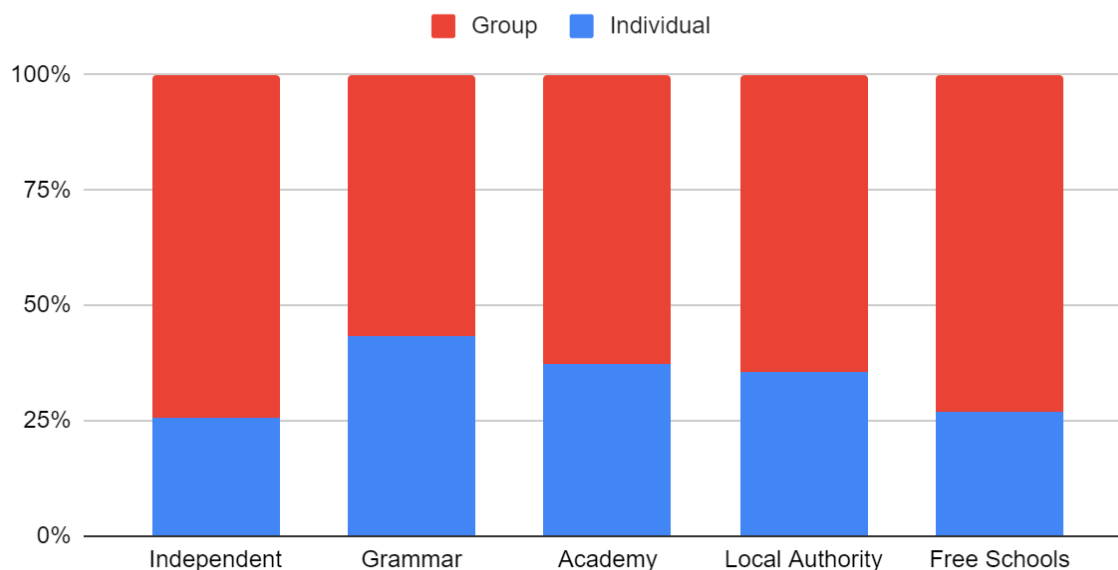


Figure 4.7: Pupils shown individually versus those shown in groups

The majority of photographs analysed show the pupils in groups. There are substantial proportions of individual portraits but, across all sectors, one way of reading this is that school is illustrated as a collective experience more often than an individualised one. Given the decades of increasing individualisation associated with neoliberal society this perhaps comes as something of a reason for optimism. The narrative of the competitive individual may not yet dominate the visual messaging found in this sample. It is interesting to note too that the sector immersed in the market the longest - the Independent sector - appears to have the highest proportion of collective depictions. However, an alternative reading of these groups as individuals in competition with each other. The 'collective' in such a reading would instead be the 'competition'. Both readings, though, perpetuate the idea that at some level in education remains a shared experience rather than a solitary endeavour. Of course, without comparative studies of prospectus images in the past we cannot know the direction of travel in this regard, whether individualism is growing or this balance is more or less a constant. It

would be worth revisiting this question in the future to see if these trends and patterns have changed, and in what direction.

This research has also consciously not recorded or analysed the depiction of pupils by gender, ethnicity or visible disability. However, there is huge scope for analysis drawn from this data looking at (in)equalities in representation of pupils in prospectuses.

School Uniform

The second most depicted theme or subject within the prospectuses follows almost entirely as a consequence of the first - school uniform. However, it is worth noting that some schools did include images (*F1.4*, *F1.5* and *A22.4* for example) of their uniform, unworn, and separate from images of their pupils.

In this analysis 'school uniform' refers to school prescribed clothing that bears school colours branding or distinctive format including sports kit. 'Own clothes' refers to clothing that does not follow any stipulated format. Clothing which is unclear due to the composition of the image or where (in Sixth Form for example) it is not apparent how regulated the outfit is.

Figure 4.8 below illustrates the proportion of pupils depicted in school uniform in contrast to those in 'own clothes' across the sample.

Proportion of Pupils Depicted in School Uniform vs. in 'Own Clothes'

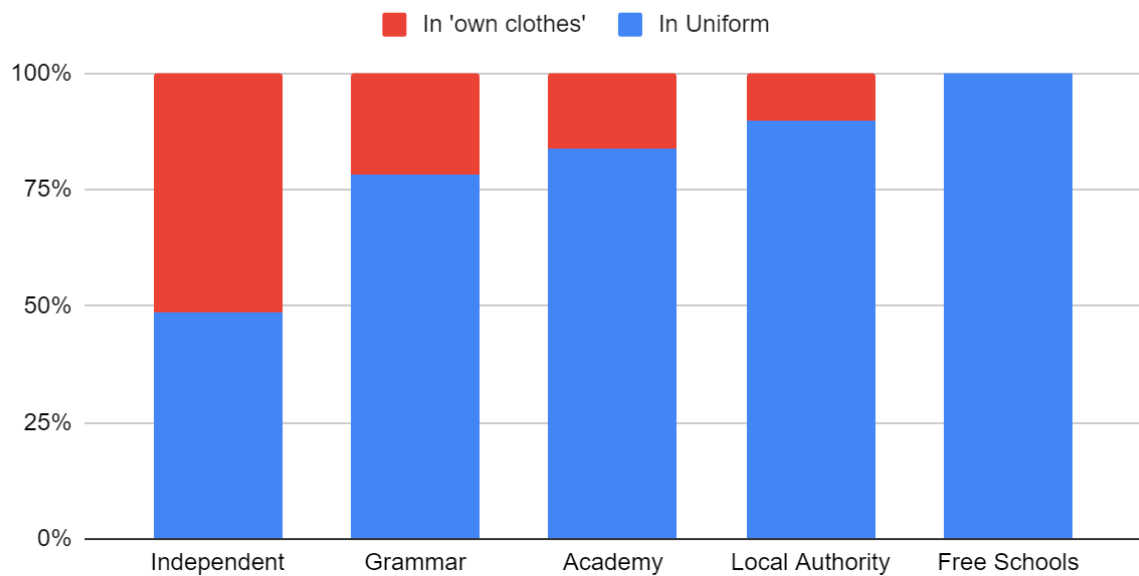


Figure 4.8: School Uniform

The most notable trend to appear is, perhaps, counterintuitive initially. Independent schools in the sample are far more likely to picture their pupils in 'own clothes' and not in their school uniform than the schools in the various State sectors. Indeed three prospectuses from the Independent sector (*P1*, *P11* and *P33*) do not include *any* images of pupils in school uniform. Yet, as Kulz (2017) observes, State schools may be attempting to replicate what they see as a public school aesthetic in their deployment of uniform rules and forms as signifiers of legitimate culture. Kulz goes on to offer an explanation for this aesthetic dissonance, she argues that “rigidly enforced rules are not just about aesthetic representations, but about demanding detailed compliance.” (Kulz, 2017a, p.67). The results of the content analysis of the sample here (Figure 8 above) suggest that this compliance, this creation of “docile bodies” (Foucault, 1995), is a lower priority for the privileged pupils of the Independent sector and more hegemonic in the schools of middle and working classes. The form and content of school uniform will be analysed in detail in the semiotic case studies below, but the findings

of this initial content analysis show a striking class based divide in the imposition of “ideological symbols” (Kulz, 2017) grafted onto pupil's bodies via the Barthesian mythologies of uniform which will be examined later. Perhaps, too, echoes of Veblen’s descriptions of the association between uniforms and servility (Veblen, 2008) can be traced within this mythology.

Teaching and Learning

Teaching & Learning Depicted in Images

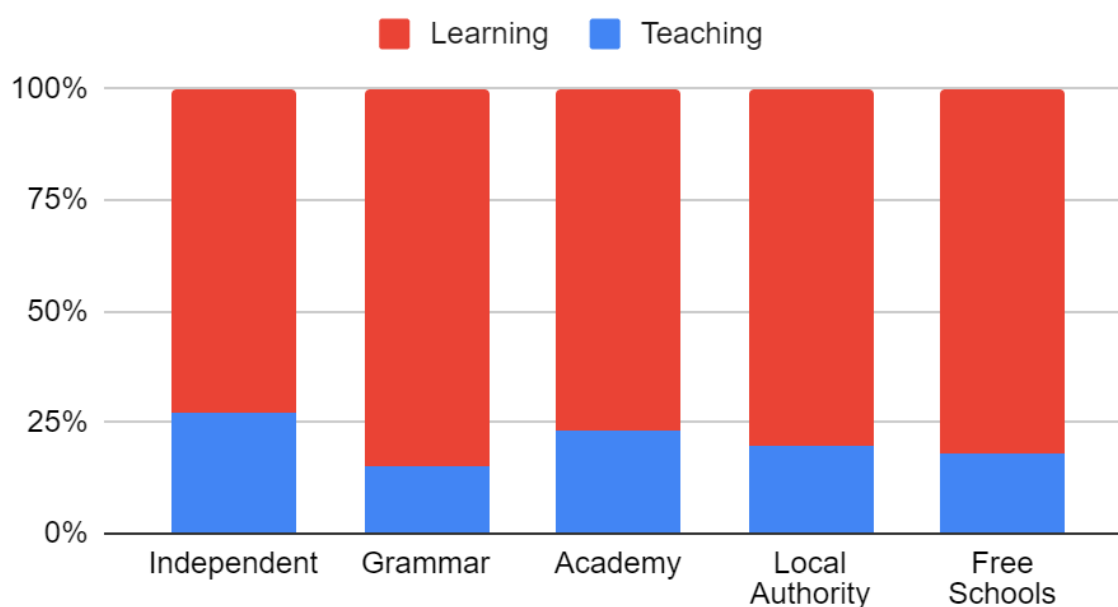


Figure 4.9: Teaching and Learning Depicted in Images

Over three hundred images featuring classroom teaching and/or learning were recorded in the sample (sports, arts and so on were excluded from this category as they are analysed separately below). The majority showed pupils engaged learning themselves without the presence or intervention of a teacher, whilst a minority showed a member of staff engaging in teaching. Only one illustrated prospectus (*P23*) did not contain any images of teaching or learning and one (*P11*) did not feature learning. A further 17 prospectuses did not include

depictions of teaching. There were also a very small handful of images showing a teacher teaching, without pupils in the composition. These were rare and featured either shots of visually striking, charismatic teaching (*P14.46* for example) or of the teacher at the front of or to one side of pupils cropped out of shot. There was no obvious difference in the general pattern across the sample. This shows that, in this sample, what the Government claims “works best” (Williamson, 2021), that is “traditional teacher-led lessons”, has not yet become the dominant signifier of teaching and learning. Photographs “with children seated facing the expert at the front of the class” (Williamson, 2021) do not appear to be being deployed using the depiction of the teacher as a marker of distinction in any systematic way in the content analysed here. The focus overwhelmingly remains on the pupil’s act of learning.

Curriculum and Academic Subjects

Entwined with the act of learning is the representation of what it is that is being learnt, that is to say the curriculum. In many cases it was not depicted in the images, but an identifiable curriculum subject (excluding arts and sport which are covered elsewhere) was recorded in 141 of the images. These were grouped into six broad curricular areas; English, Maths, Science, Humanities, Languages and Technology. Although examples of all of these groups were found within the sample the two most numerous were Science and Technology.

Subjects Depicted by Sector

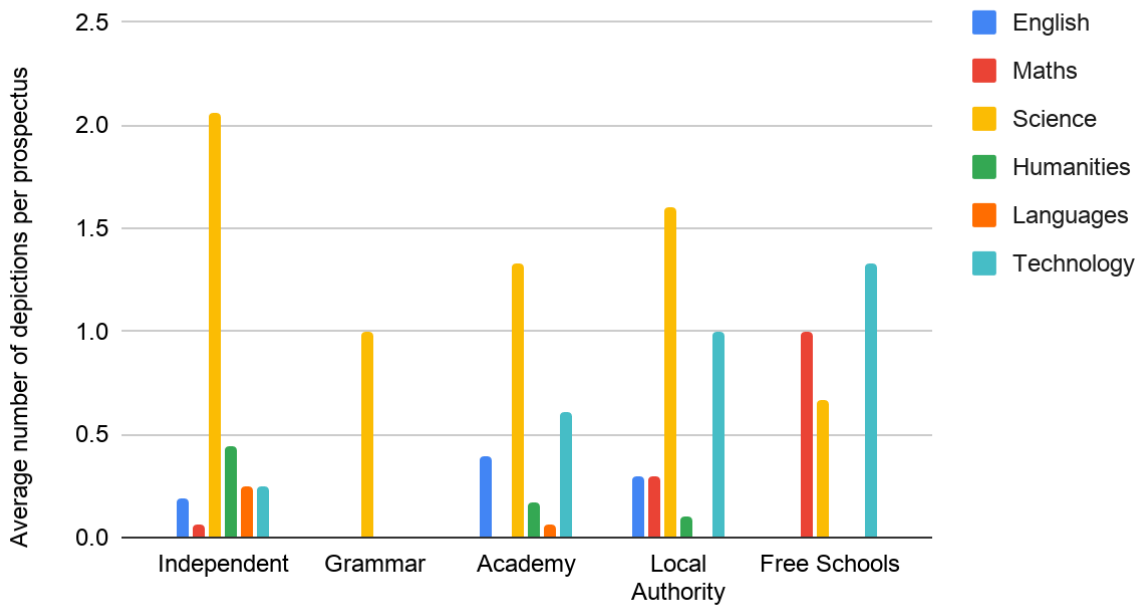


Figure 4.10. Subjects depicted by Sector.

It might be argued that this prevalence is down to the ease with which ‘props’ such as goggles, test tubes, tools and workbenches can be deployed as signifiers of these subjects. This is true. It is also, however, true of other, less represented subjects (globes and maps for geography, equations on the board for Maths and so on) and these signifiers are found amongst the sample too.

Looking at “the traditional curriculum hierarchy” (Bleazby, 2015, p.671) suggests that curricular signs carry social status and value. Echoing Bourdieu’s differentiation between practical mastery and symbolic mastery, Bleazby identifies the more abstract school subjects - Physics, Maths and so on - as having a higher status than the practical and vocational subjects that may be offered. Davey (2012) takes a similar view, finding that “‘traditional’ or ‘hard’ subjects” (p.515) are a means of converting cultural capital into value within this curricular hierarchy. This, she argues, is a mechanism where the school works at “‘sifting and sorting’ of students towards particular universities and courses.” (p.511) which, in turn, further

reproduces stratification within educational hierarchy. This point is reiterated by Constantinou (2018) arguing that as subjects within the curriculum are segregated by class this “lays the foundations for social segregation, rendering school a mechanism of social reproduction” (Constantinou, 2018, p.554). Research by Dilnot into Russell Group publications found “science, mathematics, languages, history, and geography as facilitating of highly selective university entry” (Dilnot, 2018) emphasising the hierarchy of status within the curriculum as described above.

The sample analysed here provides further evidence to support this. The largely practical and vocational subjects within the technology category such as Design Technology, Food Technology and Information Technology were far more likely to feature in State School prospectuses than those of Independent Schools. Indeed, Food Technology does not feature at all in the Independent School prospectuses (nor those of the Grammar schools) although there are a number of pictures prominently featuring pupils eating food that has been prepared for them (*P14.17* for example) or producing/distributing food as part of their ethos of service. What this shows is that Independent Schools, who are composed of, and produce, the most privileged sections of society ((*Elitist Britain 2019* , 2019) are not signifying their status through the inclusion of images depicting vocational or practical subjects in this category, their omission may also signify the focus on the higher status subjects described above. Schools in the State sector (with the exception of the Grammars) however, were less reticent in their display of these lower status subjects.

The Sciences category contains what Bleazby (2015) finds to be “ top tier” subjects in Chemistry, Physics and, slightly below them, Biology (p.673). Science is, however, the most depicted subject group across all the sectors of the sample with exception of Free Schools (where it is still a significant presence). One possible explanation, touched on above, is the

ease with which the signifiers of science can be used in visual composition. In the analysis of objects' presence below these signifiers will be returned to. Another potential interpretation might be found in the pictorial tropes that reoccur depicting science - the 'student(s) staring at test tubes' is one example, another emerging is the Promethean imagery of controlled fire/flames in the laboratory.

Attempts to dig down into distinctions in depiction of the various branches of Science, and their varying levels of status according to schemas such as Bleazby's, present in the sample were inconclusive. It was often impossible to identify the discipline purely on the basis of the contents of the image. Amongst the images that could be categorised according to scientific discipline Physics was most often depicted in the Independent sector whilst the other highest status subject - Chemistry - was found in all sectors except Free Schools and was the most widely depicted of all the discrete disciplines.

The universally higher rate of depictions of Science need also to be considered within the context of the promotion of STEM subjects within English education, which has included significant additional funding for Science in schools (*Multi-million government investment in the future of UK science - GOV.UK*, n.d.). This push has been explicitly framed within the narrative of education's role being to produce a skilled labour force. In this environment it is not surprising that Science features prominently across the sample and the traditional higher status signified by the subject may be somewhat negated by this Government led intervention.

Of course STEM covers more than just Science. Technology, as seen above, largely remains the province of low status signification. Engineering is difficult to comment upon in this research, there were a handful of images that could be read as related to engineering skills or activities, but this was not visually explicit. Mathematics, which according to Bleazby is a top

tier subject, featured occasionally but not in sufficient numbers in this sample to observe any patterns or trends in its depiction. Similarly, other subjects such as English, the Humanities/Social Sciences and Languages were not found in enough prospectuses for any overall tendencies to emerge.

The strongest pattern to emerge from a content analysis of the depiction of curriculum through images of teaching and learning is, therefore, that vocational and practical subjects such as Food Technology - those in Bourdieu's terms are closest to necessity - remain signifiers of lower status and value. This according to Abrahams "represents the most powerful form of stratification, with working-class people being streamed into routes which have continually been positioned as of less academic worth than courses based on abstract and theoretical learning." (Abrahams, 2018, p.1149).

Creative Arts

The Arts have been analysed separately from other subjects because, like Sports, they straddle the terrain of both curricular and extracurricular activity. They are, of course, a key site of cultural capital and provided the basis for much of Bourdieu's work on classed tastes - "of all the objects offered for consumers' choice, there are none more classifying than legitimate works of art" (Bourdieu, 1986a, p.8).

Across the sample the Arts were explicitly depicted in every sector. Over two hundred images were identified as containing representations of the Arts, over half of these came from prospectuses in the Independent sector of the sample. Only seven illustrated prospectuses did not contain any images of the Arts, four of these were in the Academy sector. Overall, Independent Schools were more likely to feature a greater number of images featuring the Arts than any other sector (see Figure 4.11 below). The prospectus with the highest number of

depictions of the Arts, with 17 recorded occurrences, was school *P1* in the Independent Sector. Meanwhile in the State sector, the highest number was 9 at school *A9* - this school was, however, a State boarding school.

Depiction of the Creative Arts

Average Number of Images per Prospectus

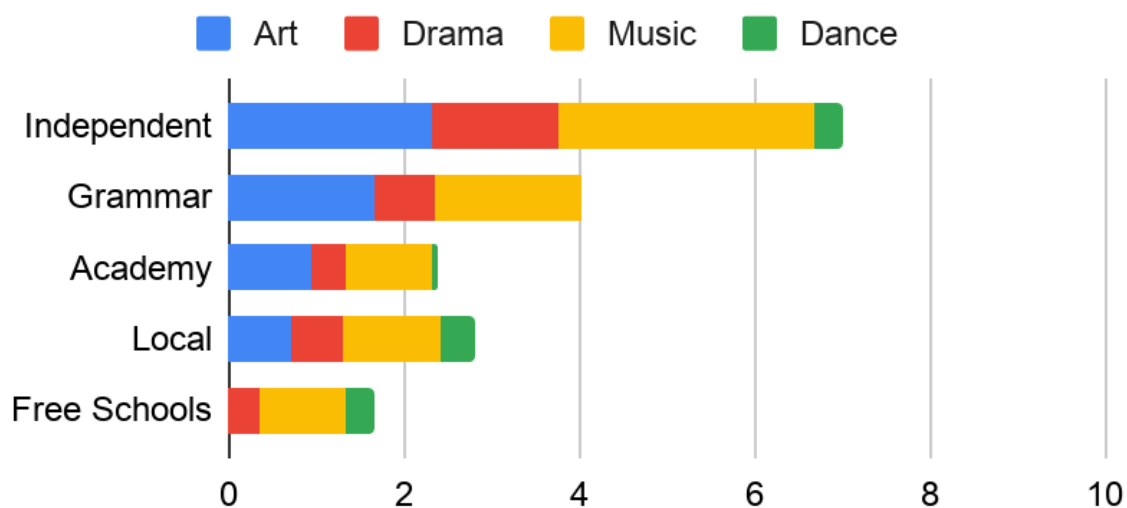


Figure 4.11. Depiction of the Creative Arts

Breaking the Arts down into component disciplines provides a couple of interesting insights. Visual art - drawing, painting, sculpture and so on - despite being intrinsically and explicitly visual in nature was entirely absent from the Free Schools in the sample and omitted from 18 individual prospectuses, 14 of which were in the State sector. Some schools, in contrast, featured double page spreads on the visual arts (*P2.23* for example) or placed it on their front cover (such as *P23.1*).

Music

“Who plays the piano today?” asked Barthes as he distinguished between the music of the elite, and latterly the bourgeoisie, and that of “another public, another repertoire, another instrument” (Barthes, 1984a, p.149). From the depictions of music featured in the ample

prospectuses we can mine further information about social status and cultural capital by digging into the types of music portrayed. Bourdieu (1986, p.8) distinguished between “legitimate”, “middle-brow” and “popular” tastes in music, combining this schema with Savage’s descriptions of cultural capital and emerging cultural capital (Savage, 2015) depictions of music in the sample were classified into three rough categories; “Popular” (featuring instruments such as electric guitars, drum kits and keyboards), “Emerging”, a loose amalgam of Bourdieu’s “middlebrow” tastes and Savage’s “emerging cultural capitals” (instruments such as acoustic guitars, saxophones and the ukulele) and finally the “Classical” (featuring the traditionally legitimate or high status instruments such as violins, pianos and so on).

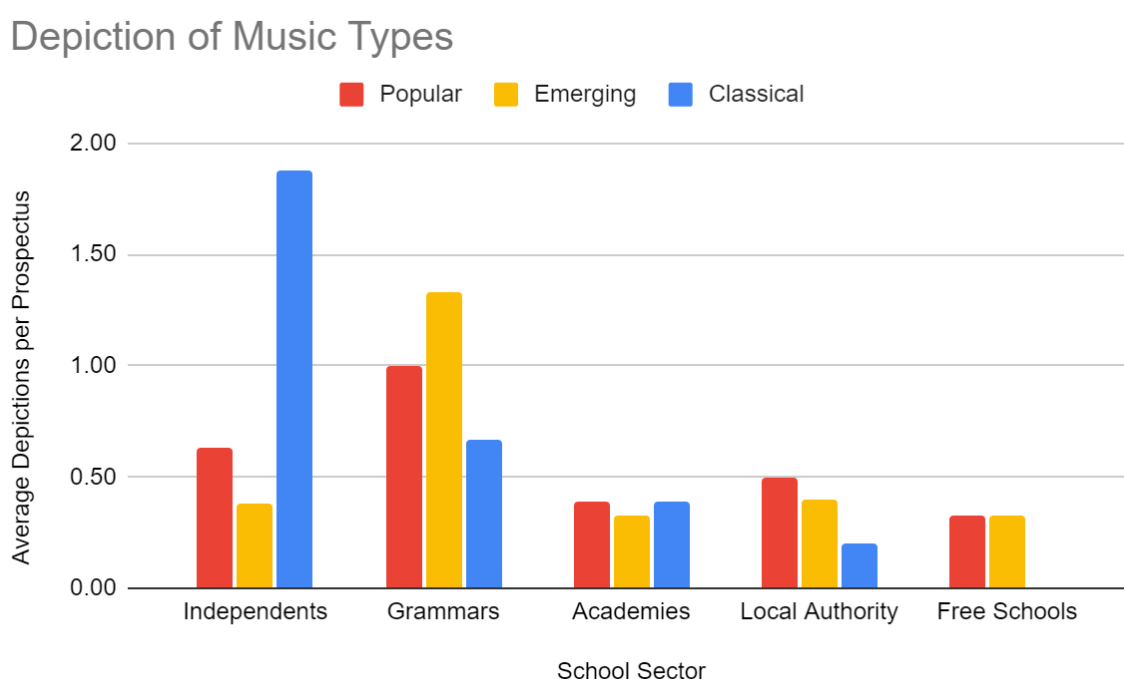


Figure 4.12. Music Types vs School Types

What can be seen after categorising the images of music in the sample is that the average number of depictions of both Popular and Emerging musical signs is relatively consistent (the Grammar sector shows a higher rate of depiction, but this is drawn from a small sample so

should be viewed with caution). However, the highest status category - Classical - displays a marked disparity between the Independent sector and the others. This suggests that the use of classical music as a sign of distinction is present within the sample. Schools, therefore, can signify high(er) status to their market through the placement of such imagery within their prospectuses. School *A9*, a State Boarding school, for example includes three images featuring Classical music. By contrast, *L4*, a Local Authority Maintained school, features three depictions of Popular music, yet none of the other categories. Both of these State schools feature an above average number of representations of music, yet the status being signified by these is quite different.

Teachers and Staff Members

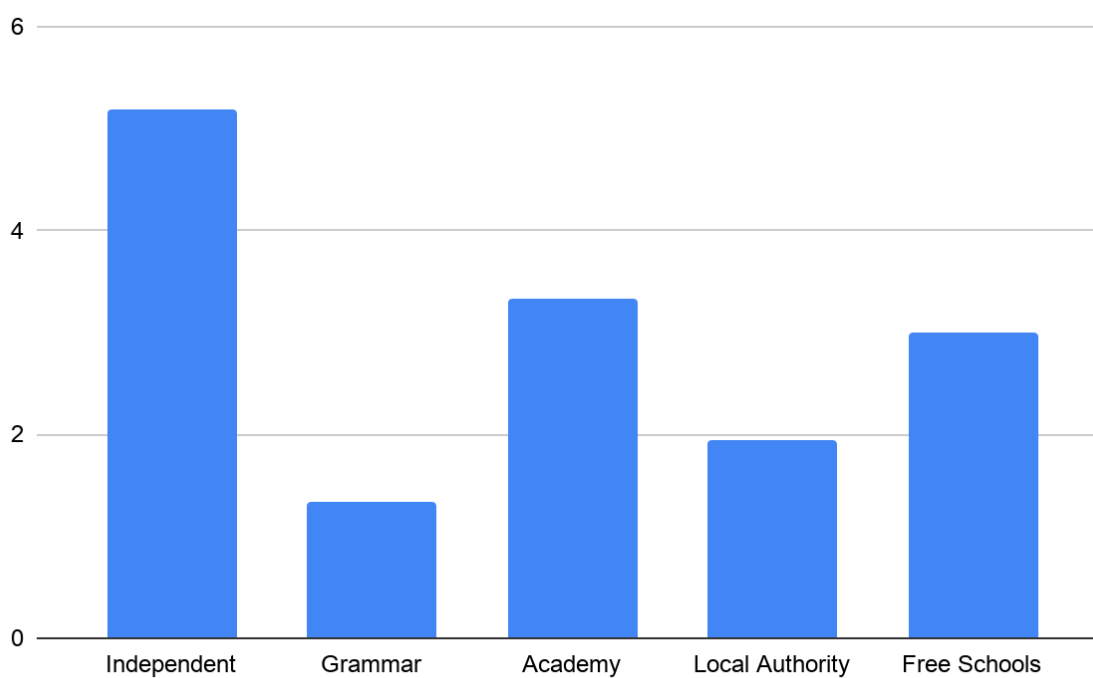


Figure 4.13. Rate of Depiction of Staff Members

The depiction of ‘teachers teaching’ has already been discussed above, and this contributes to the rate of staff depiction in Figure 13 (above). The other commonly repeated representation

of teachers in school prospectuses is that of the Headteacher's portrait included in their 'welcome message'.

Leaders and Managers

The typical format of a school prospectus features a headshot of the Headteacher near the front of the prospectus. Over three quarters of the sample prospectuses included at least one of these photographs. A small number included the Headteacher in more than one image and some also included photographs of other senior leaders and managers. There was no observable pattern to this between or within sectors beyond it being a standard format that the majority of schools followed in their prospectuses.

In part, this might reflect "the hierarchical headmaster tradition" (Kulz, 2017b, p.99) and studies of past prospectuses could yield further evidence of whether this has been a persistent presence. If tradition acts as a selling point to (some) prospective parents then this could act as a signifier of these traditional values and structures. However, there is little to demonstrate that the 'headteacher portrait' signifiers are concentrated in any particular sector of the sample and they are sufficiently widespread to limit their value by mere virtue of inclusion as markers of distinction. This may, at least partially, be down to what Kulz describes as the shift away from the Comprehensive model towards Academies and Free Schools which "mimic business organisations" (p.99) in their leadership and managerial models.

Premises: Grounds and Buildings

Depiction of School Premises

Average number of images focussed on school buildings and grounds per prospectus

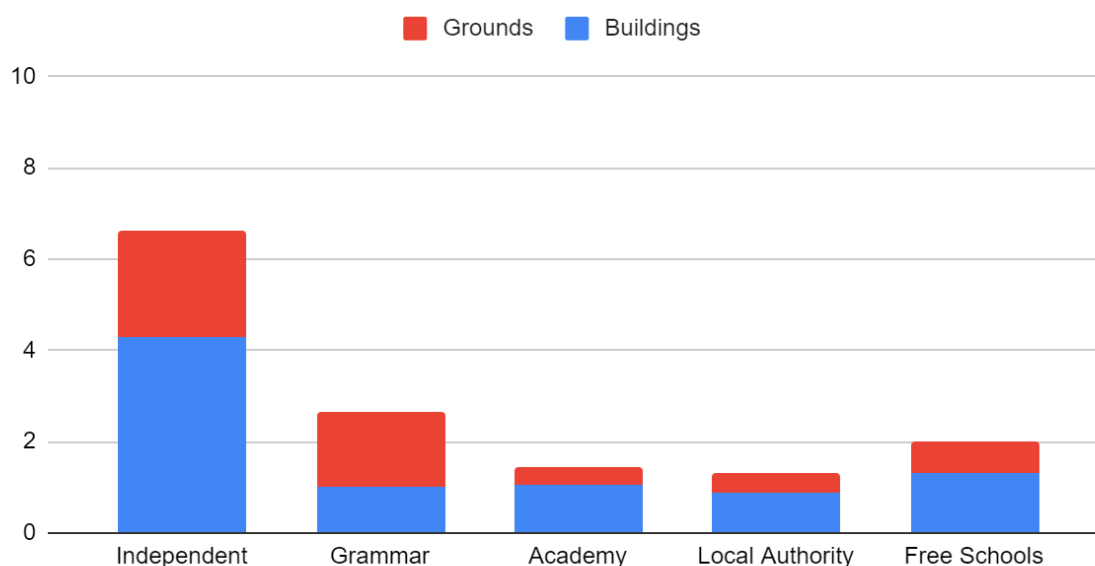


Figure 4.14. Depiction of School Premises

There were over 150 images that depicted the school premises by focussing on the buildings or the ground. Two thirds of these came from Independent Schools, who were more likely to feature buildings and also more likely to feature their grounds than schools in the State Sector.

There were examples in the State sector where their modern buildings were chosen as the centrepiece of one or more photographs (*L7*, *F1* and *A17* for example). Eleven schools in the State sectors chose not to include any prominent images of their premises whilst only one of the Independent Schools (*P33*) made the same omission.

Unlike in the State sector, the portrayals of their buildings that the Independent prospectuses featured did not depict new or modern constructions (with the partial exception of *P23*) but instead presented more traditional architectural styles to their audience. Walford's study into country houses repurposed as Independent schools found that "the original builders were

royalty, nobility, archbishops, landowners, industrialists, bankers, and capitalists, colonialists, and similar...” (Walford, 2020, p.15). This, he argues, sees the buildings designed originally to embody and project power, wealth and status gained as a result of inequality and exploitation continue to do so in their new guise as schools. The potential impact of architectural style or atmosphere (which will be examined in more detail below) on the reproduction of privilege is noted by Verkaik (2018) who connects the similarity of buildings found in public schools and in Oxbridge colleges with the manufacture of feeling ‘at home’ and a sense of belonging within these environments.

More than this, the school building also functions as part of an institutional *habitus*, being the embodiment of the school’s history (both social and pedagogical). Woolner (2010) argues that educational ideas or fashions, as well as architectural ones, shape the form of school buildings whilst Ball (Ball, 2008) connects the Academies programme and their sponsors and financing with a new ‘corporate’ architecture framed in the modern iconography of business.

Beyond ‘taste’ and the aesthetic styles of particular types of schools a further factor that should be considered when examining the depiction, or lack of it, of school premises in their prospectuses is the association readers may make between the condition of the buildings/grounds and the standards of education and behaviour within that school. Woolner (2010) suggests that there may be a correlation between these, though stressing that this is not a causal relationship.

The grounds of the school (and their location within the wider surroundings), (Gamsu, 2016)

argues, are a key site for signifying legitimacy or status (and maintaining a competitive edge) for schools. Space, in the shape of land, is a form of capital. They constitute symbolic capital in their appearance, size and location but also economic capital as an asset that can be sold or rented. The greater the space it has at its disposal, the greater the capital(s) it is able to deploy. Therefore, the display of spacious grounds is a display of status. ‘Undeveloped’ grounds even more so as this implies that the school has sufficient capital elsewhere not to need to use this land, even here Bourdieu’s “distance from necessity” can be a measure of status. Bourdieu (1999) further argues that the possession of such extensive space is a way to maintain distance, and distinction, from less desirable neighbours or interlopers. In this sample, Independent and Grammar Schools were far more likely to feature images of their grounds than schools from the rest of the State sector.

Sports

Sport

Average number of images containing depictions of sports p...

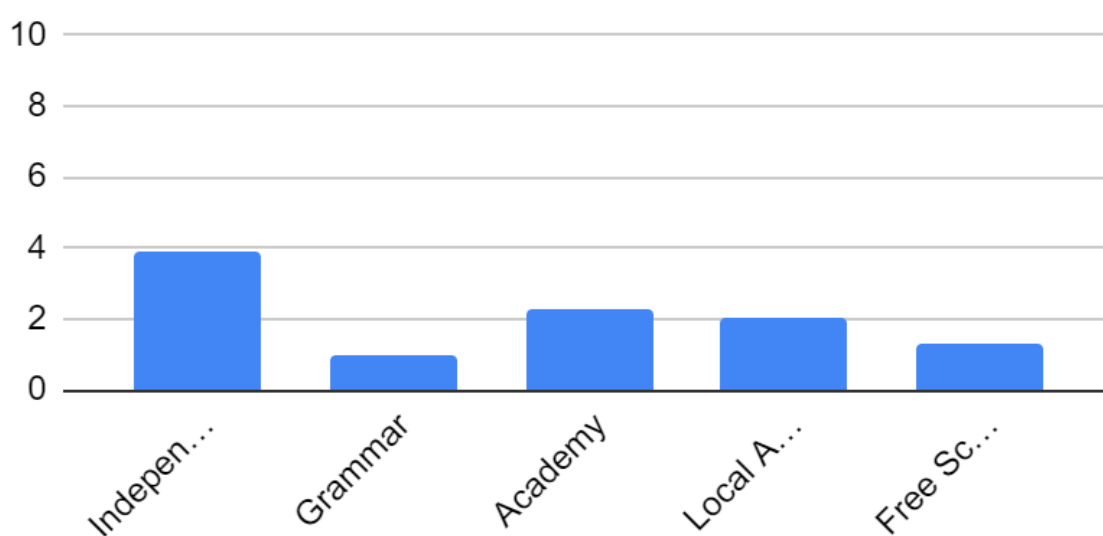


Figure 4.15. Average Number of Images featuring Sport by Sector

Sports were consistently featured across the sample with 131 recorded images featuring sport of some kind. Only 4 illustrated prospectuses out of the entire sample did not include any images of sport - *P12*, *A15*, *A19* and *F3*. Over half of the images were found in the Independent sector, who - on average - included more than twice as many images of sport as their counterparts across the State sectors. As illustrated in Figure 16 (below) whilst the distribution was reasonably consistent, there were outliers. *P12*, an Independent school, did not include any images of sports whilst *A19*, *A35* and *L7* from the State sectors featured more images of sports than the Independent School average.

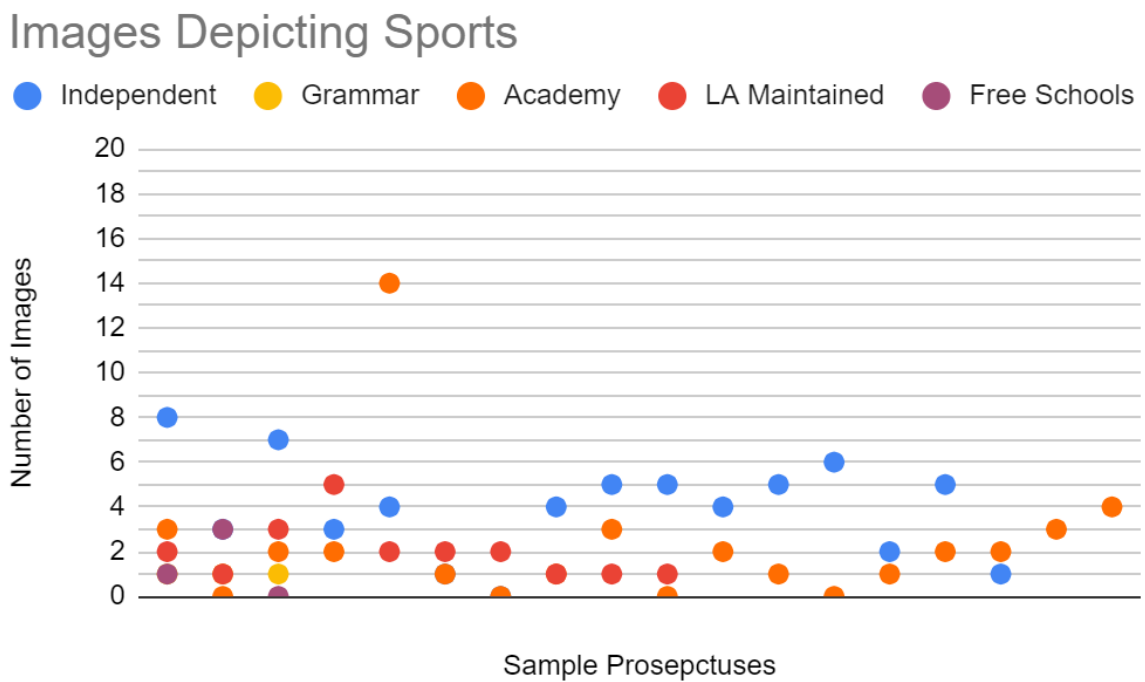


Figure 4.16. Number of Images featuring Sports per prospectus

That sport is featured heavily as a promotional image comes as no surprise. It remains tied up in the Victorian mythologies of ‘muscular Christianity’ as a marker of distinction and character developed through school sport (Verkaik, 2018, p.20). The elite grouping of

independent schools, the Headmasters' and Headmistresses' Conference (HMC), continue to use their sporting provision as both a selling point, and as part of a discourse of privilege. Beginning an article discussing the findings of an HMC sports survey they write “You only have to look at the intellectual calibre in an average Boat Race crew...” (Griffiths, 2015, p.8) before going on to extoll the virtues of sport and showcase their average provision of 5 to 6 hours of sport per week for pupils in their schools.

Gamsu argues (Gamsu, 2016) that sport functions as a form of symbolic capital that is recognised by institutions and parents alike. This may take the form of the display of sporting facilities, of competitive success or simply opportunities for participation but the results above suggest that this work that images of sport does is present across all sectors and statuses of school and that further signifiers of distinction need to be employed within the depiction of sports in order to act as markers of status. On a crude level this can be achieved by the volume of sporting images included in a prospectus, indeed the Independent schools in this study included, on average, almost twice as many images of sport as those schools in the State sectors. This echoes the Social Mobility Commission’s findings that there is a significant gap in sports participation amongst young people based upon socio-economic status “with 46% of young people from the lowest income households taking part, compared to 64% of youth from the highest income households.” (Donnelly et al., 2019, p.31).

On another level, it may be possible to identify a hierarchy of status associated with the types of sports depicted.

Individual and Team

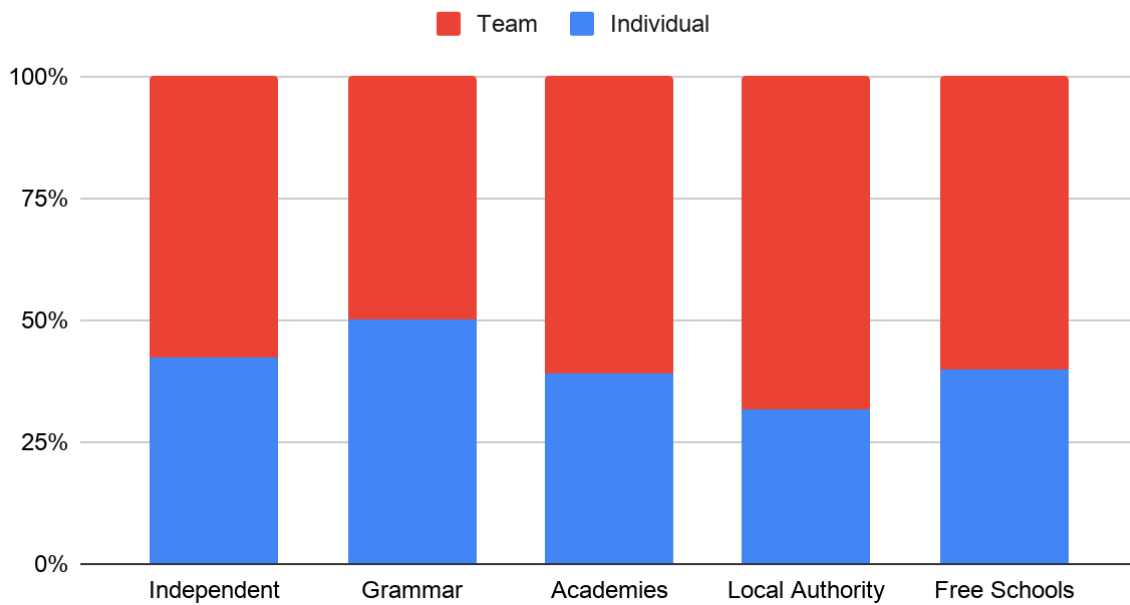


Figure 4.17. Which Sports are Featured Where? Individual versus Team Sports

The division between team sports and individual sports remains relatively even across sectors, with both featuring to a similar degree. This illustrates a balance between the competitive individualism that epitomises the neoliberal paradigm and the reproductive functions of group forming (teams, communities, networks...) that schools inculcate. These group identities can both define who is inside, and outside, a particular grouping but have historically been used to develop values such as loyalty, obedience to authority (in the form of the team captain or coach) and sacrifice for the good of the team. The use of these values to for ruling class is most desperately evoked in Newbolt's famous 1892 poem 'Vitaï Lampada'

"The river of death has brimmed his banks,
And England's far, and Honour a name,
But the voice of a schoolboy rallies the ranks:
"Play up! play up! and play the game!" (Renton, 2017, p. 152)

Whilst for many pupils today, these values have been modernised into 'soft skills' such as teamwork, they still remained framed in the language of duty and service, albeit to business

and employers rather than ‘Queen and Country’. Team sports, therefore, are a fundamental mythology reproduced in the English school system and their display within school marketing is about much more than healthy exercise and recreation.

Individual Sports by School Sector

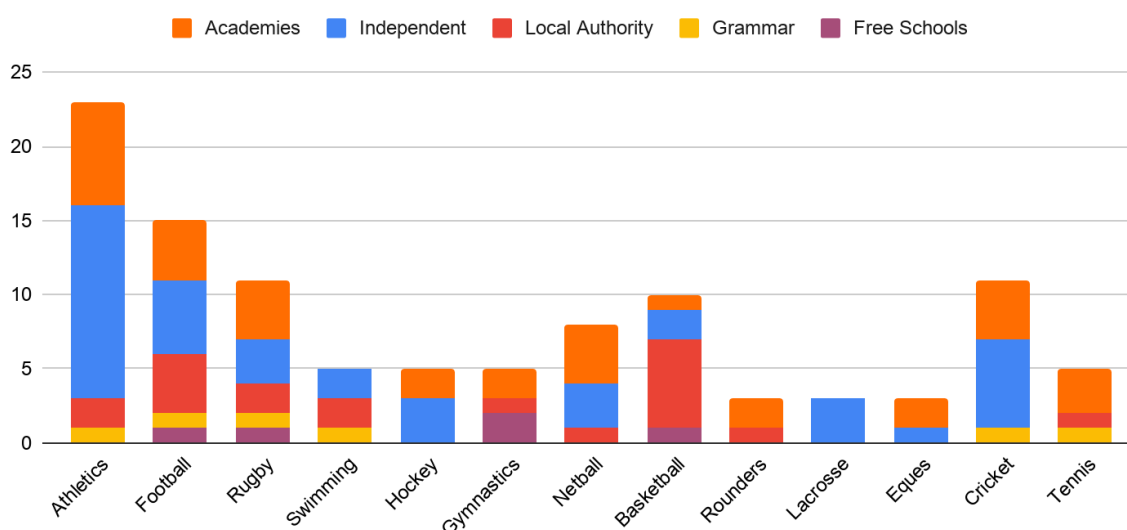


Figure 4.18. Specific Sports by Sector

Specific sports were not distributed evenly across school sectors. Figure 18 (above) shows that some sports such as cricket and lacrosse were more concentrated in the Independent sector whilst others, basketball and gymnastics for example, were more likely to be found in the prospectuses of State schools. The low number of occurrences of many specific sports (rowing for example only featured in one prospectus) means that this data should be treated with caution, but it does - with a couple of notable exceptions - reflect existing research into the status of specific sports. A report by the Sutton Trust and the Social Mobility Commission (*Elitist Britain 2019*, 2019) found significant disparities in the schooling of British International sportspeople. It reported that 43% of English International cricketers had attended Independent schools, echoing the trend found here that saw cricket being more likely to be portrayed in Independent school prospectuses. Similarly, it noted that 50% of the 2016

Gold medal winning women's hockey team had attended Independent schools - again echoed in the findings here that saw hockey largely absent from the prospectus of school across the State sectors. Over half of the images featuring athletics were found in Independent prospectuses whilst 31% of British Olympic medallists in 2016 came from Independent schools.

In two of the most featured sports - football and rugby union - the results appear to be a little more complicated. Warde notes that the difference between rugby union and football "had strong class connotations" and these remain "symbolically significant" (Warde, 2006, p.108). This class distinction between the two sports is borne out by the data showing that 37% of British male rugby union internationals had attended Independent schools as opposed to only 5% of British male international footballers. In the images studied, however, both sports are liberally depicted across sectors, featuring in the prospectuses of every sector in the sample. This may reflect the post-1990s (re)gentrification of football into a more popular, and socially acceptable sport amongst more privileged social strata. It may also reflect a recognition of rugby's ability to function as a fetish for traditional(ist) values in schooling and the State sectors' desire to signify a degree of adherence to these. It may simply be down to the relative logistic and financial ease with which these sports can be offered.

Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1986a) wrote, however, that these logistic or economic factors in access to specific sports do not - on their own - determine the class based status of a sport. He talks of "more hidden entry requirements" (p.217) such as family tradition, etiquette, and the social codes surrounding them that functioning as effective gatekeepers ensure that certain sports can be reliable signifiers of status and class. This, it appears, remains at least partially true in the sample data.

Extracurricular Activities

For the purposes of this analysis “extracurricular activities” excludes the sports and creative arts discussed above, but does include activities such as climbing, sailing and outdoor pursuits alongside other extracurricular activities such as trips, charity or community work and so on.

Extracurricular Activities

Average Number of Images per Prospectus

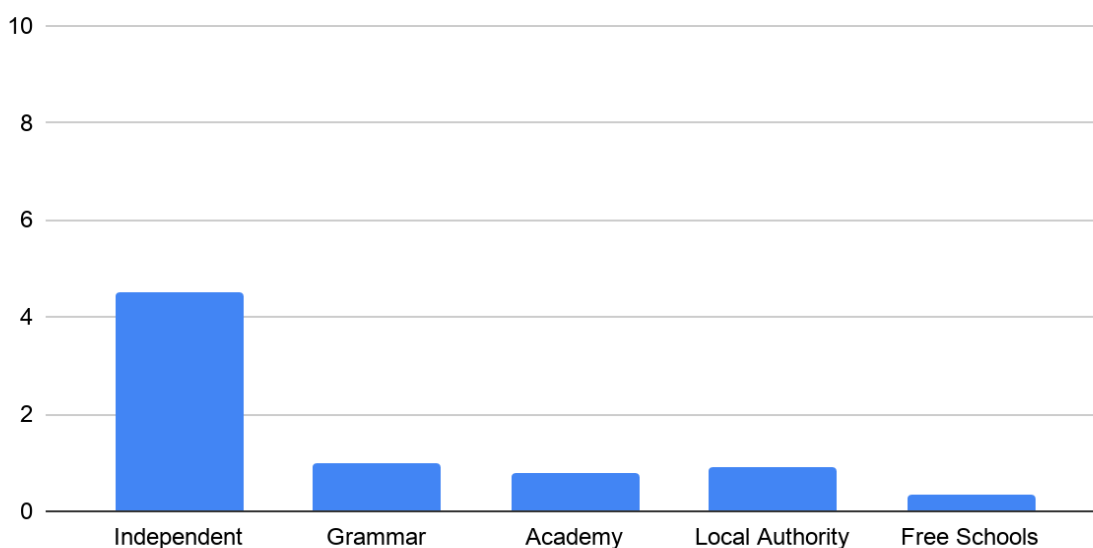


Figure 4.19. Average Number of Images featuring Extracurricular Activities by Sector

The discrepancy illustrated by Figure 19 (above) is striking. The gap in portrayal of extracurricular activities between the Independent sector and the State sectors is one of the starkest unveiled in this content analysis. On average, Independent school prospectuses featured more than four times as many images of extracurricular activities than prospectuses from the State sectors.

Cultural Capital & Cocurricular Activities

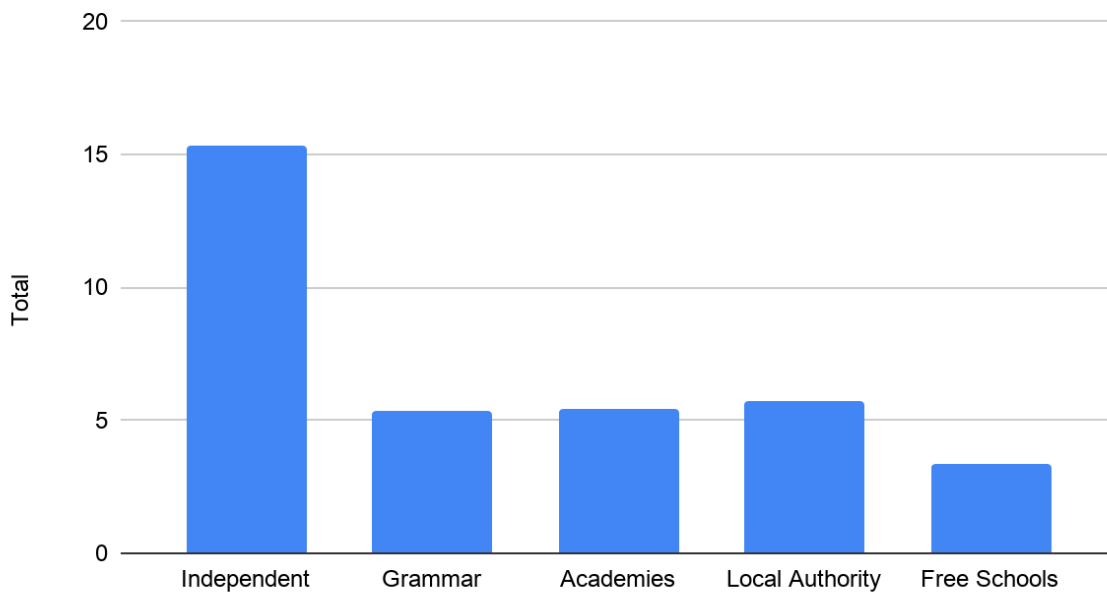


Figure 4.21. Average Number of Images featuring combined Cultural Capital and Cocurricular Activities by Sector

As Vincent and Ball note extracurricular activities form part of the middle class's "reproduction strategies" (Vincent & Ball, 2007) which enable the maintenance of held familial cultural capital and the accumulation of new supplemental forms.

When the Arts and sport are added to give a fuller picture of the inclusion of images depicting extracurricular, co-curricular and enrichment activities (with the caveat that sport and arts overlap with curricular activities) the divide remains. On average Independent schools include around three times as many images featuring these activities that are used to accumulate cultural capital.

These findings are mirrored by earlier studies that identified a classed gap in participation in extracurricular activities. The Social Mobility Commission reports that "Socioeconomic status

is a significant factor determining participation in extracurricular activities.” (Donnelly et al., 2019), p.13), whilst the Sutton Trust found that children in the highest socioeconomic strata were almost twice as likely to take part in extracurricular activities than those who were in the lowest strata (*Parent power 2018 - Sutton Trust*, n.d.).

An earlier study by Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson reported a gap between 70% of middle-class children taking part in extra-curricular activities at school versus only 56% of working-class children and that in terms of the breadth of activities undertaken the divide was even starker with only 6.5% of working-class children taking part in five or more activities (inside or outside school) compared with 42% of middle-class children (Holloway & Pimlott-Wilson, 2014). In the prospectuses analysed here this is reflected in the results. Whilst only one prospectus (*A19*) did not feature any of these activities amongst its images it was more common for schools in the State sectors to feature just sports (*L3* and *A30* for example) or just Arts (*F3*) or most commonly single examples across the categories. The breadth and variety of activities found in the Independent prospectuses (sailing, military cadets, overseas expeditions and so on) was rare within the State school samples whose offers were more limited in scope.

Heritage and Alumni

Although ‘heritage’ and ‘alumni’ could be considered thematically distinct, they have been grouped together here as they both contain signifiers of the longer term reproduction of value and intergenerational transferral of status that the school in question offers.

Heritage and Alumni

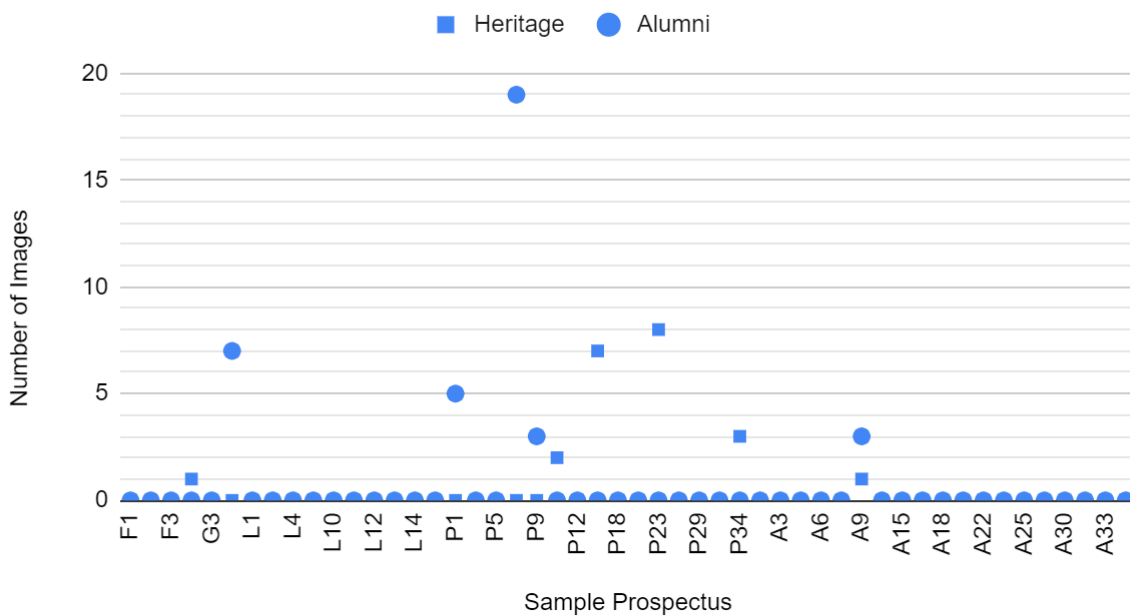


Figure 4.22. Depiction of Heritage and Alumni by Prospectus

The majority of prospectuses in the sample make no explicit reference in their photographs to heritage or alumni (although coded signification and connotation is present elsewhere in the other images). A small number do include overt and direct references to one or the other.

Only two schools across the State sectors included images depicting their heritage, *G2* - a Grammar school and *A9* - a State boarding school whose prospectus features numerous signifiers of high status. In the Independent sector a quarter of the prospectuses sampled contained signifiers of heritage with *P14* and *P23* - both founded in the Middle Ages - notable for occurring in much greater numbers than anywhere else in the sample.

The featuring of a school's alumni is another way in which a school can connect with its past. However, this was similarly rare in depiction as direct references to heritage. Again, only two prospectuses from across the State sectors included images of their alumni; the aforementioned prospectus *A9* and *G4* a Grammar School that included some of its famous

alumni in every photograph. One of the three Independent schools displaying its alumni in their prospectus imagery stands out, *P8*, which contained 19 photographs of its recent alumni.

Whilst clearly not a widely deployed visual strategy, it is clear that for some specific schools their heritage and/or alumni are considered important signifiers of their history or of the privileged destinations of those who choose to attend these schools.

4.2.3 | Objects as Displays of Antagonism

“...it may even be that the processes of a society of “consumption” powerfully reactivate this function of objects as “displays of antagonism” (*exposants antagoniques*)” (Baudrillard, 2019, p.16)

As Baudrillard (2019) writes, in a world saturated by commodities objects signify prestige and “the being and social rank of their possessor.” (Baudrillard, 2019, p.5) and this function operates far beyond the use value of any given object. They work as a “chain of signifiers” (Baudrillard, 1998, p.27) that signpost the social course(s) and class trajectories of their possessors and consumers.

In order to identify objects within the images that work in this way a further inductive content analysis was carried out on the sample. This time the intention was to identify the objects (rather than subjects) that featured in the images. The objects observed (discounting those analysed in the thematic content analysis) were then categorised into a number of groups:

- Space and Structure
- Stairs
- Nature & The Elements

- Tools for Work
- Books
- Furniture
- Food

Additionally ‘seating arrangements’ and ‘folders and backpacks’ were flagged as objects of interest during this preliminary inductive analysis.

Space and Structure

As seen above, space and structures - the form of the schools’ buildings and grounds - are a strong sign deployed to assert status, or inadvertently to reflect it. At this point, when looking at the depiction of objects rather than subjects it is worth revisiting these signifiers.

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to fully engage with depth of meanings embedded within architectural style and features, but a few elements that emerge within the prospectus images are worth consideration. Gamsu comments on the “common trope of neo-gothic architecture” associated with English public schools (Gamsu, 2021, p.3). Examples of the ecclesiastical connotations of older school architecture can be found in image *P12.2*, *P14.7*, *P14.9* and *P9.33*. However, during the 20th century Seaborne records a shift away from these quasi-religious architectural styles to a more secular aesthetic reflecting the shift in control of education from church to state (Seaborne & Lowe, 2020) whilst Gislason links this change in style to “...the growing influence of progressive educational ideas and practice on school design.” (Gislason, 2009, p.230). The ages of the buildings illustrated in this sample will be reflected, in part, by their architectural styles but it is semiotic work done by the elements of the buildings framed within the prospectus photographs that is most relevant to this study.

The link between architectural and educational qualities as manifested in the design of schools is well established, but, as Taylor notes, “...what do these qualities mean in terms of walls, windows, doors, ceilings, and other physical design elements of schools?” (Taylor, 2009, p.31) These physical design elements are present in many of the images analysed here, with walls, windows and doors the most visually prominent.

Openings: Portals and Liminal Spaces

Architectural features that can be grouped into a category of ‘openings’ (windows, doors and archways) were recorded in 191 images across the sample. As a grouped category these features were, on average, more commonly found in the pages of the prospectuses of schools in the Independent sector. Whilst, in part, this simply echoes the greater frequency of the display of school premises found in the Independent schools this enables a greater number of opportunities for these features to broadcast semiotic messages.

Openings

Average Depictions by Sector

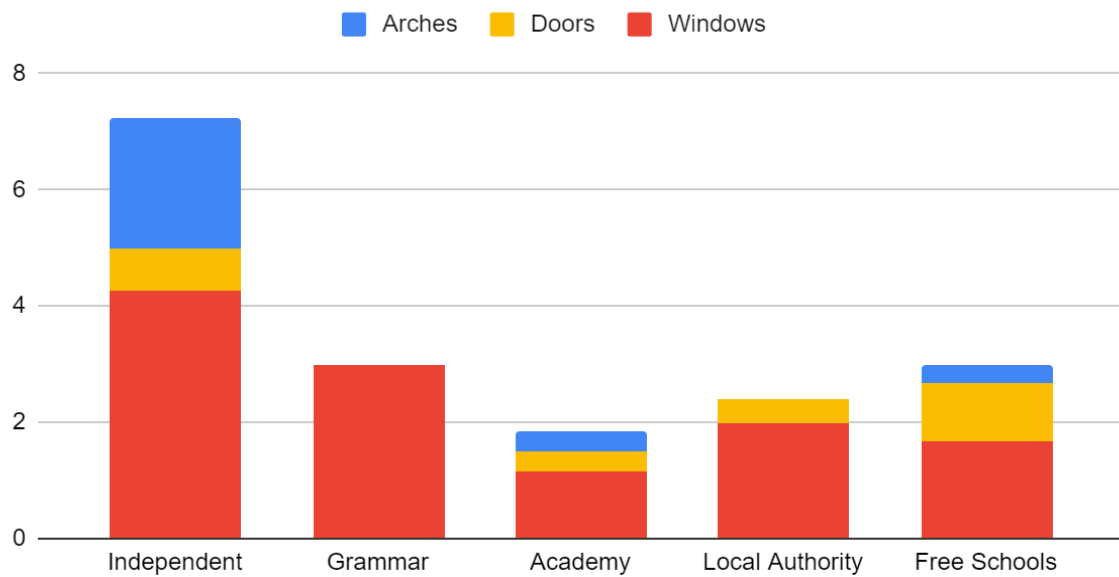


Figure 4.23. Openings depicted in the images

Features such as doors and windows can act as framing devices to construct spatial relations between semiotic relations (Goldman, 2011, p.69). In a number of images doors (*L12.15* and *A6,2* for example), windows (*L13.7*, *L12.14* and *P20.4*) and so on play an important role in the composition of the image and may work to guide or direct the reader's eye along a relationship of signs.

Windows

“Visibility is a trap” wrote Foucault (Foucault, 1995), p. 200). As schools began to move away from ecclesiastical windows towards bigger, wider, clearer ones reaching their apogee in the buildings dominated by ubiquitous glass panels as depicted, for example, in image *L7.5* they became more suited for the work of panoptic discipline. These heavily windowed schools become “like so many cages, so many small theatres, in which each actor is alone, perfectly individualised and constantly visible.” (Foucault, 1995, p. 200).

Whilst, there is a greater average number of windows recorded for the Independent schools in the sample (*Figure 23* above), this may simply reflect the greater average numbers of depictions of the premises *per se* found across that sector. When considering the relative proportional weight of windows versus the other types of openings identified such as doors and archways however, a trend towards a greater proportion of these openings being recorded as windows starts to emerge across the State sectors in comparison to the Independent sector. Whilst this may merely mirror building age trends (with the oldest schools being found in the Independent sector) it might also indicate a greater focus on disciplinary and panoptical work within those schools with a larger working class population.

At this point it is important to remember that images within the sample do not show the whole school building but rather elements of the school building are embedded within the photographs selected for the prospectus. In addition to functioning as the framing device described above, the window can produce semiotic work of its own. Williamson, for example, reads the presence within an advertisement she deconstructs as signifying a form of promise by acting as a symbolic portal between the present of the foreground and the future beyond and through the window in the background (Williamson, 1978, p.162)

Doors

This signification of the portal is even stronger within the sign of the door. Less commonly depicted than the window yet present in similar numbers across all sectors of the sample (with the exception of the Grammars); doors, and in a wider sense entrances, are an architectural feature that are subject to considerable focus during school design and renovation (Woolner, 2010, p.109). Image *F1.1*, for example, places the ceremonial opening of a new door as the very first image in that prospectus. The symbolism of the entrance in this example is doubled

by the inclusion of an archway of balloons providing a framing device to the new doors which are themselves a framing device.

More than this compositional steering though, the door acts as a semiotic fetish object imbued with a reified liminality. They both mark, and are, a magical threshold that simultaneously links and divides inside from outside. The symbolism of inside and outside, of opening and closing (Siegert & Peters, 2012) is the key connotation of the door as a sign. In the context of schools acting as vehicles for the reproduction of social relations this distinction is key.

Educational rhetoric is full of the door as a metaphor for the power of education; qualifications that ‘open doors’, entrance exams and so on. The mythology is that the right education enables passage from the outside to the inside.

This entrance may also be seen as an act of submission, immersing oneself in the design, and control, of others (Wood, 2019). The element of surrender inherent in the act of entrance is noted by Adorno (1985) who (p.40) laments the rise of automatic doors that remove the individual's autonomy of action in entrance and exit; it becomes “pure functionality”. As (Siegert & Peters, 2012) write, the sliding door itself has been very much associated with transit, with its predominant use in trains, boats and aeroplanes (Siegert & Peters, 2012). This idea can be extended to the idea of transition, with the association between sliding doors and the architecture of modern business found in many Academy new builds in homage to workshops of alchemy built by the financial sector in British towns and cities where only the labour goes in and out yet profit is generated from the thin of fictional capital. These acts of magical transformation are echoed in the promises made in the mythology of education being key to social mobility.

In many ways the semiotic opposite of the sliding door is the arch. Architecturally it has been noted that the shift away from quasi-religious architectural styles in school buildings during the twentieth century reflected a shift in control of education from church to state - with , for example, lancet windows (arched) replaced by rectangular ones (Seaborne & Lowe, 2020). The depiction of arches as passageways and entrances rather than the rectangular door therefore contains this implicit signification of an older form and function of education. This is an ideological choice “passed on through various eras, particularly in colonial settings, where civic rituals of nationhood were central to the imperial agendas of settler colonies,” (Power & Norrie, 2017, p.73). These ideas were promoted by Ruskin, with his theories of culture, memory and place leading to the idea that architecture could be used to symbolise a “noble heritage that should not be forgotten” and to express “national character” (Orr, 2011, p.72).

Enclosings

Many of the ‘enclosings’ depicted are fences and walls. Some external with the dual purpose of keeping people in, and people out, enforcing a separation between insider and outsider. Such fences and walls are more commonly shown in the prospectuses of the Independent sector where such a *raison d’etre* of separation is a more explicit appeal in their promotion.

Yet ubiquitous, and taken for granted are the internal walls and enclosures found in schools. This has not always been the case, “divisions” i.e. separated classrooms rather than one big school room started to appear in schools like Eton and Charterhouse by the 1860s (Seaborne & Lowe, 2020). They are important in the organisation of bodies within the building(s), a means of ensuring everyone (and everything) is in its proper place. Whilst one could argue that these enclosures contribute to a Foucauldian architectural creation of ‘docile bodies’,

Foucault himself saw opening as just important - if not more so - in the disciplinary environment of a building;

“A whole problematic then develops: that of an architecture that is no longer built simply to be seen (as with the ostentation of palaces), or to observe the external space (cf. the geometry of fortresses), but to permit an internal, articulated and detailed control to render visible those who are inside it; in more general terms, an architecture that would operate to transform individuals: to act on those it shelters, to provide a hold on their conduct, to carry the effects of power right to them, to make it possible to know them, to alter them. Stones can make people docile and knowable. The old simple schema of confinement and enclosure -thick walls, a heavy gate that prevents entering or leaving -began to be replaced by the calculation of openings, of filled and empty spaces, passages and transparencies.” (Foucault, 1995, p.172)

Walls and Fences

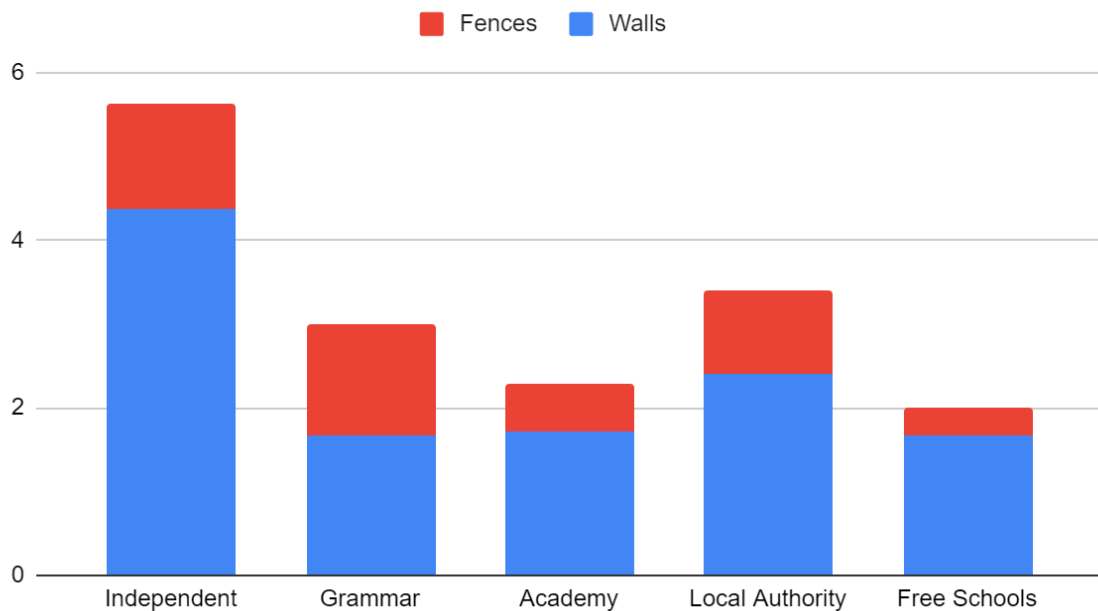


Figure 4.24. Enclosings depicted in the images

Stairways: Climbing or descending?

There were 20 images containing depictions of stairs. Perhaps surprisingly, there is no evidence that they were being used as a deliberate metaphor for social mobility. Only two of the images explicitly showed pupils climbing the stairs, whilst in contrast half of the images depicted pupils descending the stairs. There was no discernable pattern across the sectors in this and it seems, unlike the use of arches for example, that the presence of stairs in images

does not appear to indicate any deployment of the structure as signifier. Yet this absence in itself may be telling. The stairs remain in the picture, but theirs is a loud silence, of opportunities not taken and opportunities not available. Stairs provide a means of movement from one level to another but in these mythologies of schooling this movement is absent and ignored. That there is almost no evidence that the prospectuses in the sample saw, or placed value in, using the sign of the stairway to do this symbolic work might just indicate disregard for schools as a means to move between levels, between social strata and classes and instead echo symbolically the school's role in the reproduction of social segregation.

Nature & The Elements

The disparity in the rate of depiction of school grounds (*Figure 14* above) is replicated in the depiction of 'greenery' in the form of trees and grass where - again - the Independent schools in the sample feature in a higher average number of images than in the various State sectors.

Depiction of Trees & Grass

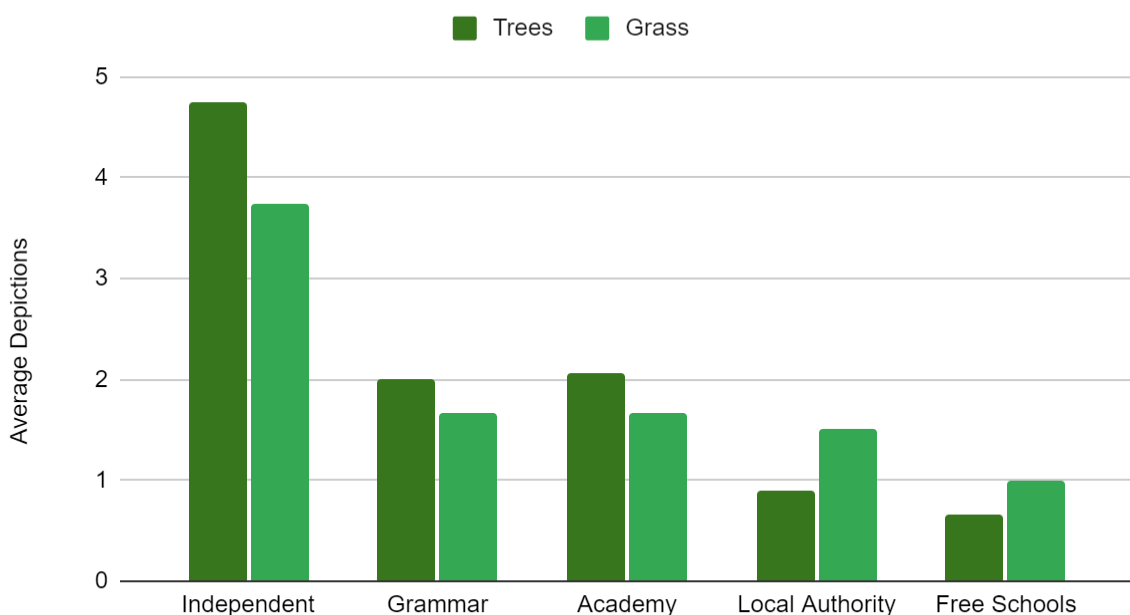


Figure 4.25. Trees & Grass in the Images

Further to the discussion around the display of grounds as a status signifier some work has been done on the role of trees and grass themselves in educational outcomes (Hodson & Sander, 2017, 2019; Sivarajah et al., 2018). Kuo et al. (2021) examined this research and conducted their own work that finds that there is a positive relationship between academic achievement and vegetation in and around the learning environment and that in particular “Tree canopy significantly predicts academic achievement even when grass and shrub cover does not” (Kuo et al., 2021, p.2).

Whilst it is unlikely that such studies have directly influenced the choice of images in English school prospectuses, the role that greenery can play is being promoted within work on school design and refurbishment (Woolner, 2010) whilst Johnsson and Lindren noted that references to nature and “beautiful surroundings” were rising in frequency in their study of Swedish school brochures (Johnsson & Lindgren, 2010, p.181).

Beyond the value of space natural settings may signify status and privilege in other ways. Bourdieu describes this as the appropriation of “ancient roots” (Bourdieu, 1986a, p.277) and the display of value (both the tree/grounds themselves and in the skills required to maintain them) that can only be accumulated over time, a manifestation of the hereditary form of these values and capitals. This echoes Baudrillard’s description of wood as a material which has time “embedded in its very fibres” (Baudrillard, 2005, p.38), a kind of reified *habitus* of the organic and authentic.

Yet, what is designated as “the natural” is a social construct, it is a meaning given to, and simultaneously extracted from, the materials of nature by the (re)productive forces exploiting it. Williamson draws attention to this antagonistic process arguing that “nature is supposed to

invest the product, which was torn from it in the first place, with the status of ‘the natural’.” (Williamson, 1978, p.122). Applied to the logic of the reproduction of the social relations of capitalism that the schools deploying these signifiers of the natural are engaged in, this tension between the symbolic value of the natural and the exchange value of nature as a material resource is starkly reflected in the backgrounds of those in positions of power in politics and business responsible for both creating and managing the ongoing climate crisis (*Elitist Britain 2019*, 2019). A cursory glance at the schools of British educated CEOs of companies ranked by in the ‘Forest 500’ (*Company Rankings | Forest 500*, n.d.) as the worst for their contributions to deforestation shows an overrepresentation of the Independent schools who, in this sample, are far more likely to deploy images of trees and wood as a sign of status and distinction.

However, this may be apt, for although a common signification of nature has been a “sense of goodness and innocence.” (Williams, 1976, p.188) nature, and the natural, can also be read as in ways more fitting for this paradigm of competition and exploitation, as Williams argued; “natural selection, and the ‘ruthless’ competition apparently inherent in it, were made the basis for seeing nature as both historical and active.” (Williams, 1976, p.188). Whilst Baudrillard argued that the increasing rarity of the natural added value to what was left after its material resources had been exhausted (Baudrillard, 2019, p.218). This, in turn, returns us to the signification of a distance from necessity and aesthetic disposition by those schools who are able to display grounds not put to functional or economic use.

The Elements

Average Number of Depictions by Sector

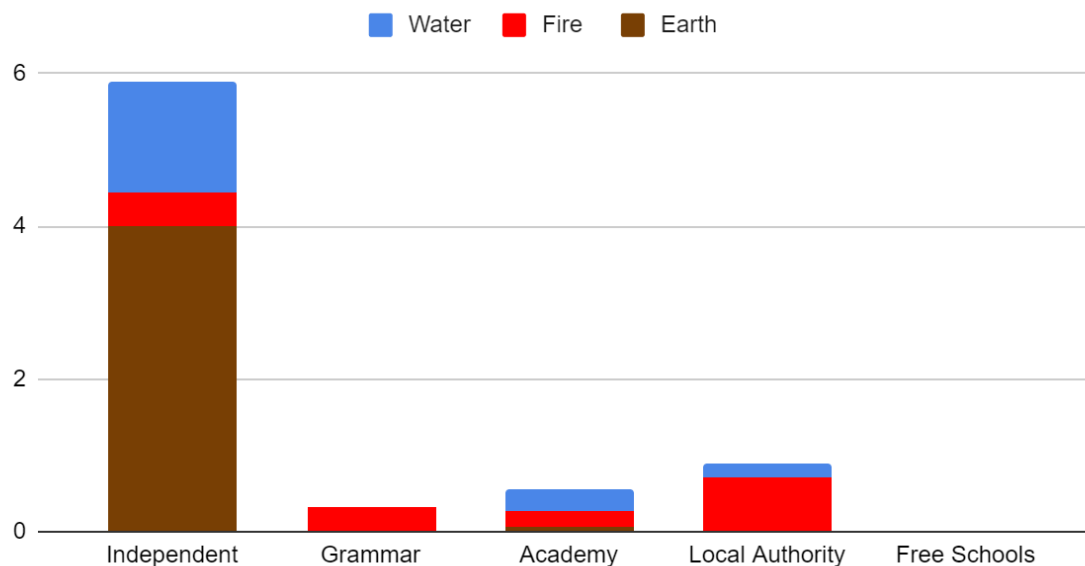


Figure 4.26. Earth, Water & Fire in the Images

“There is no way back to pre-scientific holistic wisdom, to the world of Earth, Wind, Air and Fire.” wrote Žižek (Zizek, 2010), perhaps hinting at reasons why such elemental images overwhelmingly occur in the Independent sector prospectuses. The privilege to be somewhat ‘above and beyond’ the necessities of scientific, or industrial, demands. Instead tapping into a more timeless and eternal natural order. Such an appeal to privilege as a natural state might, perhaps, resonate with those parents seeking to reproduce familial advantage.

Tools for Work

Tools for Work

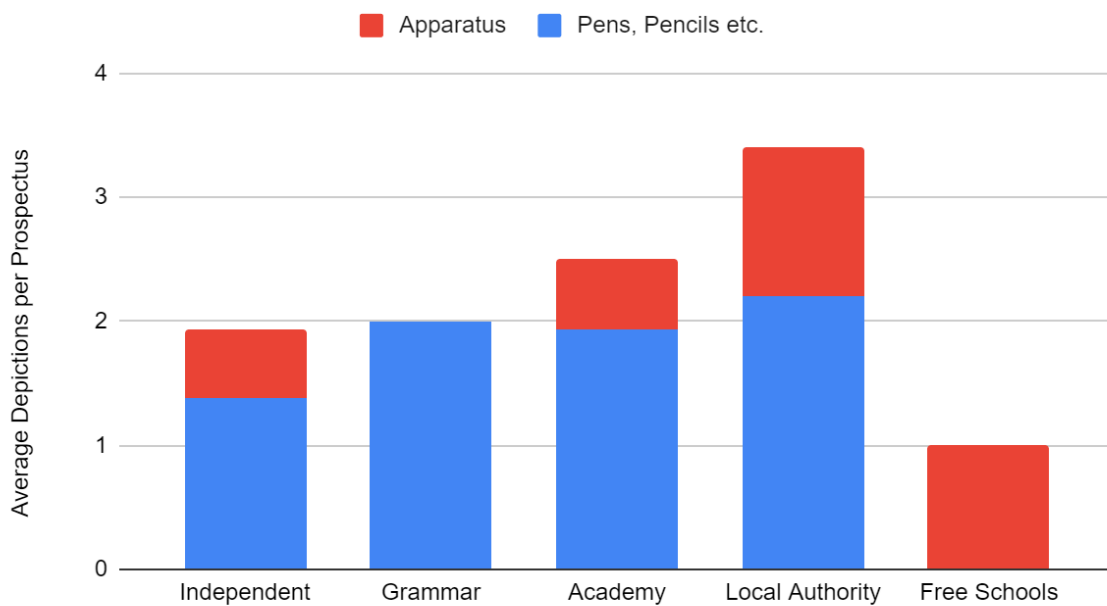


Figure 4.27. Tools for Work

A considerable number of images included various tools and equipment being used by the pupils and their teachers. Leaving aside computers and sports/music specific items, the most numerous were ‘mark making instruments’; pens, pencils, paint brushes etc. These were found across all sectors with the exception of the Free Schools, though slightly more infrequently in the Independent sector prospectuses than in those of the remaining State sectors. ‘Apparatuses’ - the various bits of kit and machinery that are used for the performance of work related tasks are also featured in a number of images. Test Tubes were regularly included with 28 examples across the sample. As discussed above, these work as a signifier of the study of the Sciences (specifically Chemistry) and thus in themselves as a marker of status. A range of other equipment from across the curriculum also featured from measuring devices used in what appears to be Geography field work to the machinery employed in the practical work of the Technology subjects. Again, these operate on one level as signifiers of the curricular discipline, with its associated status but it is also possible to read meanings into the inclusion of the paraphernalia of work in and of itself. There appears to be a

slight trend indicating a decreasing prevalence in these depictions correlating with higher status schools (as ordered by the markers of status already discussed). Whilst the patterns observed are not strong enough to draw any confident conclusions from, it is still worth examining the possibilities of meaning encoded within these images as they may support other, stronger, traits that have been found.

Veblen (2008) described the association between freedom from labour and high status and a quick search of the internet will reveal a huge range of cultural practices, such as long fingernails, that have emerged as signifiers of this leisure status. This may be reflected in some high status schools focussing less on the pupils using the tools of work than those where to quote Willis the focus is on “learning to labour” (Willis, 1978). It is also worth noting in passing at this point the long association between work and suffering contained in the word ‘labour’ (Williams, 1976). Such considerations take a more rigorous and critical form when viewed through the lens of the ‘distance from necessity’ as a marker of distinction as developed by Bourdieu and used in this study. This should be balanced, however, by acknowledging that ‘work’ has become a moral virtue in tune with the ethos of ‘muscular Christianity’ noted above that is enshrined in the English school system and within the ethical paradigm of anglo-saxon capitalism producing a need for the education and promotion of labour as an end in itself and as a “calling” (Weber, 2001, p.25). These conflicting mythologies of work as a low status burden and as a moral virtue may explain why the signifiers of ‘working as status’ within schools contain contradictions and confusions. They also contain reflections and signs of the division of labour, and the status accompanying it.

Aprons and Labcoats

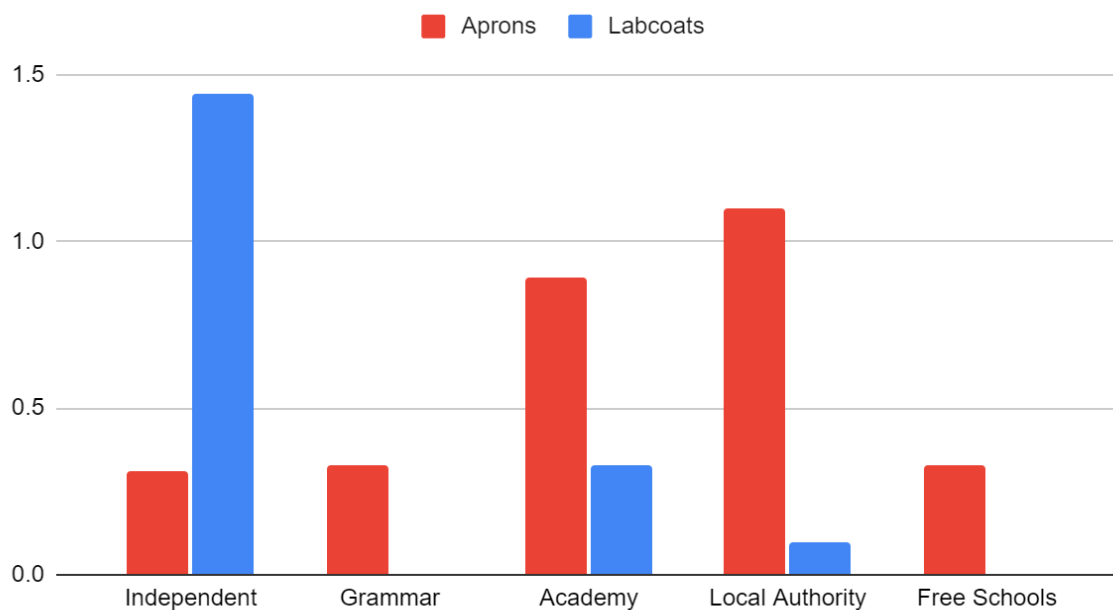


Figure 4.28. Aprons & Labcoats in the Images

The most striking example found within this sample of images is the contrast between depictions of labcoats versus aprons. Figure 28 (above) indicates that labcoats are very strongly associated with the highest status schools, those in the Independent sector whilst the wearing of aprons is more commonly identified within the State sector. Whilst logistical factors such as cost and speed of use may account for schools' choices in this regard, the stark distinction recorded above may also signify elements of a status based division of labour. Labcoats could be read as a signifier of more supervisory, managerial and professional forms of labour in practical fields - scientists, technicians, engineers and so on whereas the apron could be traditionally associated with the more manual jobs - blacksmiths, butchers, cooks and so on. Whilst it is impossible to state this with confidence there is also an intersection with other signifiers of status in the form of the colours and materials used in labcoats and aprons respectively. Whilst all the labcoats depicted are made of fabric in muted colours (predominately white) not all of the aprons shown are. A number of the aprons are shown to

be made of brightly coloured plastic or other synthetic materials which, as will be discussed below, may be read as signifiers of lower social status.

Books

Depictions of Books

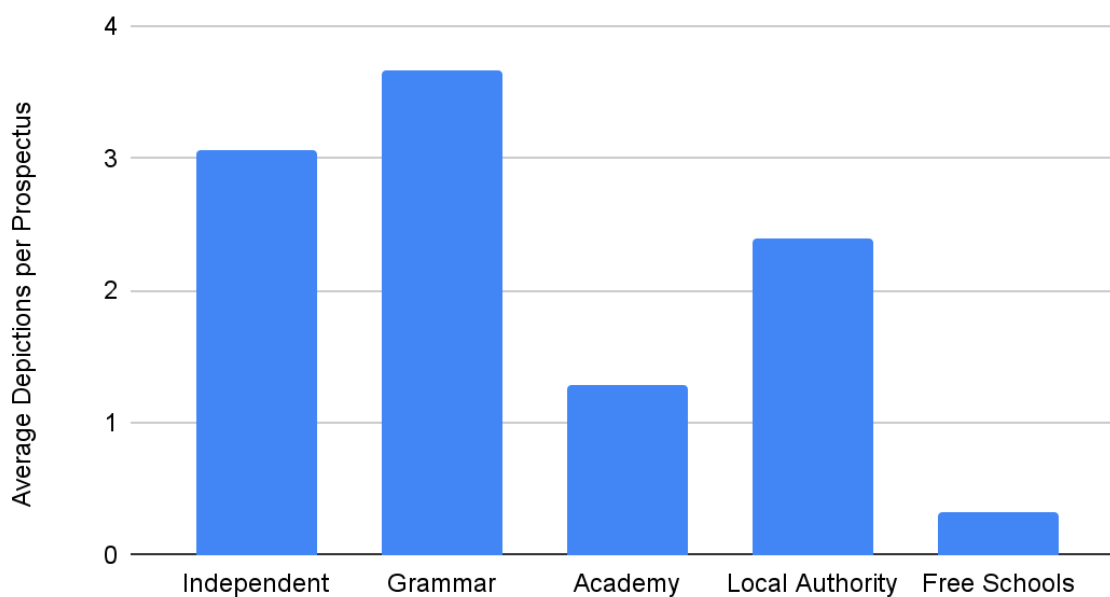


Figure 4.29. Average Number of Depictions of Books in the Images

Books are a common object found within prospectuses across all sectors and whilst there is some variation in the average frequency of depiction between sectors it is difficult to interpret these patterns as relating to social status (see Figure 29 above) although the relative scarcity of books in the Academy and Free School sectors is worth noting.

However, books have long been associated with social status as a widely recognised form of cultural capital which at times has manifested in a form of snobbery about their possession when contrasted with more vulgar pursuits such as “going to the dogs, the pictures or the pub” (Orwell, 2008, p.1). Such characterizations have met with fierce resistance from working class communities who - echoing the radical pamphleteers enabled by Gutenberg’s invention

of the printing press (Rees, 2017) - saw in the form of the book a means of self-empowerment. A tradition immortalised in the Manic Street Preachers' lyric "libraries gave us power" drawn from their own South Wales working class environment (Pyke, 2014). Such popular cultural memories are important for the signification in school prospectuses to work as the readers draw from their own store of cultural references and symbolic vocabulary when decoding and interpellating the messages analysed here.

Books are hegemonic as a normative ideal (Ludvigsen, 2014) and remain central to ideas of legitimate culture inculcated by all schools. The symbolic value for schools of the book as sign derives from this normative understanding that books signify education (and literacy and learning and so on). It should come as no surprise then, that books are present across the sample regardless of the other signifiers of status around them.

Books are a prime example of "objectified cultural capital" (Sieben & Lechner, 2019) whereby the symbolic value is reified in a commodity that can be exchanged or accumulated. As such, as an object, the book takes on something of the nature of a fetish object whose properties both signify and mediate social status in an almost magical way far beyond the book as a vehicle for reading and knowledge (Dant, 1996). Images *P14.21* and *P14.22* featuring a teacher leafing through a large hardback book to the rapt attention of the students gathered around the desk capture the essence of this.

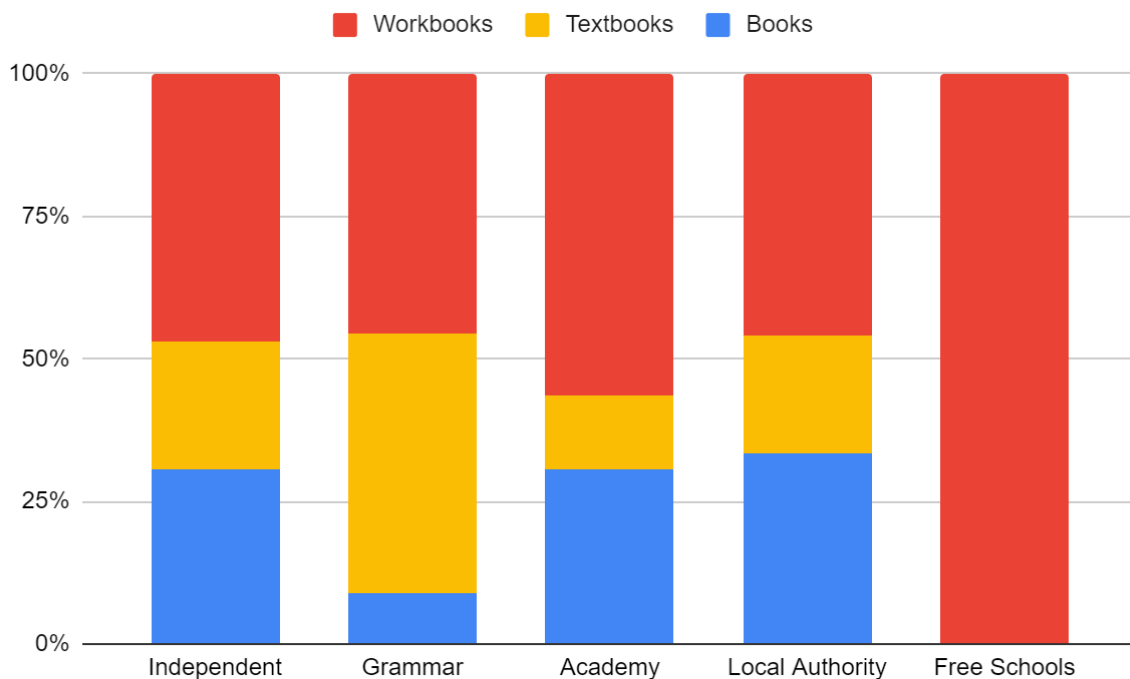


Figure 4.30. Breakdown of Types of Books

Different types of books have traditionally been regarded as being associated with different social classes, for example Hoggart’s descriptions of working class consumption of “sex-and-violence novels” (Hoggart, 2009, pp.229-244). The information gathered from the analysis here is too limited for an exploration of relations between genre and class in the manner of Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1986, p.114). It is, however, possible to distinguish between some basic functional types of books in the sample. In *Figure 4.30* (above) the total images are broken down into workbooks (exercise books, sketchbooks, notebooks etc.) whose purpose is to contain the pupils’ own work, textbooks which have been produced and distributed for use in specific classes and books (fiction or nonfiction) for individual reading. The smaller sample sizes of the Grammar and Free School sectors display a greater diversion from the otherwise similar distribution of these book categories across the sample. There is little evidence of patterns in this distribution to suggest that any of these categories implies greater or lesser status based upon concentrations within school types. When it comes to how

these books are displayed within the spaces shown a trend does tentatively begin to emerge however.

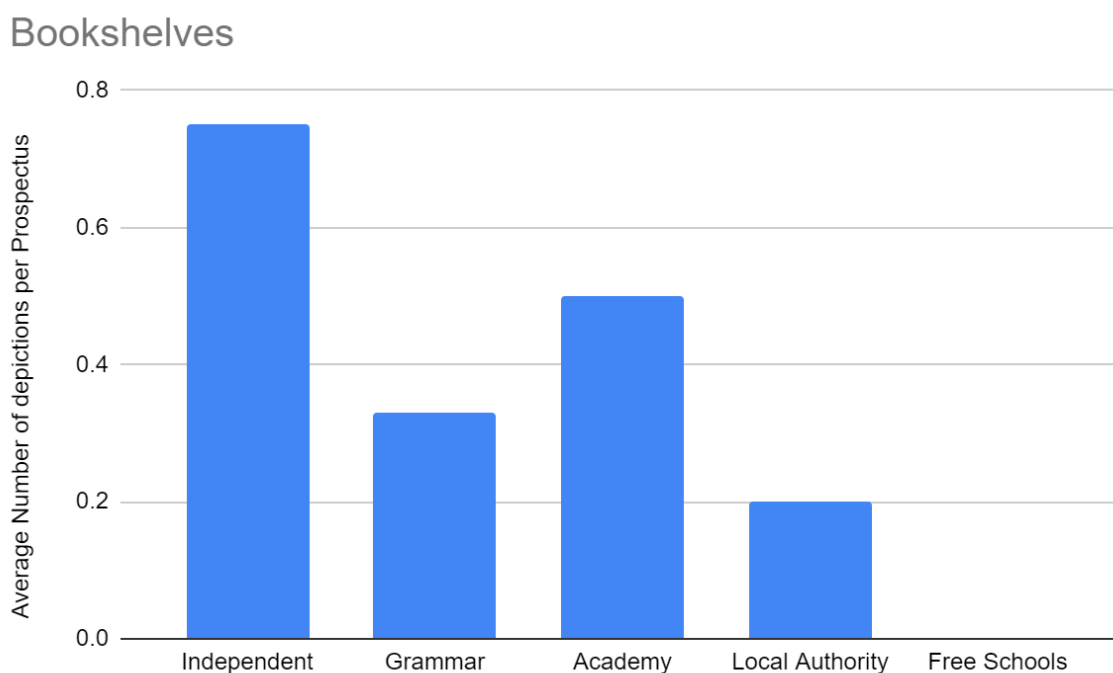


Figure 4.31. Bookshelves in the Images

Figure 4.31 (above) shows the average rate of depiction of bookshelves across the sectors.

The pattern here now begins to follow the trends in status that have been identified with other signifiers. Independent schools feature, on average, more images of books displayed in bookshelves than the State sectors. This is usually through images of the school library such as image *P14.23* or *G3.1*. Image *P9.8* depicts a study space with a single block of bookshelves front and centre of both the room and the photographic image, framed by arching wooden beams. Image *P1.26* shows a room where not only are books displayed on fine old wooden shelves but they are displayed with their cover facing out (as featured titles may be displayed in bookshops) and plenty of empty space between them allowing the viewer to focus on the books as individual objects of choice rather than an undifferentiated mass.

The work that the display of rows of books can do in broadcasting status and cultural capital has become more recognised in recent years through the emergence of the phenomena known as ‘shelfies’. These have risen to greater prominence during the pandemic as attention is paid to the backdrop speakers display when in video chats and meetings. This use of the inclusion of books within one’s own carefully composed or curated image has, however, long been employed by those seeking to illustrate their distinction, as Ludvigsen notes “although the word bookshelfie may be new, the tradition of posing in front of one’s book is not, as portraits of statesmen, scholars and clergy across the ages demonstrate” (Ludvigsen, 2014). She goes on to acknowledge that “having, owning and displaying books in one’s home” forms part of the strategy employed by middle-class families in the reproduction of familial cultural capital.

Such strategies, much like those of school choice itself, are often rationalised through a discourse of educational benefits (Flood, 2018; Sikora et al., 2019) and this may be the primary mythology that the above images are denoting there will be additional connotations due to the book’s fetishisation. The ostentatious or conspicuous (Veblen, 2008) display of books as objectified cultural capital can start to become a ritual of “expressing desire for and approval of the object and its capacities, celebrating the object, revering it, setting it apart, displaying it, extolling and exalting its capacities, eulogising it, enthusiastic use of it...”(Dant, 1996) which. Dant argues, produces an “overdetermination” of the books’ social value. Their mass deployment as fetish objects create magical portals to an expanding “imaginary world” (Benjamin, 2009, p.170) available to the elect who choose, and thus are themselves the chosen (Weber, 2001, pp.65-66), that specific school.

Furniture

There were 173 images featuring desks and 90 featuring chairs within the sample. Most of these were within classroom settings though a proportion were also recorded that were in social spaces. Their depiction provides a further insight into the pursuit of education as individual or collective effort and the role of the teacher within this when the layout and arrangement of this furniture is noted. Woolner remarks that teachers and/or schools using “a more traditional didactic style” tend to set up classrooms with desks and chairs lined up in rows and facing the front, where the teacher positions themselves (Woolner, 2010, p.35). Classrooms laid out with groups or clusters of tables and chairs and a teacher, mobile, and moving amongst them are more associated with group work. Further these two layouts and teaching/learning methods that they are best suited for reflect (and are reflected in) the division between the so-called ‘traditionalist’ and ‘progressive’ camps amongst educators in England today (Watson, 2020, p.8), which in turn is one dimension of the culture wars that seek to replace class antagonism as a prime motivator in popular (and, crucially, populist) political discourse.

Individual vs. Group Seating Arrangements

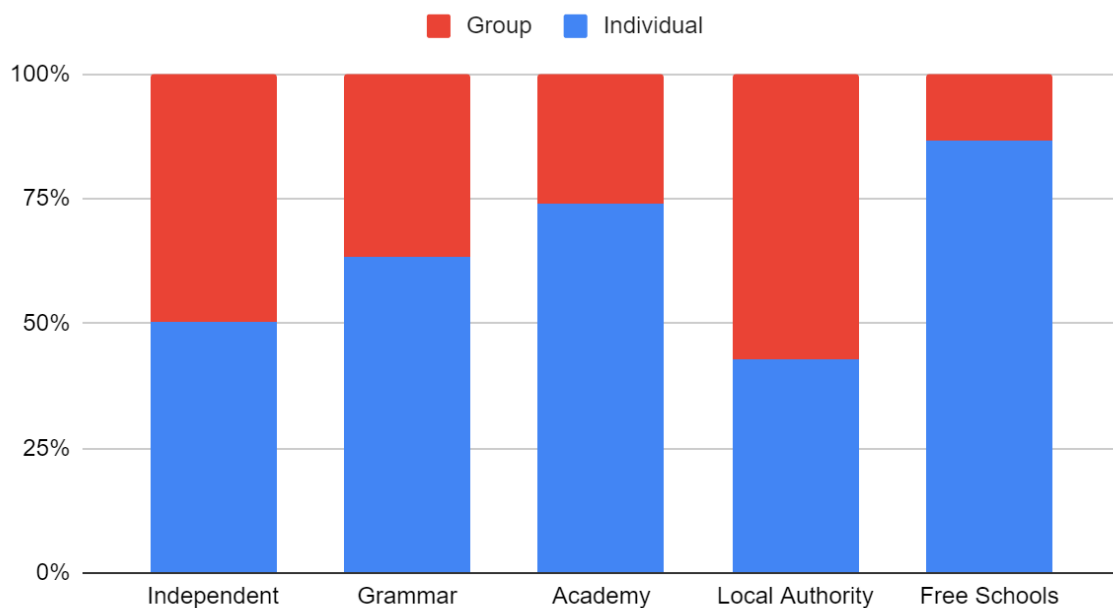


Figure 4.32. Seating Arrangements

In contrast to the depictions of teachers and learners examined above (see Figures 4.7 and Figure 4.9) analysis of the depiction of seating arrangements paints a picture where the individualistic and teacher-led visions of education are more prominent. Indeed as Figure 4.32 (above) illustrates this was the majority depiction in every sector except the Independent and Local Authority schools. The explanation for these individualistic and traditionalist approaches predominating in Academies and Free Schools is perhaps found in the common motivations and pedagogies rooted within successive education policy reforms over recent decades (Ball, 2008). Indeed the current Education Secretary, Gavin Williamson, has been reported as demanding that schools lay out their classrooms in this fashion as they reopen following their closure during the Covid pandemic (Swinford & Bennett, 2020).

Their reduced presence, however, in the Independent and Local Authority sectors might tell two different stories. The adoption of the more progressive pedagogies that may be reflected in the classroom layouts found amongst the Independent sector has been reported as a contrast

to the increasing neo-traditionalism found amongst Academies and Free Schools (Benn, 2020) and this may reflect the self-confidence of status that has been identified in other aspects of signification amongst the prospectus (such as school uniform). However, such visual signification of being at ease with elements of progressivism must be balanced by the 50% of seating arrangements found in the Independent prospectuses that reflect the more traditional teacher led learning described above.

Amongst the sample from the Local Authority Maintained sector, however, there are a majority of depictions of group work and collective layouts which might suggest that these schools have maintained “embodied values, histories, localised knowledge, ideals and ways of working” (Craske, 2020, p.7) that manifest both in a refusal to Academise and in retaining a commitment to earlier progressive and collective ideas of education.

Despite the potential signification of furniture such as cupboards, drawers and shelves (Bachelard, 1994) their depiction was relatively uncommon and it is impossible to draw any inferences of general trends or patterns from these limited depictions.

Food

Depictions of Food

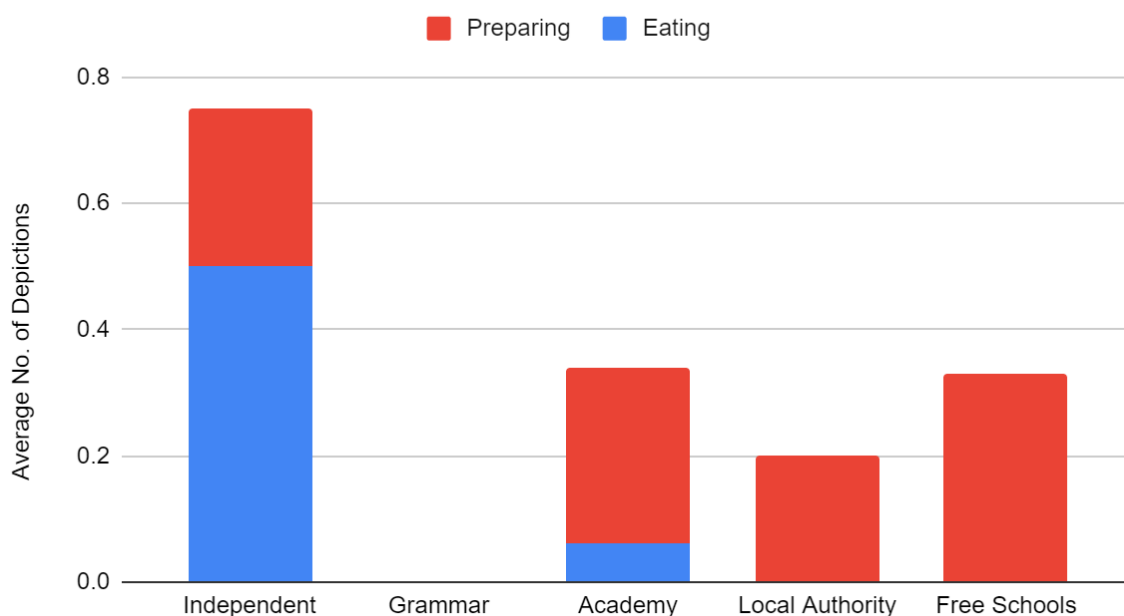


Figure 4.33. The Eating and Preparing of Food

As seen above, there was a clear distinction in the depiction of food technology as a curricular subject between the sectors. When looking at the depiction of food itself, as an object, within the sample images a similarly stark divergence appears. Although not frequently depicted (less than once per prospectus on average in every sector) the inclusion of images showing the preparation of food are to be found in all but Grammar schools. Depictions of eating food, however, appear almost exclusively in the Independent sector.

Whilst the specific details of the food on display in these images are not present in sufficient detail to allow the application of Bourdieu's findings on food tastes (Bourdieu, 1986a) it is worth noting that he argues that "the art of eating" (p.175) is one of the few activities where the working-class can challenge legitimate culture through "convivial indulgence" (ibid.) and a rejection of hegemonic rules around the consumption of food. It should, perhaps, be no

surprise then that the schools with the highest working-class populations (the State sectors) choose not to include depictions of their pupils eating.

Barthes (1973) notes the class differences signified by the depictions of food in French magazines between the magical depictions of food in those publications with a working class audience lacking the means to acquire the dishes on display and the meals included in the more middle-class periodicals that can be prepared at home. This, he argues, signifies that the working-class are only “entitled to fiction” (p.87) a consumption of food reduced to simply looking. This distinction is echoed in the findings here that show pupils in the Independent sector are more likely to be seen actually eating the food, whilst those in the State school prospectuses are restricted to its preparation.

School pupils' relationship to food is not restricted to symbolic capital however. It is a fundamental material condition of economic status. Increasing numbers of children lack sufficient access to this basic need. The number of emergency food parcels being given to children in the South East of England from food banks (in the Trussell Trust's network alone) has risen from 37,633 in 2014/15 to 122,333 in 2020/21 (*End of Year Stats - The Trussell Trust*, n.d.) whilst 15.1% of pupils were eligible for Free School Meals in the South East of England in the Autumn term of 2020/21 (*Free school meals: Autumn term, Autumn Term 2020/21 – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK*, n.d.).

Beyond this, the status disparity between food consumption and food preparation can perhaps be illustrated by noting that the average hourly wage for workers in catering is £8.87 (*Catering Services Hourly Rate in United Kingdom | PayScale*, n.d.) which is below the National Living Wage of £8.91 whilst at the same time the average cost of a meal in the United Kingdom for two people at a mid-range restaurant has been estimated to range

between £35 and £80 (*Cost of Living in United Kingdom. Prices in United Kingdom. Updated May 2021, n.d.*). The results, therefore, of learning to prepare food and gaining credentials to enter the catering industry (as depicted more prominently in the State school sectors) will restrain the majority of those pupils in working class occupations. Consuming the results of this food preparation, however, entails a financial cost that necessarily creates an inequality of access.

Whilst such crude statistics do not tell the full story of the material conditions relating to food, they may provide some context within which to read the disparity in food depiction between school sectors and to begin to add additional readings of status from food as a signifier in school prospectuses.

Backpacks and Folders

The seemingly innocuous object of the pupils' school bag revealed an unexpectedly dramatic status based difference. Where pupils were depicted carrying bags or school materials a clear difference emerged between those at schools in the Independent sector who were overwhelmingly shown carrying their materials around in folders and ring binders whilst those in the State sector, especially Local Authority maintained schools, were pictured with backpacks over their shoulders (Figure 4.34 below).

Backpacks and Folders

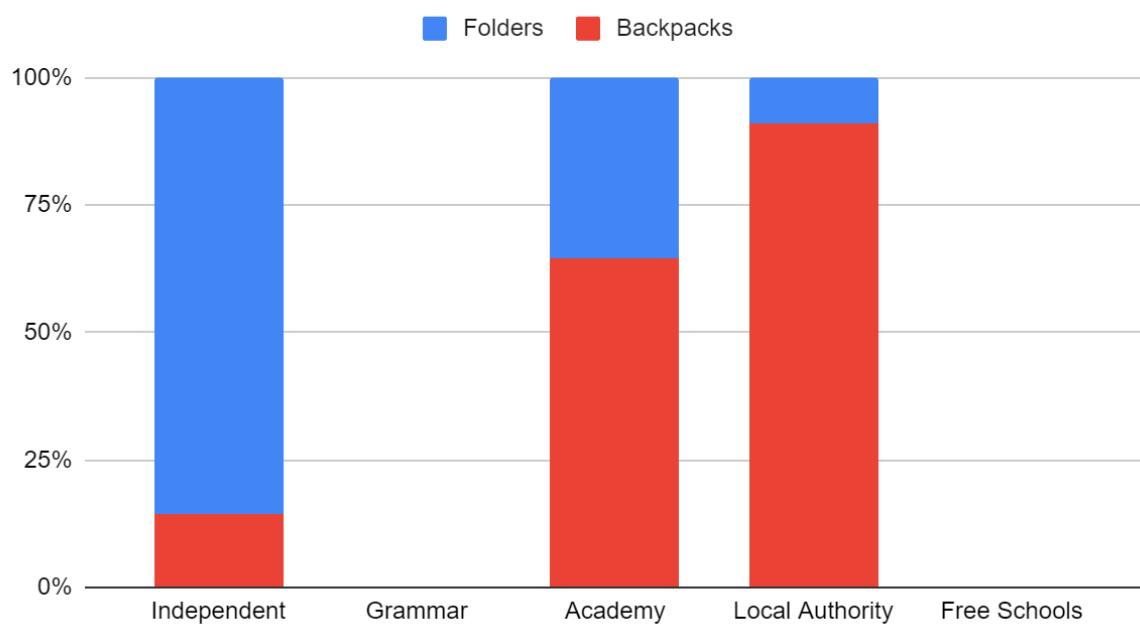


Figure 4.34. Backpacks and Folders

A possible explanation for this disparity lies in the logistical resources available to pupils in the different kinds of schools. It is reasonable to speculate that better resourced schools, with more space and finances available, may be better placed to provide their students with convenient and secure locations to store their belongings, reducing the amount of material that needs to be carried from class to class. This could explain the greater likelihood of pupils being pictured with backpacks in more poorly resourced schools.

However, there are other potential connotations present in the sign of the backpack/file. The backpack could be read as displaying practicality and functionality and, thus, signify Bourdieu's practical disposition. There may also be associations with the stratified labour market, with lower status manual work being connected with bags and packs in contrast to the more professional occupations linked to files, folders and so on. Certainly these connotations are amplified when read in conjunction with the pictured habitus of the besuited young man or woman striding purposefully through architecture that repeats these associations in our

cultural memories. This stratification, in turn, is reflected in the legitimate culture of the middle-class 'smart dress' of school uniform requirements. However, although some schools issue their own 'uniform' backpacks in school colours and with embroidered school branding these were not apparent in the sample analysed. Instead, an array of backpacks bearing individual touches (of preferred brands, of sporting teams and a myriad of personalised additions and alterations) can be seen in the sample and elsewhere. Not always regulated by the imposition of legitimate dress, the backpack may be a nascent *contrepellation* for, as Hebdige argued:

“...the deviation may seem slight indeed – the cultivation of a quiff, the acquisition of a scooter or a record or a certain type of suit. But it ends in the construction of a style, in a gesture of defiance or contempt, in a smile or a sneer. It signals a Refusal.”
(Hebdige, 1979, p.3)

4.3 | Atmosphere: Analysis of the Designed Environment

Beyond subjects and objects, beyond themes and content, present in the images are the environmental qualities that frame and produce the atmosphere of the photograph. Whilst some - like light and shadow - are too nebulous to grasp and analyse, others bear the traces of human intent such as the *raumfarbe* or atmospheric colour in an image (Merleau-Ponty, 1995) or the remembered/imagined sense qualities of the materials present in a given image. This is part of what Baudrillard calls the designed universe and can contain the same meanings as the other signs analysed above. “This “designed” universe is what properly constitutes the environment. Like the market, the environment is in a way only a logic that of (sign) exchange value. “ (Baudrillard, 2019, p.216). Colour and material will therefore be subject to analysis for signs of status below.

Colour and Palette

Looking at the colours found in the prospectus images it is possible to start to build up some data on the palettes employed across the sample. Some prospectuses appear to take a crafted approach to their colour palette such as *P.14* (see Figure 4.36 below) whilst in others the palette may be more of a secondary result of the dominant colours of school uniforms and buildings.

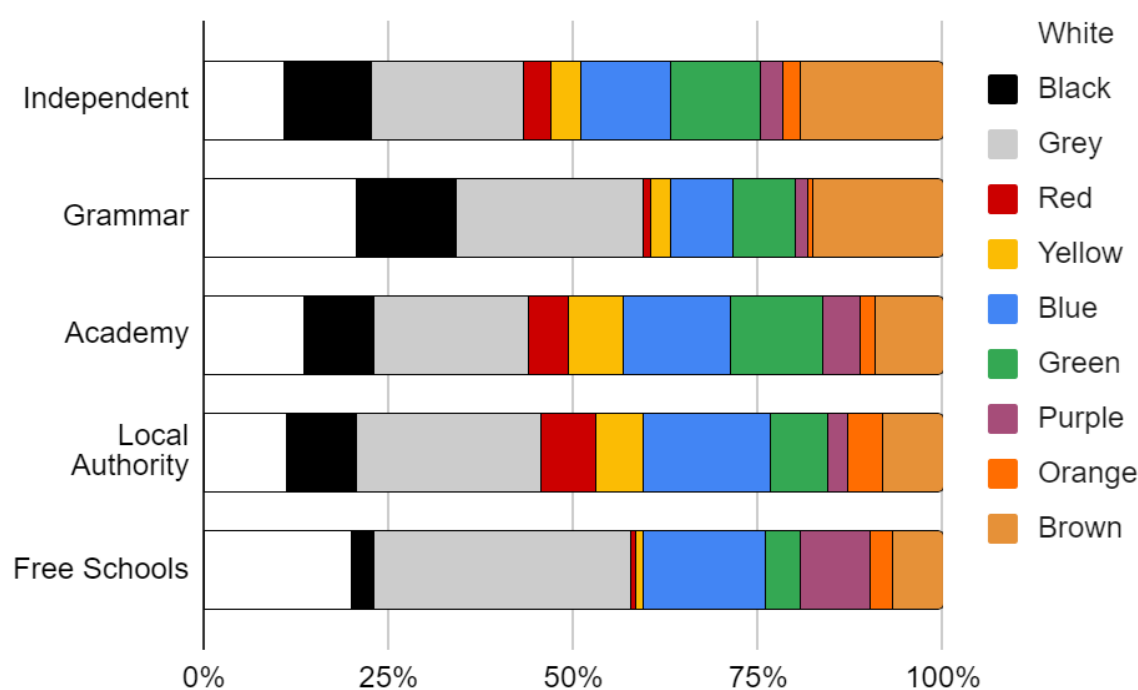


Figure 4.35: Colour Palette by Sector

Looking across the sample by sector there are two areas of colour that can be identified for further analysis. The first is the use of bright, primary colours versus the use of more neutral ‘earth tones’. The second is the presence of monochrome colours (black, white and grey) in the palette.

Taking the blacks, whites and greys first there are both mundane and ideological displays of value at work. Greys - most numerous in the Local Authority and Free School sectors - may signify a degree of ambiguity or compromise as sectors taking a less clear ideological or status driven role as the Academies or Independent schools whose purpose is, perhaps, more 'black and white'. Baudrillard, meanwhile, talks about the bourgeois tendency to reduce colours to "tints and shades" in a "moral refusal" of spectacular - or vulgar - colour (Baudrillard, 2005, p.31). More plausible, however, is the material explanation that Academies and Independent schools have more often used professional photographers or editors who have captured white walls and surfaces (such as school shirts and tables) with greater contrast - and thus white rather than grey - than murkier results of DIY photography employed by schools who might not have a marketing budget. The higher contrast images of black and white (rather than grey) may in turn signify clarity of purpose and even a more authoritarian approach towards the rights and wrongs of educational and pedagogical values.

The Independent sector has a higher presence of earth tones from the spectrums of green and brown. This is, of course, linked to a greater number of images picturing the natural environment in the form of grass, trees and the landscapes within which many outdoor activities (i.e. extra-curricular activities) take place. It is also (as discussed below) in part due to the properties of the predominant materials on display (wood and stone rather than plastics). However, a closer look at the palette of school *P14* - a high status boys' boarding school - suggests a more curated approach. For Baudrillard, the use of natural colours might signify a rejection of modernity, or of the form(s) of emancipation implied in the visible human labour of bright, artificial - and thus born of artifice - colours.

P14 Palette

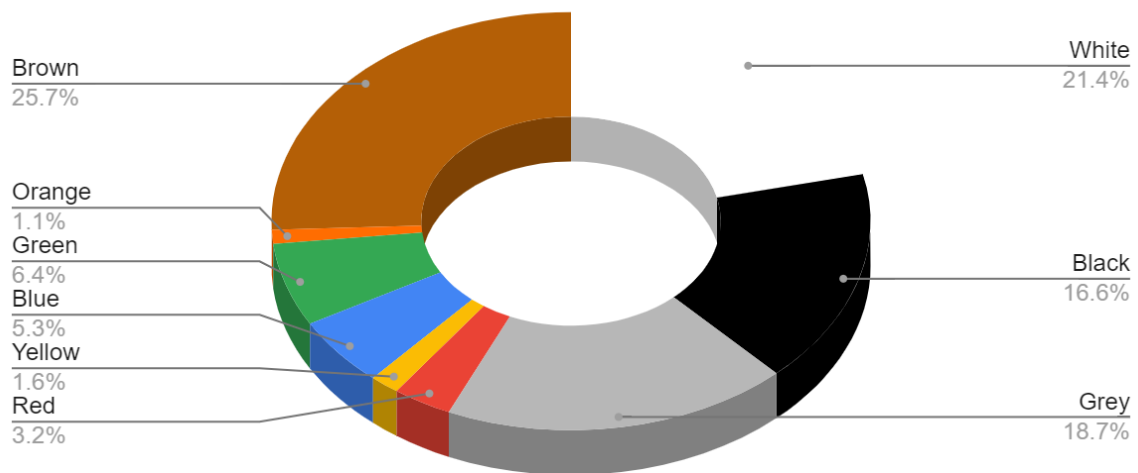


Figure 4.36: Colour Palette of Sample P14

The overwhelming proportion of this palette is browns, greys, blacks and whites. This is true of both internal and external shots. “Artificial” colours are almost entirely absent with the palette drawn from stone, wood and careful lighting. The clothing of pupils and staff blends into this palette with the use of subtle and neutral greys, blacks and whites. In contrast, a look at the colour palette of *L7* - a Local Authority comprehensive school reveals a much wider spectrum of colours. The browns, greys and greens are present; but so too are reds, oranges, purples and yellows. Primary and secondary colours abound alongside their more muted counterparts. The carefully restrained palette of *P14* is absent here, instead there is a vibrant diversity of colours from across the spectrum. The language used here to describe these contrasting palettes “restrained”, “vibrant”, “diverse” and “subtle” betrays the ease with which colour schemes can be ascribed meaning by its readers. There is not scope here to delve into the intricacies of colour theory, but clearly the differences in use of colour between schools is linked to, and from, the wider signification of status and values within the imagery.

L7 Palette

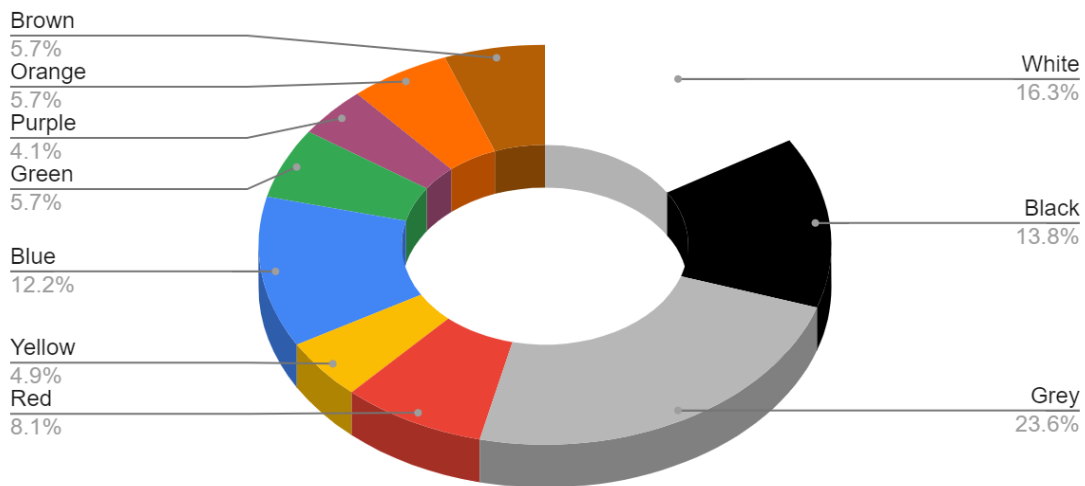


Figure 4.37: Colour Palette of Sample L7

Materials

When looking at the two schools above (*P14* and *L7*) as well as the sample more widely, the colour palette is partially shaped by the choice of materials included in the imagery.

Photographs heavily featuring wood panelling or stone are, of course, more likely to produce palettes with browns and greys. Conversely, only synthetic materials (or synthetic paint hiding previously natural materials - though this was not a notable presence in the sample) such as plastic will produce the bright primary colours found in (for example) *L7*.

Natural vs. Synthetic

When coding the materials contained in the sample images according to a simple binary choice of natural material (stone, wood, leather etc.) versus synthetic material (concrete, plastic, vinyl etc.) the results suggest a very interesting trend.

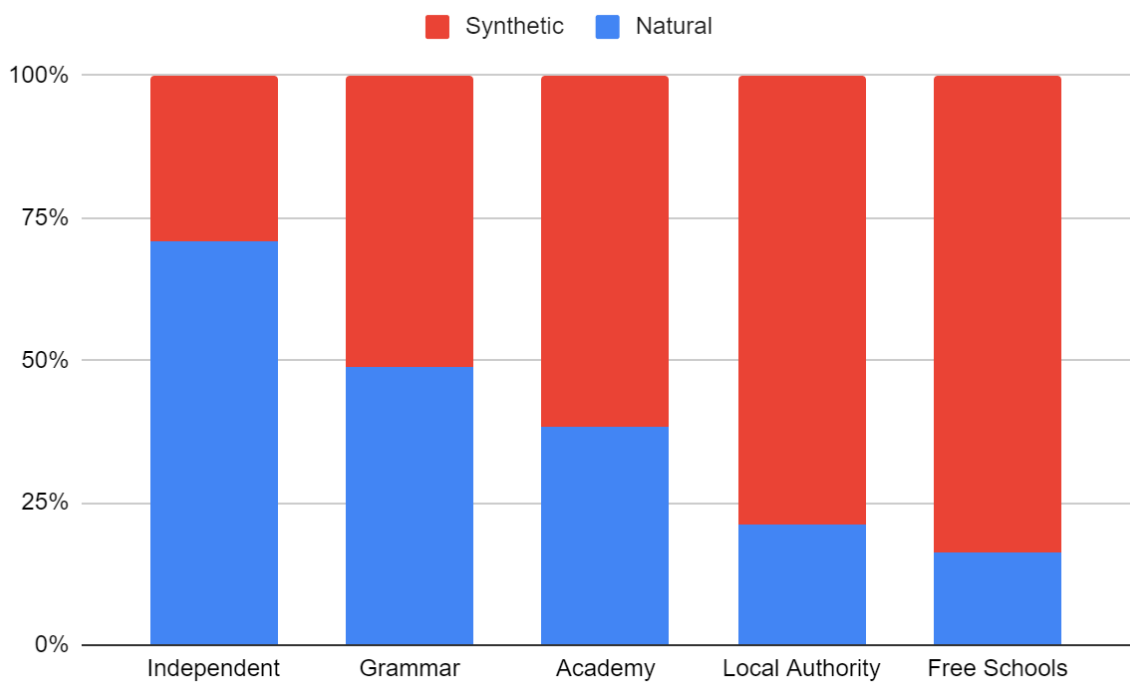


Figure 4.38. Proportion of Natural versus Synthetic Materials featured in Prospectus Images by Sector

There is a clear progression of increasingly synthetic materials as one goes through the sectors. This echoes the broad status hierarchy of sectors found repeatedly across other signs in the sample images. This is, however, perhaps the neatest gradient found. Independent schools, followed by Grammar schools some way behind, have the largest proportion of natural materials. Across the non-selective State sectors the opposite is found with a clear majority of materials being identified as synthetic. To examine in more detail the status-based meaning of this and the signification within this divide it is worth looking at a few of the more common materials found in the sample; concrete, wood, glass and plastic.

Concrete vs. Stone

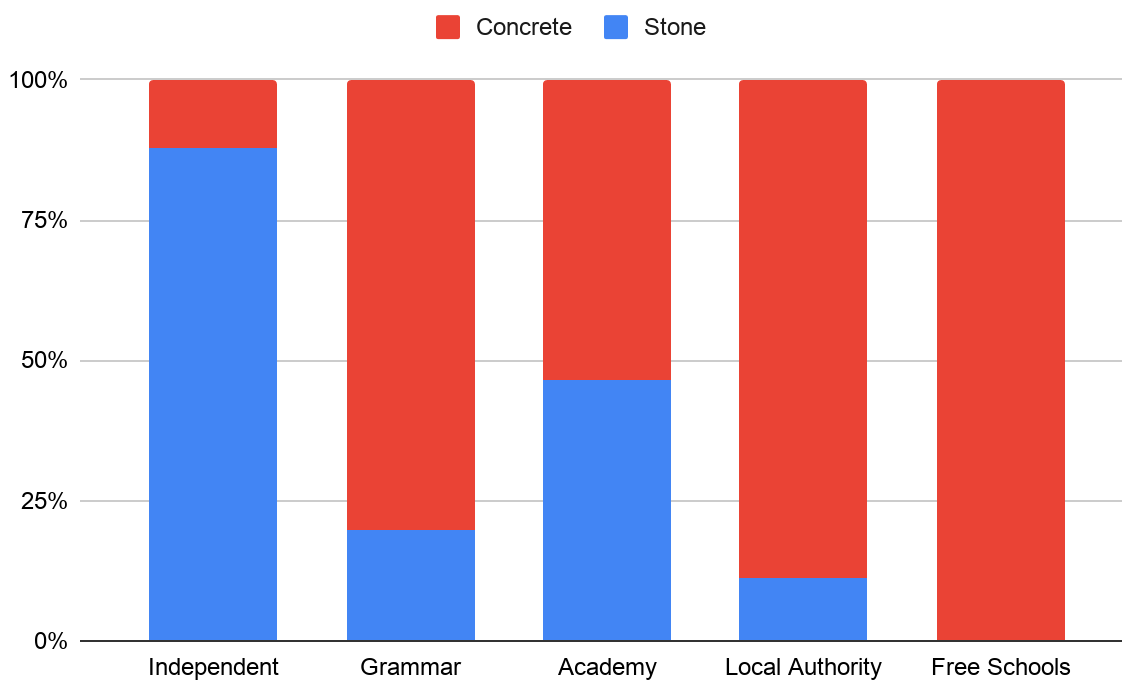


Figure 4.39. Proportion of Stone versus Concrete featured in Prospectus Images by Sector

One of the more striking and, perhaps, unexpected contrasts was in the uses of concrete versus the use of stone. *Figure 4.39* shows the enormous disparity in its presence in prospectus images across sectors. Whilst it may be tempting to account for this contrast through the mundane factor of building age it is unlikely to be this simple. Whilst no data was collected on the age of the buildings depicted in the images, both the Independent sample and the Academy sample (a distant second in the display of stone) include ‘new buildings’, predominantly so in the case of the Academies. Concrete, therefore, is not merely a result of new builds in the photographs of schools. There is, however, potentially an element of historic specificity in the preeminence of concrete in, for example, the Local Authority sample. Forty (2012) links the widespread use of concrete with the post-war consensus from which Comprehensive schools in England sprang:

“Prefabrication in concrete rescued the social democracies from their political predicament, for it offered the prospect of building houses, hospitals, schools and roads fast, and with unskilled labour. “ (Forty, 2012, p.160)

The Local Authority schools in this sample, as seen in numerous themes identified above, contain the strongest remnants of this Comprehensive system and the ideological and pedagogical values built into it. One of the key goals of neoliberalism has been to reverse the results and constructs of the postwar social democratic project and this is true for education too. Forty’s social analysis of concrete provides a fascinating glimpse of how this might be reflected in the choice of building materials:

“In the realm of building materials, these emancipatory possibilities could never have become attached to a traditional material like, say, wood, whatever other aura it may have. And while the social and physical transformations offered by concrete, as by many other twentieth century innovations, promised to benefit mankind, each has also destroyed old ways of doing things, old craft skills, older forms of social relations, and has as a result always aroused some resistance.” (Forty, 2012, p.14)

This contrasting value opposed to wood, as noted above by Forty, is also echoed - albeit to a less striking degree - in the depictions of wood in the prospectus images.

Wood vs. Engineered Wood

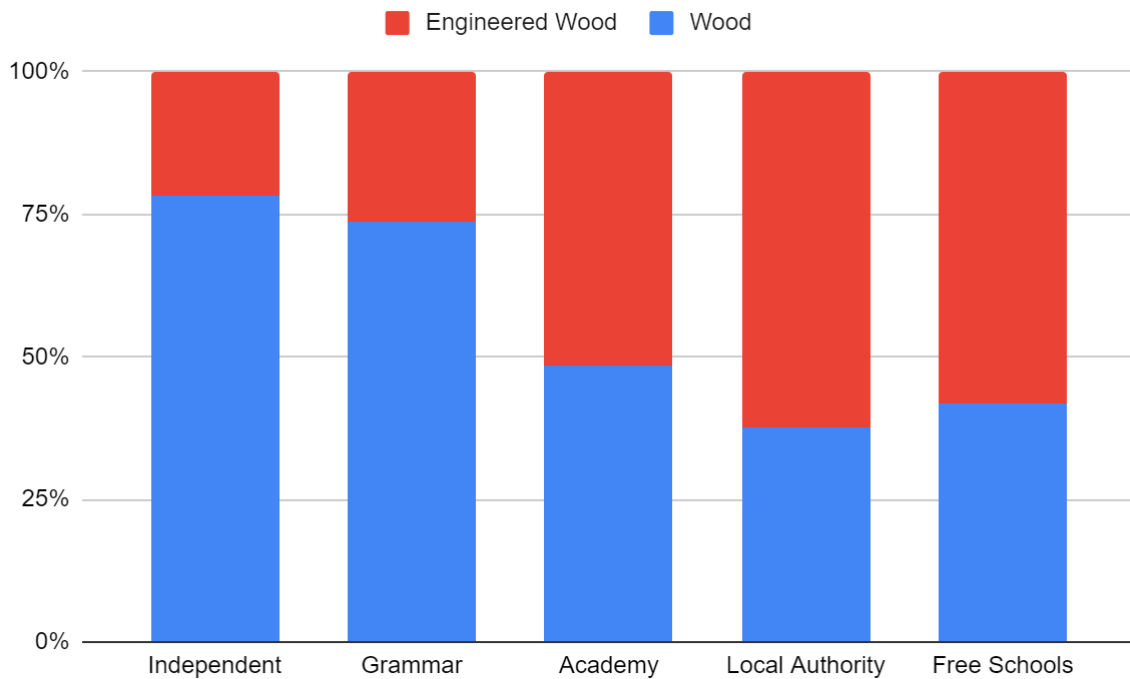


Figure 4.40. Proportion of Wood versus ‘Engineered Wood’ featured in Prospectus Images by Sector

Wood, as noted by Baudrillard, contains ‘being’, “time is embedded in its very fibres” (Baudrillard, 2005, p.38). It cannot be produced on demand, it has to live and grow, maybe for many years, before it can be transformed into wood panelled walls or desks and chairs. It is atmospheric deferred gratification that signifies longevity, security and stability. Engineered wood, on the other hand, is an *ersatz* product, mass produced as a superficial imitation of wood. Whilst industrial logging may change the material and economic position of wood, its symbolic status remains. The distribution of wood’s presence in prospectus images would appear to reflect this status with more ‘real’ wood found in the images of Independent and Grammar Schools than in the non-selective State sectors.

Glass: Transparency and Visibility

Glass is a material that features across the sample in a total of 174 images, with all sectors depicting it, on average 3.5 times per prospectus. It is, for Baudrillard (2005), a material that

encapsulates both means and end. Glass “is the basis of a transparency without transition”. It permits visibility, but not movement. It is, therefore, the perfect material for constructing the school as disciplinary space. As Kulz notes, the glass fronted Academy enables a Foucauldian panopticon where “transparency induces a state of constant inspection” (Kulz, 2017a, p.40) for both students and staff. For Foucault “Visibility is a trap” (Foucault, 1995, p.200) with the panoptical awareness of the potential for being watched at any time disciplining and controlling the behaviour of students and staff alike. Eskilson explicitly links this process with the use of glass in buildings, arguing that “this dystopic vision of architectural transparency as a facilitator of the disciplinary mechanism stands in stark contrast to the uplifting reading preferred by most modern architects.” (Eskilson, 2018, p.200). Page, however, argues that the glass buildings and open plan classrooms found in some new build schools move beyond “panoptic uncertainty” (Page, 2017, p.4) towards a predictive disciplining of the future where the inspection is endless rather always possible, it is discipline that is ‘always-already’ changing teaching (and learning) from a performance to a simulation.

However, whilst it might be expected to find such meaning predominantly in the sectors most explicitly embracing managerialist control and a disciplinary focus - i.e. the Academy sector - the data in this study does not really bear this out. Depictions of glass are distributed relatively evenly across all sectors in the sample. Further unpicking of the glass in context - scale, location, age etc. would need to be conducted to fully explore the distribution of panoptical (or post-panoptical) signs across the sectors.

ForeverWare: Plastic as Magic Material

In the 1990s children’s television programme ‘Eerie Indiana’ (Rivera, Schaefer, & Dante. 1991), an episode played on the magical qualities associated with plastic. A special kind of

plastic called 'ForeverWare' was used (amongst other things) to prevent children from ageing. Plastic contains and wraps as an act of preservation, it seals its contents against outside elements. At the same time, however, plastic is an alchemical agent (Barthes, 1973) for the infinite transformation of matter. Plastic is, therefore, a material of reproduction *par excellence*. This reproduction is imitative, able to produce a seemingly endless conveyor belt of imitations or a series of model objects (Baudrillard, 2005).

Such functionality is, of course, not free of symbolic status. Plastic is often regarded as inferior to single, unique objects.

“Materials meeting all demands, purposes and tastes were not regarded as dignified. Far from being praised as a quality, plasticity was the hallmark of cheap substitutes, forever doomed to imitate more authentic, natural materials.” (Bensaude Vincent, 2013, p.19).

Within education the desire to acquire distinction from one's 'competitors' sits uneasily alongside the imperative to ensure the smooth reproduction of skilled and trained workers. This pedagogical tension between schools shaping students as serial products or as individual subjects can be symbolically found in the display of plastic across the sample images. *Figure 4.39* above suggests an unequal distribution of synthetic and natural materials between sectors that echoes the idea of status attached to the unique versus the mass produced. For plastic itself though the story is not so clear. All sectors feature plastic with relatively similar frequency, implying that the strain between the individual and the socio-industrial expectations of schooling is present across all schools regardless of status. However, deconstructing sample images such as in Chapter 5.6 below can illustrate how the co-presence of signs can socially contextualise the status of material. For example, plastic prominently features alongside both bright, artificial colours and activities close to necessity in *Image A17.19* providing a combination of signifiers of status and social class within the image.

Chapter 5 | Results III: Semiotic Case Studies

Introduction

5.1 | Mythologies of the “Heroic Head”

Kulz describes how “the contradictions of neoliberal education reform and its companion, the self-made aspirational subject” are embodied in the figure of the ‘Heroic Head’ (Kulz, 2017b, p.86). These two images highlight different aspects of this mythology contained within the sign of the Headteacher, a sign included in 60 images across the sample.



Figure 5.1. Illustration of Image A17.3

The Red Pen

The red pen immediately captures the attention in this image. In this context it is the archetypal teachers' tool. Despite moves towards diversifying the teacher's marking palette, the red retains its clear associations with the work of a teacher (Holyman, 2018). In the case of image *A17.3* the signification of the red pen is clear - this Headteacher is a working teacher. This is an important distinction from the trends towards non-teaching 'CEO' models of school leadership (Thomson, 2020) that emerged in tandem with the Academisation programme, but instead draws upon older paradigms where the Headteacher is the senior member of a group of professional peers (Ball, 2008). At the same time, however, this sign works to support mythologies of social mobility and the rewards of wise decisions and hard work. The Headteacher remaining connected to the work of a teacher connotes that they were, and still are, a teacher and that their seniority has come from rising up the ranks through their own efforts and choices. A signification doubled-down upon by its location within the imagery of school, which for these prospective parents remains the prime vehicle for their children's social mobility and access to careers.

Work, interrupted

“We should not say that one man's hour is worth another man's hour, but rather that one man during an hour is worth just as much as another man during an hour. Time is everything, man is nothing: he is at the most time's carcass.” (Marx, 1978, p.54)

Red pen still grasped in his hand, this image appears to capture the moment when the Headteacher looks up from his work, spontaneously interrupted by a passing photographer. What this ostensibly shows is a Headteacher busy in their work, who doesn't have the time to waste on unproductive “dead time” (Clever, 1979, p.120), to have the time to spare on

posing for photographs runs counter to the ethos of the self-made subject and in this mythology may be “worthy of absolute moral condemnation” (Weber, 2001, p.104) for its waste and idleness.

This stolen glance, looking the reader straight in the eye, is forbidden in fictional imagery (Barthes, 2006b, p.111), breaking the performance convention of the fourth wall and addresses the reader directly. This transformation of the viewer into the “spectator-owner” (Berger, 1973, p.56) echoes narratives of schools being at the service of the public, or at least of the parents who choose them.

Paperwork and the ‘Theatre of Labour’

Despite this breaking of performance conventions (and the intrusion of the real into the image through this face to face engagement with the reader), the photograph remains a pose. In Barthesian terms this pose is the sense of arrest or permanence that comes with reading a static or immobile image (Barthes, 2006b, p.78). In image *A17.3* the Headteacher never finishes his marking, his work is frozen in time, incomplete. In more prosaic terms the image is a pose in that it is staged for the camera. No Headteacher is going to place themselves in a position to be surprised by a marketing photographer barging into their office unannounced. The breaking of the fourth wall in this image is a manufactured reminder of the ‘as if natural’ ideological work of prospectus images.

The performative content of this image extends into the “theatre of labour” (Fleming, 2017, p.140), where the pile of indecipherable papers awaiting a mark with the red pen, that will never come, takes the form of a kind of ceremonial work. Work that, on numerous levels, is produced through performance and observation for the creation of appearance and to affirm

the expected image of a teacher. In schools such performative labour will be familiar to many in the form of the “administrative anti-production” (Fisher, 2009, p.39) that has proliferated in education over recent decades. As Fisher points out, this bureaucratic production does not relate to the education being provided - the production and exchange of knowledge and skills in the classroom - but instead is literal performance management, the auditing of representations of education (p.42). This ‘short circuiting’ of the work of a teacher starts to look a lot like what Baudrillard described as “third order simulation” with image *A17.3* edging towards the hyperreal and removed from the “distinction between the real and the imaginary,” (Baudrillard, 1994, p.4).

Suit and Tie

The performance of appearance is more explicitly acknowledged in the fetish object of the ‘suit and tie’. This dress code that sartorially reifies middle-class legitimate culture in the form of professional attire is increasingly self-referential and disconnected from an economy that has moved away from the Keynesian model that gave birth to the middle-class as an ideological construct (Weiss, 2019). Like the young unemployed *bluffeurs* of the Ivory Coast who dress in designer brands whose illegitimacy is unquestioned (Miles, 2021), the value in such costumery has been detached from whatever material origins it had and instead its status is drawn from the wearer’s ability to don it performatively. The suit and tie has in some ways become a simulacrum (Baudrillard, 1994), like the infamous steak in *The Matrix*, we know it is not ‘real’, we know that the middle-class professionals and business leaders, whom we are supposed to aspire to, are less and less likely to dress like this, yet we still cling to the comforting belief in the socially transformative power of the suit and tie.

Indeed the wearing of the suit and tie is widely understood as a performance. One guide for aspiring teachers suggests “If you’re going to be effective as a teacher, you have to dress like

an effective teacher” (Barton, 2014, p.34), explicitly arguing that new teachers must be “good at playing the part of the teacher: dressing in an appropriate, professional way is a key part of that symbolism” (Barton, 2014, p.35).

It remains tied to the mythology of aspiration and social mobility that reward the ability to acquire and deploy cultural capital in the embodied form of dress and costume. Kulz notes that teachers are not given an explicit dress code but are “expected to understand” (Kulz, 2017a, p.71) the unwritten, yet legitimate, rules of professional attire. The Headteacher in *A17.3* demonstrates through his clothes his understanding of these rules and his ability to deploy them appropriately. It is, therefore, a confident display of the cultural capital held by the Headteacher with the message that this will be available for the children of prospective parents to acquire should this school be chosen.

This is, of course, a classed display of cultural capital. As Bourdieu argues, the attention and investment devoted to self-presentation “are proportionate to the chances of material or symbolic profit they can reasonably expect from it” (Bourdieu, 1986a, p.201). This potential valorization of clothing and appearance depends, however, on the ability to enter a job market where these learnt rules pay off. As an ossified icon of the middle-class white collar worker, the conventions of the suit and tie have value for those aspiring to enter that section of the labour force, for those seeking a middle-class status for their children. It has less value for those for whom the suit and tie cannot be exchanged for status, for those in strata of the labour force (or indeed outside of it) where more practical clothing is normalised - a smaller ‘distance from necessity’ to refer to status criteria used in the content analysis above. It also has less value for those who are members of the dominant class, whose embodied self-assurance reduces their need to demonstrate the cultural capital that they are confident in recognising in others (Bourdieu, 1986a, p.204). The trend of business leaders and politicians

to ditch the suit and tie is echoed here by findings that the Independent sector is less committed to the fetish of the school uniform. This has not - yet - made its way into these images of Headteachers, hinting at the importance of the aspirational parent in the education marketplace.

The Lanyard

A further sign worn on this Headteacher's body is the lanyard (with ID card). Perhaps its most immediate message is as a badge of authority. The lanyard is a form of credential that proves the legitimacy of the wearer's status. It is common for schools to use different coloured lanyards to indicate a hierarchy both of legitimacy, autonomy and access (Stevenson, 2019). Elsewhere, the lanyard becomes a canvas for the broadcast of institutional identity, allegiance and values - such as LGBT 'allyship' (Calvard et al., 2020) - which provides fertile ground for the display and deployment of cultural and/or social capital through this sign. There is evidence that lanyards are read in this way, one study found that patients showed a preference for Doctors wearing lanyards "associated with professional bodies" (Davies et al., 2016, p.586) leading the authors to conclude that lanyards may play a role in building "confidence and trust" in the NHS. For this Headteacher, the lanyard signals that they are a legitimate member of school staff with all of the authority that may be read into that status by the audience.

There is a further dimension to the lanyard as a sign of legitimacy linked to what Foucault described as a "political culture of danger" (Foucault, 2008, p.66). For the aspirational middle-classes the "nightmare" (Therborn, 2020, p.76) of a squeezed and shrinking status manifests as fear driven investment in the neoliberal model of education. (Jackson, 2010), p.39) which only fuels a sector already riven with anxiety and insecurity, as Jackson argues;

“fear is powerful and pervasive in English schools and central to many education discourses.” (Jackson, 2010, p.39). One material consequence of this insecurity in schools (and across society more generally) is a fear of outsiders or others be it ‘stranger danger’ or ‘illegal immigrants’. For schools, aside from new roles in immigration control being foisted upon them as part of the United Kingdom’s ‘Hostile Environment’ approach (Griffiths & Yeo, 2021, p.9), this has led to a greater concern with safety via the restriction of access to schools to those with valid credentials, proven identities and criminal records checks. This tighter control of the school boundary is embodied in the form of the lanyard, of “wearing the border” (Stevenson, 2019, p.34). For the anxious middle-class parent this visible display of concern with maintaining the separation between insiders and outsiders may provide some degree of reassurance and of securing their own status as being amongst the legitimate insiders.

Clean and Solid Comfort

The chair pictured in *A17.3* is neither a luxurious leather armchair nor is it one of the multiple plastic desk chairs found in every classroom. Instead its distinctive character is that of “clean and solid comfort” associated with middle-class ideals (Weber, 2001, p.116), in keeping with the ideology of the entrepreneurial self and its doctrine of wise choices. It is comfortable *enough*, with its padded back and seat to enable work to be pursued without distraction, and distinguished from the chairs in the classrooms *enough* for hard-earned status of its user. Baudrillard notes a trend towards chairs no longer gravitating towards desks, indeed that desks are becoming subordinate to the chair in the relationships of symbolic atmosphere (Baudrillard, 2005, p.45). This is not the case here. The straight backed chair remains locked in symbiosis with the desk that largely obscures it. The chair is a tool to enable the labour of the Headteacher in a manner befitting a beneficiary of rational economic activity. All of

which serves to semiotically promote the mythology of social mobility and meritocracy that markets itself at aspirational middle-class parents choosing schools.

Big Other is Watching You!

Unlike in some other instances (see Figure 5.7 illustration of *L13.18* below for example) of the panoptic trap of visibility, *A17.3* suggests that it is the Headteacher (and by extension the school) themselves under surveillance. Seated with his back to a large set of windows that form the greatest part of the background in this image, this Headteacher is under external observation. Observation, of course, is a word familiar within education as a key mechanism of performance management. As a form of disciplinary measure observation works directly through systems of sanction or reward based upon what is seen in these observations - performance related pay, Ofsted reports and so on. As Foucault noted, this “permanent visibility” (Foucault, 1995, p.201) ensures the “automatic functioning of power”. In the case of *A17.3* this power is shown not to lie with the Headteacher, but outside, elsewhere. This symbolic space beyond the windows could be read as the Lacanian ‘big Other’ - intangible, indefinable yet somehow acting to ensure that the Headteacher and the school follow society’s rules of what a school should be and do, and at the same time participate in maintaining them (Zizek, 2007). “We are”, as Lacan argues, “always asking the Other what he desires” (Lacan, 2009, p.38). The Other - the symbolic space beyond the windows - “acts like a yardstick against which I can measure myself.” (Zizek, 2007, p.9).

The idea of measurement is central to the performance being laid on for this big Other, the marketisation of schools requires the hierarchical sorting of schools via league tables, exam scores and Ofsted reports “designed to enable prospective customers (parents) choose the ‘perfect’ school?” (Wall & Perrin, 2015, p.18) leading to this symbolic space being filled with, as Wall and Perrin so neatly put it, “Expectation, Expectation, Expectation” (Wall &

Perrin, 2015, p.26). By placing the Headteacher in full view, they are compelled to demonstrate their desire to fulfil these expectations. In the context of a school prospectus, this big Other expecting a performance is the consumer, the parent choosing their child's school. In turn, they too are subject to the compulsion to perform, to play the role of the entrepreneurial self making wise choices and investing on the basis of the symbolic information the prospectus image provides.

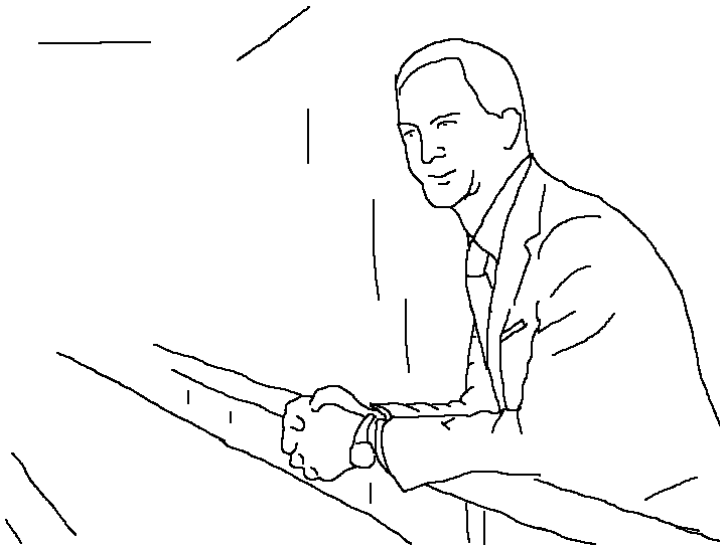


Figure 5.2. Illustration of Image P23.2

The Gaze

The first thing to notice here is the gaze. Unlike in the previous example, it is not directed at the camera or the reader. The Head is looking elsewhere. We cannot see where or what. The focus of his attention does not directly concern us. Using the spatial and compositional grammar of *Figure 3.18 - The Dimensions of Visual Space* allows a reading of the meaning of this gaze. Unlike in Barthes' reading of electoral photography this gaze is not "ascensional" nor "lost nobly in the future" (Barthes, 1973, p.100). Instead, it is fixed firmly on the 'margin ideal given' - that is, looking backwards at an idealised past and present. It is important to

understand this ‘ideal given’ as being situated *both* in the past and the present. It is not mere nostalgia but rather a rooting of the status quo - the ‘as if natural’ of ideology - within this idealised past. This, in turn, enables a signification of tradition with this gaze. Practice need not adhere to traditionalism in this case, the rest of the prospectus that this image is drawn from confidently eschews some of the more traditional tropes of an appeal to traditions commonly found across the Independent sectors, yet - as this gaze signifies - is still firmly situated within the need to reproduce existing social relations. The location of this sign within the Headteacher, as part of the bigger mythologies of the ‘heroic head’, embodies the social positionality of the school.

The Suit and Tie (again)

Further signification of this appeal to an idea of traditional values and legitimate culture can be found in the Headteacher’s attire. It is as Kulz neatly puts it - “ideology worn on the body” (Kulz, 2017a, p.74). This image deploys the same basic signifier as *A17.3* - the suit and tie - with the same appeals to the middle-class professional aesthetic imposed as legitimate culture. However, there are a number of details that work as marks of distinction. Perhaps, the most easily read of these subtle touches is the ‘pocket square’, an accessory that works to signify both a knowledge of sartorial etiquette, unwritten rules that require the appropriate cultural capital to follow and a certain distance from necessity. To maintain a crisply folded handkerchief neatly in the breast pocket demands a degree of removal from the more physically engaged forms of labour that teachers may find themselves doing. The pocket square signifies, not the ‘working teacher’ Head of *A17.3* but a leader that oversees and directs affairs more remotely and from a higher position or status. This is not the Headteacher as embodiment of Kulz’s “self-made aspirational subject” promoting a mythology of social mobility based on hard work and wise choices, this is the mythology of an ‘as if natural’

hierarchy and its reproduction with the Head as sign of its success. This sign, therefore, is for the interpellation of the 'always already' privileged parents that overwhelmingly make up the population of England's Independent School sector.

The Wristwatch

Another detail that is worn on this Headteacher's body is the watch. Watches are "meaning bearing objects" (Freake, 1995, p.67). In the British Channel 4 sitcom 'PhoneShop' the opening episode sees salesmen Ashley and Jerwayne try to impress the importance of wearing the right watch upon their new colleague Christopher. Christopher's 'wrong' watch prompts a derisive response of "Oh my lord it's a Timex Junior!...Hello Snoopy, where's Grafield (sic)?" from an incredulous Jerwayne (Bowker, 2010). The same communications of status occur in schools, Kulz records a conversation of pupils discussing the status and position of their Headteacher who, they claimed, "only wore clothes from Ralph Lauren and 'the big stores' like Selfridges." (Kulz, 2017b, p.94). In the case of this image (*P23.2*), although we cannot see what brand of watch is being displayed, it is clearly neither a "Timex Junior" nor the 'in your face' evidence of conspicuous consumption (Veblen, 2008) favoured by the fictional Ashley and Jerwayne. It is instead, a more refined and restrained, proof that this Headteacher understands the rules regarding the legitimate display of wealth, testament to the cultural capital being drawn upon.

More than this, the watch signifies a possession or appropriation of time (Baudrillard, 2005, p.101). Foucault notes the development of "disciplinary time" (Foucault, 1995, p.151) and the use of it in producing "docile bodies" in schools. The Headteacher of *P23.2* is, by displaying his watch, displaying his possession or control of this disciplinary time. The sign of the watch here, therefore, is one of restating the hierarchy of authority and power within this school and

rejecting notions of democratic or participatory leadership models. As Ball notes, models of monitoring time and motion have been introduced to teacher appraisal (Ball, 1990) reflecting the “shift in the governance of schools from professional/collegial in style to managerial/bureaucratic” (Ball, 1990, p.153) as neoliberal business logics were deliberately introduced to schools by successive government reforms. The work done by the ideologies of time can, however, trace its roots back further. The ‘muscular Christianity’ central to the founding mythologies of English Independent schools, and its acolytes elsewhere in the Education system, shares a common synthesis of asceticism and the moral justification of inequality with the ‘Protestant Ethic’ described by Weber (2001) reproduced in the mythology of the entrepreneurial self that Kulz sees embodied in the Headteacher (Kulz, 2017b).

The View from the Balcony

“Both aloof and wary. They expect no reciprocity. They wish the image of their presence to impress others with their vigilance and their distance” (Berger, 1973, p.97)

This passage, written about the 18th century painting *India Offering Her Pearls to Britannia*, could equally have been written about *P23.2*. The gaze of the Headteacher is not directed at the reader, but elsewhere, at anonymous others. In the context of their leadership role in school that is signified elsewhere in the image, it may be assumed that they are instead looking at other people in school, most likely pupils but possibly members of staff. In combination with the signification of hierarchy (above) this relationship is read as that of overseeing their subordinates. Such a reading is reinforced by the composition of the image, where the viewer is situated slightly below the subject of the image - the Headteacher. Despite the proximity that the composition places the subject and reader in, the gaze elsewhere invites no dialogue. It is as if the viewer is unnoticed or absent.

This Headteacher's gaze personifies the turn to managerial models in education, the "top-dog theories" (Ball, 1990, p.165) that "contain a view of the organization looking down from the position of those 'in control'" (ibid.). In this case, image *P23.2* shows a Headteacher 'in position' as this top-dog, in command and control of their domain. A contrast with the message in image *A17.3* of a position gained and maintained through hard work and rising through the ranks.

There is further signification embedded in this image of the gaze, however. The concept of vision (and visioning) are increasingly strongly associated with educational leadership (Courtney & Gunter, 2015) deployed alongside 'values' (be they 'British' or of the school), the vision of the Headteacher is central to the openly ideological work of the school. But, as we see in *P23.2* "visions are the property of leaders, who should enact them relentlessly" (p.401).

This "top-down gaze" (Thomson, 2020, p.151), embodied here by the Head in position on a balcony surveying the nameless others in his school, suggests something of a panoptical approach to power (Bentham, 2011; Foucault, 1995). This gaze is an arrangement in space and power that induces "a state of conscious and permanent visibility" (Foucault, 1995, p.201) allowing the Headteacher's power to function automatically. The "unverifiable" aspect that goes along with the Headteacher's prominent visibility atop the balcony is connoted by his location. Unlike the Headteacher of *A17.3*, *P23.2* is not seated at his desk, in his office. Instead, he is 'outside', in the corridors somewhere, potentially mobile rather fixed in his place. This roving deployment of power, familiar to many teachers in the form of the 'learning walk', ensures that the subjects of this control are kept in a state where they know they might be under observation and the gaze may come to rest upon them at any point.

5.2 Triumphal Arches

“Doors are architectural media as an elementary cultural technique because they process the guiding difference of architecture, the difference between inside and outside.” (Siegert & Peters, 2012, p.8)

Images *P14.6* and *F1.1* both prominently feature openings, doors and archways yet the semiotic signification can be read in quite contrasting ways. The differing socio-economic status between the Independent School of P14 and the State Free School of F1 can be visually read at a glance despite the apparent similarity of image theme and contents.



Figure 5.3. Illustration of Image P14.6

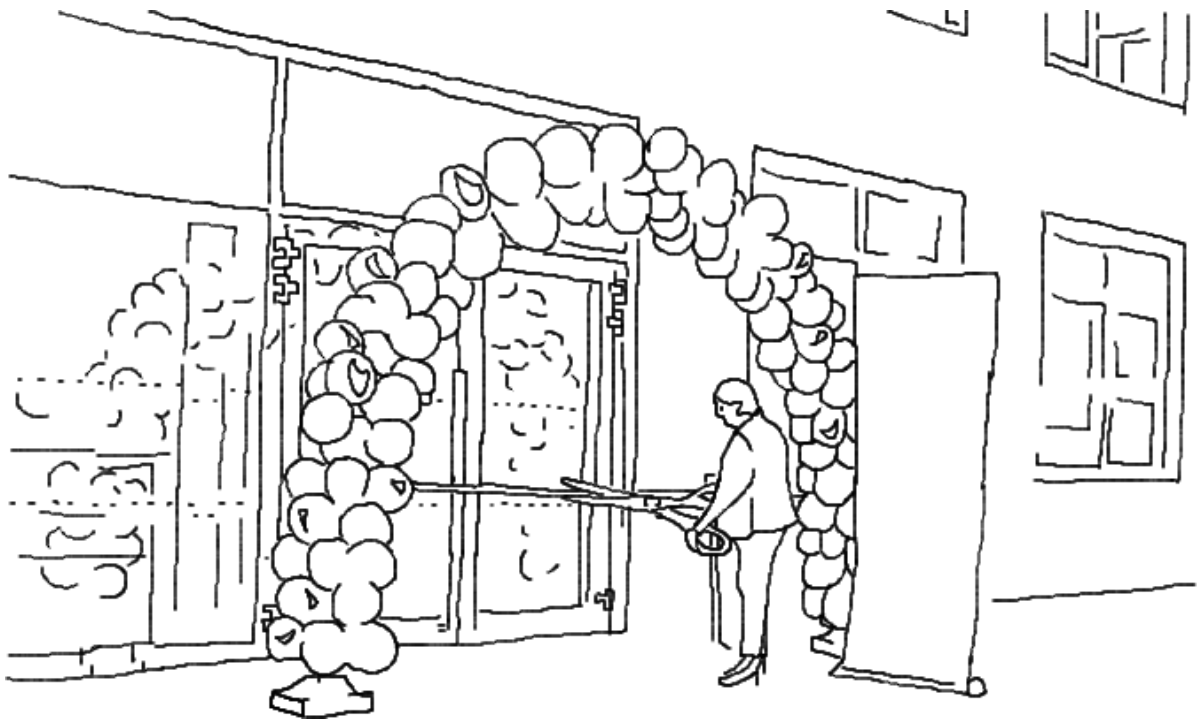


Figure 5.4. Illustration of Image F1.1

Liminal space

As discussed in Chapter 4.2.3 above doorways are a liminal space with the symbolic power of magical transformation and transfer. They indicate the potential to go through, or in, or beyond. To go somewhere else - there, not here. This power is central to the mythology of the school as a vehicle for social mobility.

Inside and Outside

The doorway itself is neither inside or outside, yet it is also both inside and outside. Once through the doorway one's position changes, but the doorway itself is the threshold of, in and between the two.

Despite this clear symbolic opposition between inside and outside *Image F1.1* adds layers of ambiguity to its signification. The glass doors are being ceremonially opened with the cutting

of a ribbon that bars access to them. Yet this act is taking place within the frame of another entrance, a temporary arch constructed of balloons. Beyond this a further arch can be seen in the reflection of the balloons on the glass frontage of the school building. This image, there visually contains three entrances of varying materiality. These echoes of entrances blur the dialectical relationship between insider and outside (Bachelard, 1994) and induce a sense of uncertainty about whether one is 'here' or 'there'. The final entrance, the reflected arch, cannot be passed through. In this image, *FI.1*, the student cannot fully pass between outside and inside and the school remains an extension of the outside world, perhaps signifying its function as extended apparatus of the relations of the (social) factory. Instead, like the end of the rainbow, the promise of transformation, of increased social mobility, remains a mirage. The poet Jean Tardieu expresses this frozen movement in the lines quoted by Bachelard;

*“Pour avancer je tourne sur moi-même
Cyclone par l’immobile habité”*

(In order to advance, I walk the treadmill of myself
Cyclone inhabited by immobility) (Bachelard, 1994, p.214)

Victory, Framed

Whilst the journey signified by the doorways in *FI.1* might be as illusory as the movement on a treadmill the archways of *PI4.6* tell a - symbolically - different story. Instead of ephemeral balloons, reflections and sliding doors, here the archways are getting ever more open as the students move through them. Possibility is opening up before them as they stride confidently through the threshold. No obstacles stand in their way. Prior thresholds fade away into the background in the image. These arches are also in the quasi-ecclesiastical architecture style linked with the ideas of nation and character popularised by Ruskin as noted above on p.143. This lends image *PI4.6* a sense of security and permanence in its semiotic claims of mobility.

It is also worth noting the visible *habitus* of confidence and quiet entitlement connoted in the portrayal of the students walking purposefully through the door. Unencumbered by backpacks they are free to carry simply a folder. They are not dressed in the pastiche of white collar business wear that is the archetypical school uniform. Instead they wear the ‘real thing’. They already possess - and have been granted - the autonomy and self-assurance to wear this in their own way. A top button undone with a tie askew would face a sanction in many schools. Here, however, it is ‘as if natural’. The semiotic triumph with which these young men stride through the archways fittingly echoes the form of the classical and neoclassical ‘triumphal arches’ - such as the *arc de triomphe* that are the legacies of imperial ambition.

5.3 | Colonising the Prospectus Image | Where class and race intersect

Cosmopolitanism as Cultural Capital

Whilst the aspect of privilege and disadvantage focussed upon here has been a socioeconomic version of class, images *PI.13* and *PI.16* provide a clear example of where class intersects with race. These images, both drawn from the prospectus of the Independent school *PI*, appear to illustrate students engaged in some sort of overseas trip or expedition with ‘voluntouristic’ overtones. The content analysis conducted above suggests that schools in the Independent sector are considerably more likely to include images depicting trips ($M = 2$) compared with schools in the State sector ($M = 0.2$) and a similar divide can be observed in depictions of service, charity and voluntary work with Independent schools again more likely to include these images ($M = 0.5$) as opposed to State schools ($M = 0.1$).

The creation of pupils as “cosmopolitan subjects” (Maxwell & Aggleton, 2016) through international trips may provide them with additional cultural capital and contribute to the formation of their *habitus* producing “an openness, interest and ease of engagement with the

Other – in the form of exotic/foreign cultures, places and people” (Maxwell & Aggleton, 2016, p.782). This ‘ethnic Other’ is also viewed by some white middle class parents as a ‘resource’ for their children to draw power and authority from, produced by these cosmopolitan encounters (Reay, 2008). Such power and authority is appropriated through a “claim to know the Other” (Skeggs, 2004, p.158) that must be authenticated through its distinction from tourism and portrayal as a more meaningful exchange. For middle-class parents seeking to purchase this form of cultural capital for their children through their choice of school, the images of voluntarism and service in exotic far away places may provide this stamp of authenticity.

The cultural capital acquired by pupils on these trips can then be exchanged for economic capital or further cultural and social capital via its deployment in applications for jobs and Universities (McGloin & Georgeou, 2016). Whilst McGloin and Georgeou rightly argue that the “the sale and consumption of a ‘development experience’ operated at a pedagogical level to solicit students into a seamless rhetoric of neoliberalism” (McGloin & Georgeou, 2016), p.404) the exploitative and one way nature of this exchange of capital extracted from the developing world echoes Marx’s critique of earlier colonial relations in “the turning of Africa into a warren for the commercial hunting of black-skins” (Marx, 1970, p.703). Central to this appropriation of the ethnic Other is the use of their difference to signify a difference in the pupil who has appropriated it from their competitors. For the pupils and their pupils the school publishing images *PI.13* and *PI.16* is advertising the opportunity to invest in this accumulation and the production of a classed and racialised privilege in line with the ideology of the entrepreneurial self.

(Re)making a Difference

Practices of voluntourism, school expeditions and the images of service more heavily featured in the prospectuses of Independent schools are framed by the language of ‘making a difference’. However, as images *Pl.13* and *Pl.16* illustrate, the classed and racialized privilege intrinsic to these practices allow two critical interpretations of this language of difference.

In the Bourdieusian sense, the trips advertised to parents in these images produce and reproduce markers of social differentiation (Robbins, 1991) for their participants. The difference being made is between those who acquire this form of cultural capital and those who do not, between those pupils having the chance to be made as cosmopolitan subjects and those who don’t.

The inequity of access to these trips is fundamentally classed, primarily through cost, but also in other more insidious ways. These trips are far more likely to feature in the prospectuses of fee-paying schools whose intake is overwhelmingly drawn from the wealthiest strata of society. Participation in these trips is an additional expense on top of this with costs typically in excess of £4000. Beyond this, the extra-curricular nature of such activities renders them at some distance from ‘necessity’, unlike the acquisition of educational capital and credentials in the form of exam results and qualifications. The financial barrier to these trips has been recognised for a long time. In 1937 a newspaper reporting on an expedition by the Public Schools Exploring Society (now operating as the British Schools Exploring Society) records the funding given by the Jubilee Trust and local Councils to enable a small number of ‘council lads’ to take part (“Schoolboy explorers off to Newfoundland: Council lads in the party,” 1937). However, another report in the same paper the following year announcing that the Duke of Gloucester would be the principal guest at the Society’s fundraising dinner at The

Dorchester (“Social and Personal,” 1938) gives some indication of the degree of social and cultural capital deployed in bankrolling these trips. Whilst, perhaps, not so extreme today the ability to draw from family resources of economic, social and cultural capitals remains a prerequisite to access the sort of trips that sets the pupil apart and produces the desired markers of distinction. This difference between those for whom it is ‘as if natural’ to seek out these experiences and those for whom such trips are not part of their social world is fixed - or ‘quilted’ - through the interpellation of these prospectus images and their potential role in parental school choice.

This classed distinction between the holders of such cultural capital and those without it is accompanied by a racialised distinction, the difference made between the voluntourists and those they purport to aid, “underscored” McGloin and Georgeou argue, “by colonial power relations” (McGloin & Georgeou, 2016, p.409). These colonial power relations invoked in travel and tourism provide a location where the privileges of class and race intersect, as Jackson notes; “nothing was more damaging to the racial ideologies separating colonisers from colonised than the appearance of a white man with nothing in his favour but the colour of his skin.” (Jackson, 2011, p.344). Image P1.13 cannot be imagined depicting disadvantaged British pupils striding down the streets of one of Africa’s more prosperous gated suburban neighbourhoods being greeted by the children of the local elite. Indeed, in 2009 one ‘adventure holiday’ operator - Activities Abroad - promoted itself as offering ‘chav free holidays’ based upon the names of people, and the social class it associated with them, in its customer database. When challenged the company’s founder was unapologetic stating;

“I simply feel it is time the middle classes stood up for themselves. We work hard to make a decent home and life for our families ... Unfortunately, everyone else in our society seems to take from us, whether it is incompetent bankers or the shell-suited urchins who haunt our street corners”. (Z. Williams, 2009)

Whilst such attitudes might not be made explicit in contemporary promotional material, it is a striking illustration of the presence of class distinction and social chauvinism in the

consumption of travel experiences that situate the consumer in a position of superiority and privilege. The potency of its appeal lies in the activity being viewed as “helping a needy other” with the implication that “local knowledge and practice are automatically understood as inferior”. (McGloin & Georgeou, 2016), p.409).

There is a longstanding relationship between the ethos of colonialism and the British school system. The aforementioned ‘muscular Christianity’ formed a bedrock of the values of both and the public schools (now the Independent sector) inculcated British imperialism into its pupils (Verkaik, 2018) as it churned out generations of colonial administrators (Renton, 2017).

White Saviour



Figure 5.5. Illustration of Image P1.13

“Promotional images of smiling children in the embrace of tanned westerners communicate the promise that voluntourists will bestow development on those in need, and that the needy will be dutifully grateful.”

(McGloin & Georgeou, 2016, p. 412)

With a backdrop of an empty dusty street, flanked by a tree and a corrugated roofed building, image *PI.13* features a white woman front and centre surrounded by (mostly) smiling black children. Most of these children are smiling at the camera, whilst a number are hugging, or clinging onto, the white woman in the centre of the composition. Behind this, two white men bend their heads slightly to look down on children in the crowd. The image almost fits perfectly with Sin and He's description of photos of "smiling children in dusty, remote towns in Africa" (Sin & He, 2018, p. 216) being used to represent "First World identities and Third World experiences on social media" (Sin & He, 2018, p. 216). The distinction between identity and experience is key here. The first world pupils are being sold an experience in these trips, an experience produced by the third world as object(s) that in turn (re)produces the pupils as privileged subjects.

The background provides environmental clues to the location of this image in Africa, although this on its own is inconclusive. It plays upon a shared grammar of imagery in popular media, but it is lacking in specificity beyond the 'elsewhere', a less developed than 'here' setting for the main action of the image - the 'white saviour'. In image *PI.13* "the indigenous community forms part of the photogenic landscape, which adds value to the 'authenticity' of the individual's adventure" (McGloin & Georgeou, 2016, p.406). There is a stark distinction between the adults (or older teens, the photo is inconclusive in that regard) who are all white and the young children who are all black. As Sin and He argue, "images of children reflect key tropes of innocence, dependence and protection (Sin & He, 2018, p. 219) and their visual and symbolic relationship with older, white, students (or teachers) "reinforces a paternal logic of a superior global North as compared to an inferior global South." (Sin & He, 2018, p. 219). This logic, reproduced by the symbolic exchange embedded in this image, imposes a deficit model (Bhopal, 2018) upon the relationship between the school pupils and

the African children - the white students are represented as 'worthy' whilst the black children are presented as 'in need'. Yet, whilst there is of course an obscene discrepancy in the material resources available to the children pictured in image *PI.13*, the resource offered by the visiting students is precisely one of little material value to their hosts - unskilled and inexperienced short-term labour. On one such trip I accompanied to Ladakh in India several years ago, the work that the Western students were due to undertake - the re-painting of Buddhist *stupas* - was politely cancelled as, due to the impending visit of the Dalai Lama, the local community wanted the job done more professionally!

This persistent trope of the *soi dissant* 'white saviour' has not escaped criticism. In the 1980s the imagery of the famine in Ethiopia and Sudan provoked an outpouring of charity in the United Kingdom and elsewhere culminating in the Live Aid festival. The symbolic exchange of this representation drew criticism from, amongst others, the anarchist punk band Chumbawamba who released an album entitled 'Pictures of Starving Children Sell Records' in protest. More contemporary charitable enterprises such as Comic Relief have been accused of deploying 'white saviour' tropes in their imagery with photos posted online by celebrities such as Stacey Dooley and Ed Sheeran provoking a well-publicised backlash (Hinsliff, 2019). These images bear a striking resemblance to *PI.13*.

The class component of this is highlighted in viral spoofs such as the 'Gap Yah' video on YouTube (Meltzer, 2010) and the Instagram account of 'Barbie Savior' (Zane, 2016) which play upon, and with, the visual tropes of both the 'white saviour' and of privileged young people.

Great White Hunter

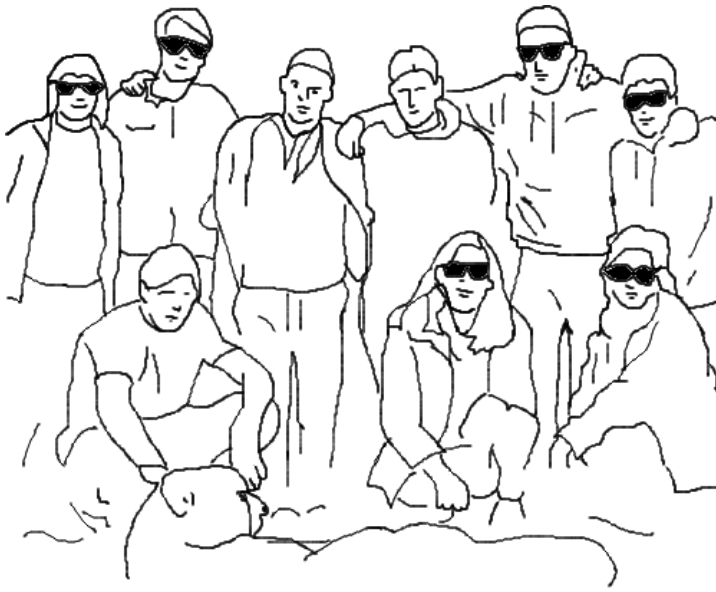


Figure 5.6. Illustration of Image P1.16

In the same prospectus - that of school *PI* - another image appealing to parents but drawing upon colonial, classed and racialised tropes can be found. Image *PI.16* evokes the photos of the ‘Great White Hunter’ with its composition. A group of mainly white young people gather around the body of a fallen game animal and pose for the camera, smiling triumphantly at the lens. This replicates many of the same potential meanings inherited from colonial relations as in *PI.13*. As Hays notes the visual rhetoric of the safari repurposed here in ecotourism guise portrays “an iterative act of claiming the landscape and its inhabitants by shooting with a gun and/or camera, by taking away trophies and photographs.” (Hays, 2019, p.158). The same logic of the exotic Other is (re)presented here, as background to authenticate the “colonial imagining of a land that was simultaneously savage and picturesque” (Jackson, 2011, p.353) whilst portraying the Great White Hunter, or ecotourist, as chivalrously intervening to tame (Jackson, 2011, p.350).

The safari, was - and still is - a classed activity for simple reasons of affordability and in terms of possessing the cultural capital and ‘knowhow’ to be in a position to envisage ‘going on safari’ and whilst the boom in cheap airfares and relative ease of crossing borders at the end of the 20th century may have permitted a slightly wider section of the Western middle-class to engage in ‘globe-trotting’ travel activities such access seems to be narrowing again as the 21st century accelerates.

The colonial ideological work undertaken by these images, however, belongs to a tradition that precedes the age of mass tourism. At the height of the British Empire lessons were given using images projected by lantern slide “to teach the empire’s schoolchildren what it meant to look and to feel like an imperial citizen at the beginning of the 20th century.” (Moser, 2017, p.192) and Federici (2018) argues that there is a;

“continuity between the imagery found in several sixteenth-century colonial paintings produced in the Andean region at the peak of primitive accumulation in the ‘New World’ and the imagery coming from the ‘new enclosures’ that have been central to the globalization program.” (Federici, 2018)

Images *PI.13* and *PI.16* can be viewed as lying squarely within this tradition of colonial ideological work, appealing to select parents on the grounds of classed *habitus* and tastes in order to reproduce the social relationships signified within these images.

5.4 | Visibility is a Trap

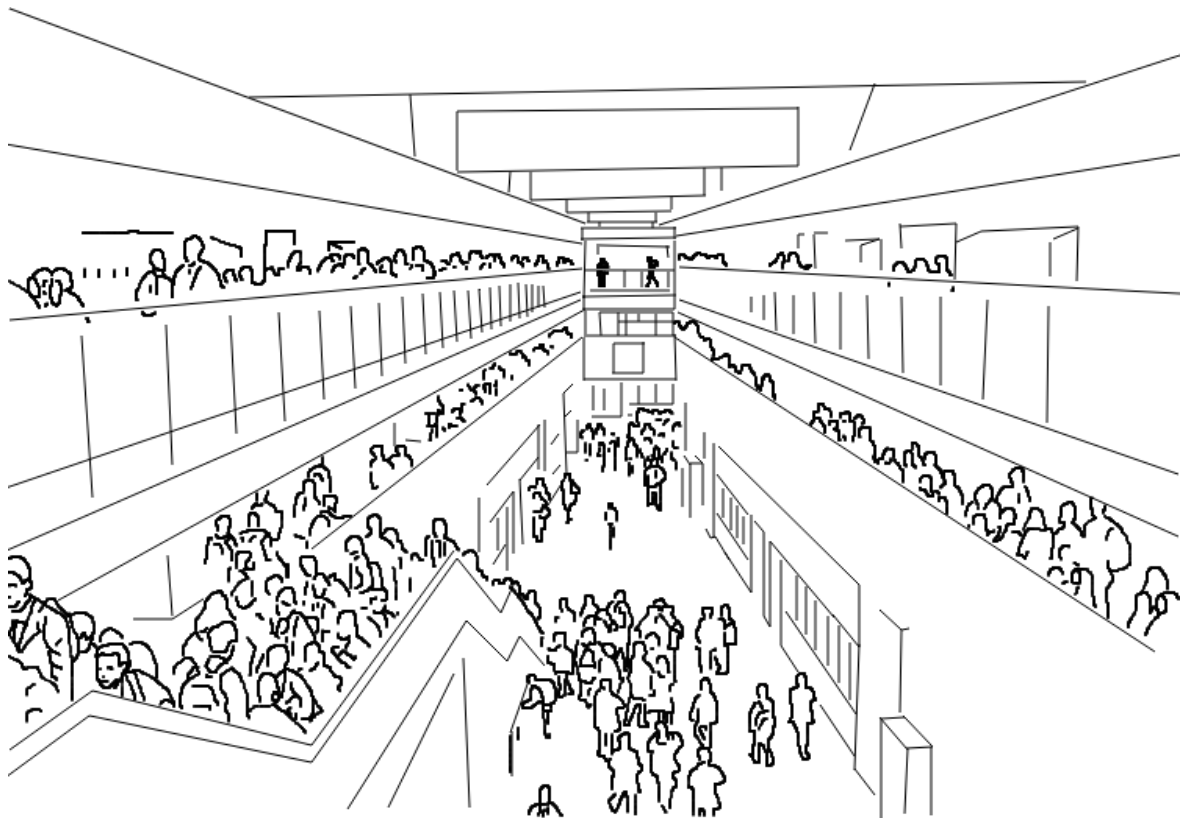


Figure 5.7. Illustration of Image L13.18

“Is it surprising that prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons?” wrote Foucault (1995, p. 228). Image *L13.18* shows a ‘bird’s eye’ view of a central area of school *L13*. It bears a striking resemblance to the familiar images of prisons encountered in the media (Cachia & Hawkins, 2019; Cumming, 2016) From a high(er) vantage point for the reader the picture shows crowds of pupils on three floors of the school, some ascending and descending a staircase whilst others pass along first and second floor balconies and a ground floor space. Alongside the balconies, and the ground floor area the doors of rooms off to the side are visible. At the far end of the space, directly opposite the reader another vantage point can be seen that can be assumed to offer the same overview as the one possessed by the viewer.

Bentham, Foucault and the Panopticon

Both the idea and the design of the panoptical school originate from the 18th century writings of Jeremy Bentham. Although the panopticon was primarily focussed on the building of an ideal prison, Bentham argued that it could be applied to the school as well (Bentham, 2011). Whilst much of the discussion of the panoptical nature schools is filtered through the lens of Foucault on sentence lifted directly from Bentham's writings leaps out with modern resonance. The line “All play, all chattering - in short, all distraction of every kind, is effectively banished” (Bentham, 2011, p.86) could have been written in any one of the proliferating behaviour management guides emanating from the *soi disant* traditionalists gaining prominence in educational discourse today.

#EduTrads and ‘original sin’

Headteacher and Chair of the Social Mobility Commission, Katherine Birbalsingh, explicitly expresses another view entwined with the carceral atmosphere of some schools. Arguing in favour of strong disciplinary measures she claimed that “children are born with ‘original sin’ and must be ‘habituated into choosing good over evil.’” (Hobson, 2021). Beliefs such as this are regularly promoted by some educational traditionalists, particularly in disputes with more progressive educators on platforms such as Twitter. They place the authority of the teacher at the forefront of practice. Government behaviour advisor and behaviour training provider to schools, Tom Bennett, argues that “some level of adult coercion” (Bennett, 2019) is required for learning. Such attitudes are not new, but - amplified by some of their advocates' social media prominence - are regaining influence in Government policy-making and public discourse (Watson, 2020). Whether such views are correct is not what is important here, but rather it is the appeal to these tenets (and their ideological transformation into ‘common sense’) that can be found signified in images such as *L13.18*.

Pentheus Torn by a Thousand Hands | The Fear of the Unruly Mob

Elites have been driven by a fear of the mob for thousands of years (Jasper, 2021). The identification of crowds as a hostile force to be contained and or dispersed echoes today in the design of schools and in the discourse surrounding them. Indeed, following the 2011 riots across England, one school's disciplinarian ethos was explicitly lauded as 'the school that beat the rioters' (Kulz, 2017b) However, the unruly crowd is not just a threat to the authority of those in charge but stands in opposition to the narratives of the heroic individual (Jasper, 2021) that are so central to the mythologies of social mobility and meritocracy as reified in neoliberal educational practices.

Nothing strikes terror into the heart of a discussion about schools more than the prospect of a Bacchanalian mob of students flouting rules and out of reach of the authority of the teachers. Permeating popular culture through movies and books the 'unruly mob' of children trope is the opposite of the docile bodies described by Foucault (1995). These fears account for the preeminence of 'behaviour' as a target for intervention and the flourishing industry of authors and consultants offering 'behaviour management' solutions. One behaviour management book (Bennett, 2020) conjures up frenzied images of the Jonestown Massacre (p.118), the Children's Crusade (p.119) and the death of Princess Diana (p. 120) in its drive to stress the urgency of classroom control. These fears also underpin the rationale for the 'taken for granted' ideas that children 'need boundaries' as pursued in their stricter forms by the new breed of disciplinarian Headteachers much loved by the media.

In image *L13.18* the carceral architecture stands in contrast to anonymous crowds of pupils on the stairs and in the corridors. The depiction of this antagonism in the photograph signifies to

parents an acknowledgement of these fears and a reassurance that the school is - literally - designed to manage them. One study of school design in the context of security culture describes how the architects have “internalised and naturalised the politics-of-threat culture” (Bevan, 2019, p. 552)

Such signifiers of the need to create ‘docile bodies’ in schools are, however, heavily classed. Images such as *L13.18* are drawn almost entirely from the State sector. This discrepancy is echoed in studies that argue that spatial panopticism and surveillance is largely absent from Independent schools (Adams, 2021; McCahill & Finn, 2010). This is not to say that the panoptic - in both its Benthamist and contemporary managerialist incarnations - does not make its presence felt amongst the images from the Independent schools in this sample. Image *P23.2* (discussed above), for example, has panoptic signs within it. However, signifiers of the mythologies of control and discipline are considerably more prominent amongst the State school images and the buildings they depict.

Such panoptic imagery cannot be regarded as merely the legacy of inherited architecture; the new builds of glass and concrete discussed in Chapter 4.3 account for much of the signification in the sample images from the State sector. This reflects (and is reflected by) the continuing prominence of discourses promoting the creation of docile, working class, bodies. The successive holders of the media manufactured title of ‘Britain’s Strictest Head’ (Ball & White, 2021; Fahey, 2021; *Head to open chain of ‘Britain’s strictest schools’*, 2012) all exclusively led schools in the State sector and the narratives surrounding them have been ones pathologizing working class and black young people (Kulz, 2017a). Reay argues that this pathological othering of working-class pupils plays to the fears of an increasingly insecure middle-class (Reay, 2007), it can be seen, therefore, how the classed tension of *L13.18* may be positively interpellated by some middle-class parents. This tension is signified both by the

depiction of carceral architecture containing the crowd, but also in the crowd of pupils itself. This crowd teeters on the edge between the unruly mob and the disciplined body. The pupils are uniformed, contained and channelled, yet, at the same time they are pictured walking in different directions, both up and down the stairs and in groups and huddles rather than in neat single or double file. Image *L13.18* pictures both the efforts the school makes in imposing discipline and simultaneously hints at the ever present risk that, without the school's efforts, the unruly mob might re-emerge. It is through this lens of insecurity - the fears and anxieties of the middle-class noted by Reay (2007) - that the counterintuitive notion that signs of the carceral in schools can become promotional imagery.

Gewirtz et al. identified the class nature of the “undertones of tainting” (Gewirtz et al., 1995, p.35) present in parental school choice based upon euphemisms of order, discipline and security. These *habitus* informed preferences for segregation from a classed other, as Ball (2008) observes, have been enshrined in successive government's policies promoting parental choice of school. Reay (2017) on the other hand draws attention to a degree of ambivalence amongst sections of the middle-class to segregationist school choices. She records, for example, parents using schools with large working-class populations as a “backdrop that middle-class children can shine against” (p. 138) amongst the motivations, some more principled or benign perhaps, for *contrepellating* the classed messages within school choice - a further illustration of the potential attraction of the “manufactured uncertainty” (Kenway, 2001, p. 136) between disciplinary school and the unruly mob in image *L13.18* to some of its audience..

5.5 | Labour Personified: Work Stations

“The difficult thing to explain about how middle class kids get middle class jobs is why others let them. The difficult thing to explain about how working class kids get working class jobs is why they let themselves.” (Willis, 2000, p.1)

Across the political spectrum there is broad agreement on the virtue of employment. Left and right tend to agree that ‘more jobs’ is a good thing, be it the demand of the right to work or the boasts of job creation, yet the nature of the jobs in question is rarely specified (Graeber, 2019). Schools, too, find themselves promoting employment, and employability as part of their purpose. Images *L14.4* and *A33.12* both, initially, broadcast signs relating to how schools *L14* and *A33* provide the opportunity for their pupils to to acquire the skills and aptitudes required for this employability.

For parents and children fear and uncertainty about future employment may be a significant concern. The direct route into employment for school leavers without significant credentials has all but disappeared (Yates et al., 2011) and credentials ‘arms race’ (see below) is accompanied by a growing hegemonic precarity in employment, The flexibility of labour demanded in a neoliberal economy leads to a fluidity of roles, statuses and skills (Standing, 2011) with gig workers seeing little return on any investment they may have made regarding occupational skills.

These anxieties can manifest amongst young people as a form of what Fisher (2009) calls “reflexive impotence” (p.21) where knowing that employment prospects are bleak generates an indifference to the acquisition of occupational skills which, in turn, makes these employment prospects bleaker. It is the antagonism between the soft bigotry of low expectations meeting the hard bigotry of high expectations in an increasingly unequal

marketplace. The disciplinary role of the school as imagined by Foucault is replaced by a more diffuse system of control based upon debt and enclosure (Fisher, 2009).

Despite all this the mythologies of employability; of hard work and aspiration, remain central to the discourse around schools and education.

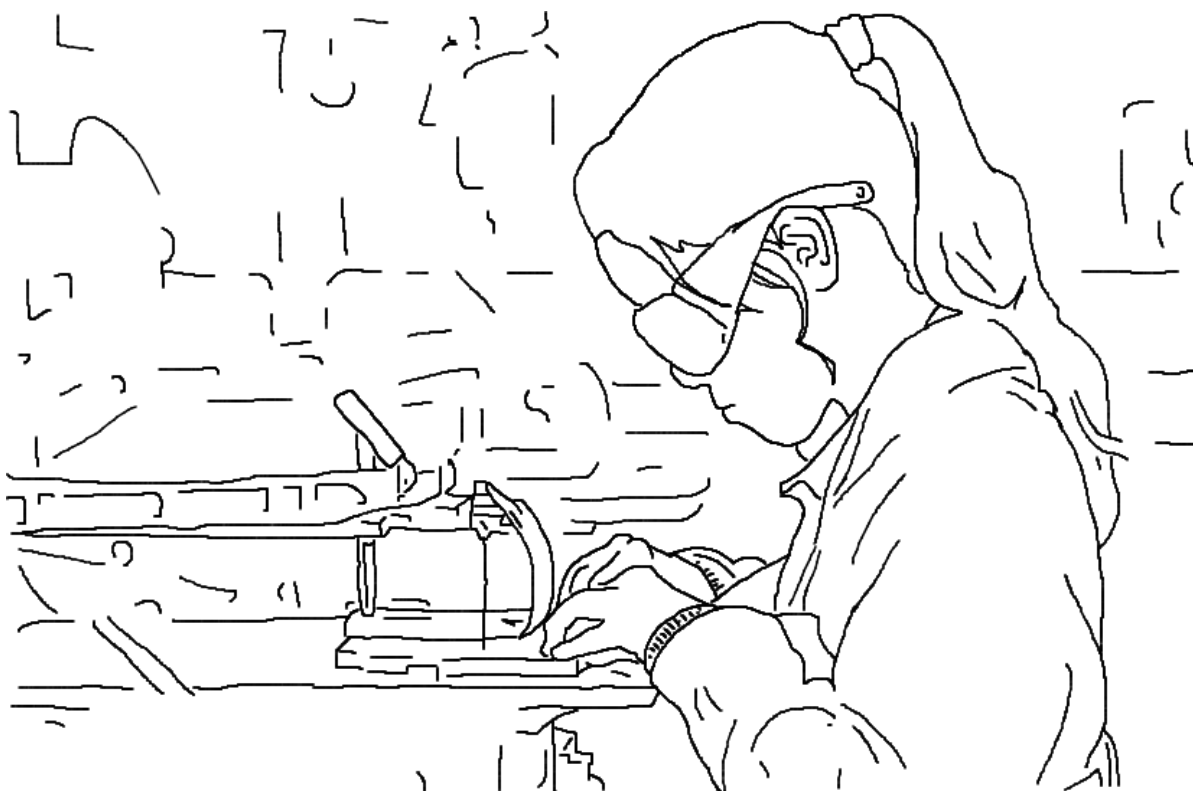


Figure 5.8. Illustration of Image L14.4

Image *L14.4* shows a girl sitting at some sort of machine, perhaps some sort of saw, focused intently on her work. Both of her hands are engaged with the machine and the task. Her gaze is directed at this activity. The girl and the machine are the only subjects in focus in the image, her surroundings and background are blurred. She is wearing practical clothing, safety goggles and her hair is tied back. This is an image strongly signifying the development of a practical disposition on the part of the pupil - and, in turn, the offer of this practical disposition by the school. *L14.4* also exemplifies - with its occupational specialism - the

individualised utilitarianism of the Protestant ethic so central to the spirit of capitalism (Weber, 2001).

Plotted against the dimensions of visual space the figure of the girl is located on the right hand margins, within the areas of the new (both ideal and real). The machine, on the other hand, is set on the left hand margin - the area of the given. It is, therefore, the machine that is symbolically producing the girl as worker. The machine (capital) is the given, the already existing. The girl is the new, the result of the symbolic work in image *L14.4* There is little distinction between the ideal and the real in this compositional grammar, suggesting that the reproductive process is efficient and effective with no dangerous gap between the ideal and the real. For parents interpellated by this picture in the prospectus this affirms the semiotic messaging of the signification of the acquisition of occupational or vocational skill. The school is - symbolically - selling itself on this offer.



Figure 5.9. Illustration of Image A33.12

“Once in the basement, the room opened up into rows of desks. There were approximately one hundred in total, each equipped with an ageing desktop computer and a telephone with a headset.” (Woodcock, 2016, p.39)

A33.12 is a more ambiguous image, combining signs revealing the contradictory and antagonistic nature of employment and employability in late Capitalism. The image focuses on a young man seated at a computer. He is wearing headphones, his gaze centred squarely on the screen in front of him, oblivious to the camera. His fingers are caught frozen in the act of typing whilst his face is set in an expression of total concentration. He is wearing a school uniform of blazer, shirt and tie. He is seated at the end of an otherwise empty row of computer stations, while blurred and out of focus in the background sits another row of young people each focused on their own individual workstation. The composition and contents of this image echo the description made by Woodcock of the call centre as a workplace. The call centre - as

portrayed in Woodcock's book and in popular media - is arguably the epitome of the proletarianisation of white-collar work. Despite the superficial signifiers of dress and tools the social relations of the call centre are firmly replicating those of the 19th century factories that Marx wrote about with alienation a key common feature.

Superficially the signification in this image is such that it appears to be appealing to aspirational parents. It echoes the nature of white collar work - historically the province of the middle classes - and depicts a young person using the up to date tools and technology of the modern workplace. As with *L14.4*, the compositional grammar indicated by the dimensions of visual space again indicate the production of a new worker, who is both ideal and real, from the given of the machine - the means of production. This provides a glimpse, not only of the repeated message that the school is offering the acquisition of occupational skills but that the variation in status that might be read into the difference between the white collar work of *A33.12* and the blue collar work of *L14.4* is more cultural than economic. In both cases the relationship between labour and capital is the same - both new workers symbolically produced in these images are fundamentally proletarian.

This symbolic proletarianisation of the white collar worker is amplified by other signs within *A33.12*. This young man is centred in both gaze and pose on the work that he is doing. He is alone, his headphones and singular focus function as an invisible cubicle. Echoed by the indistinct figures in the background this disciplinary enclosure is "heterogenous to all others and closed in upon itself" (Foucault, 1995, p.141), a partition where "each individual has his own place, and each place its individual" (Foucault, 1995, p.143).

The Protestant Ethic & Hard Working families

Early legislation in England aimed at enshrining a duty to work can be traced back to the Statute of Cambridge in 1388 aimed at addressing labour shortages following the Black Death (and the Peasants' Revolt) and the wage rises that this caused (Cohn, 2007). These early Poor Laws aimed at regulating and obligating work and criminalising those who chose to avoid it through begging and vagabondary. This distinction between 'strivers and skivers' (Valentine & Harris, 2014) has remained a core moral tenet of legitimate culture in England for the 700 years since. "Moral worth", Valentine and Harris argue, is "predicated on a willingness, and capacity, to undertake paid work – in other words on economic value" (Valentine & Harris, 2014, p.87) and this is a central mythology in the purpose and function of education. Every generation sees the repetition of "moral panics linked to prevalent youth cultures led to a heightened concern about 'idle hands'." (Furlong et al., 2018, p. 32) that frequently manifest along classed, gendered and racialized lines. This idea has been weaponized via language with 'hard working' increasingly a politically idealised prefix to 'families' in electoral rhetoric (Runswick-Cole et al., 2016). Of course, the counterpose to this are the 'undeserving' 'shirkers'. These images draw upon these moral readings of work and worth in assigning value to the labour (and the role of labourer in turn) being illustrated here

5.6 | The Aesthetic versus the Practical

Art for Art's Sake



Figure 5.10. Illustration of Image G3.8

Image *G3.8* depicts a pupil painting. They are standing at a desk using brushes, canvas and an easel - all strong, traditional, signifiers of the fine arts. The materials shown contain high status values of 'atmosphere' (Baudrillard, 2005) with the natural (wood, canvas, bristle) predominant in the image. The canvas itself is large and sturdily framed indicating that this act of painting, and the material investment required to purchase or produce these canvases, has a sense of gravity and is to be regarded seriously. The easel reinforces the connotations of material quality with its solid wooden construction (unlike the more fragile - and cheaper - easels that might be found on the market). Indeed, the very presence of an easel at all is a mark of distinction from the many schools (including those depicted in the sample) whose pupils' paintings rest on the surface of desks and tables.

As Marx (1973) notes, the material foundation of art (in the case of the art in this image, the canvas, the brush, the paints...) are the necessary conditions that frame its foundational relationship with the mythology of the society that produced them. So, the canvas and so on are intrinsically bound up with the social relationships on display - and reproduced here.

Bourdieu regards painting as a “fully consecrated” form of legitimate culture (Bourdieu, 1996a, p.96), this status is reproduced in, and by, schools in England today. *Figure 4.11* above shows that the presentation, and representation, of the visual arts - as a form of cultural capital - is more prevalent amongst higher status schools. Whilst the precise tastes in painting of different fractions of the bourgeoisie are complex, contextual and constantly evolving, the value of ‘art for art’s sake’ (Bourdieu, 1986a) and the irreproducible qualities inherent in a painting (Benjamin, 2009) contribute to the high status that this photograph broadcasts.

Yet, the painting is only present within the existence of the photograph which as itself lacks the status of a painting being merely a legitimisable medium, located between the vulgar and noble cultural practises according to Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1996a). This tension between the artistic medium as ‘signifier’ and the artistic medium as ‘message carrier’ highlights the simulation (Baudrillard, 1994) at work here, distinctions between the real and the imaginary, between the depiction of the artform and the artform that depicts it, blur and mask the ideological work the image is doing. This is an encounter where the Real - the photograph held in the hands of its reader (albeit with an additional layer of simulation via its reproduction in the printed prospectus or on a digital screen) exists above and beyond the symbolic - the painting whose simultaneous presence and absence is as signifier. This requires almost a *dompte regard*, or ‘taming of the gaze’, in the Lacanian sense (Lacan, 1998, p.109) to reconcile this tension into a functioning sign. It is apt that the product of the painting on the canvas cannot be seen and relies upon the lower-status photograph to communicate its

value to value to its audience for this not ‘art for art’s sake’ it is instead the cultural capital accumulated through the acquisition of ‘know how’ that is being interpellated by the parents the message is intended to reach.

Such a representation of the school and pupil’s investment into the acquisition of the cultural capital afforded by the teaching and learning of fine art acts - in Bourdieu’s words “to inspire a certain familiarity - conferring a feeling of belonging to the cultivated class,” (Bourdieu, 1993b, p.230). The process illustrated by image G3.8 shows the formation of *habitus* captured in a (literal) snapshot, it is cultural capital being transformed from a possession into *being* (Bourdieu, 1993b).

The role of *habitus* in the later use of this acquired cultural capital in gaining employment in the arts is noted by the government’s Social Mobility Commission who, after reporting that just 18% working in the fields of music, performing and visual arts are working class in origin (Elitist Britain 2019 , 2019), note the creation of “a hiring and progression cycle that favours dominant behavioural codes (around dress, accent, taste and etiquette)” (Social Mobility Commission, 2021, p.7).

Distant from Necessity

A further barrier to working-class employment in the arts sector noted by the Social Mobility Commission is the high reliance on (often unpaid) internships and high volume of freelance work to gain entry into these professions. Not only do they require the cultural capital in the form of ‘know how’ and the social capital to access the formal and informal networks within these industries, they also oblige the ability to draw upon economic capital to survive enduring the initial stages of low income necessary in this field (Social Mobility Commission, 2021). Those whose labour, and the obtaining of the experiences and credentials required to

qualify for work, is closer to necessity (i.e. working in order to meet basic material needs such as housing, food and services) are prevented from pursuing work and training in the arts because of its remoteness from meeting those needs - its distance from necessity. Working, and studying, the arts may be regarded as a luxury that only the privileged can afford to undertake.

This distance from necessity - and thus the high status it grants - is signified within image *G3.8*. There is, in contrast to image *A17.19* below, an absence of practical considerations in the pupil's dress. No protective apron or overcoat is worn, instead the pupil wears their standard school uniform including blazer and tie. These, as any art teacher can attest, are magnets for paint. Even the rudimentary practical precautions of rolling the blazer's sleeves up or tucking the tie out of harm's way into the shirt are neglected in this image. The use of canvas and easel also signify a reduced concern with the practical. Both take up valuable space both in use and in storage, whilst the canvas is associated with the use of oils (and in practice, acrylics) a medium that requires time to work with, care with cleaning and illustrates a luxury of time and space indicative of operating distant from necessity.

By way of contrast, image *A17.19* (below) is saturated with signs of a functional aesthetic and a proximity to necessity.



Figure 5.11. Illustration of Image A17.19

The image shows three children (boys, in what might be a conscious effort to challenge gendered curricular stereotypes) standing in a kitchen preparing food. The three of them are working together cooking something in a pan over a stove. Beside them is a tray of plastic containers. They are wearing red aprons. The room, and its surfaces, are a glowing white, clean and sterile. The materials are predominantly synthetic and in primary colours with plastic and red, white and blue visually dominant. The background of the composition consists mainly of large, transparent windows.

Meeting Material Needs

The first thing to note is the proximity to necessity of the activity depicted. Cooking food, and learning the skills to do so, is fundamental to meeting material needs. These skills increase in importance (and in proximity to necessity) in an inverse relationship to wealth. Bourdieu's recognition that as wealth increases the proportion of income that needs to be spent on food

decreases remains true (Bourdieu, 1986a). However, as food budgets are amongst the most ‘elastic’ of essential living costs (Francis-Devine et al., 2021) it is here that cuts are made when necessary. As of 2021, it is estimated that 13% of children in the United Kingdom live in households with food insecurity (ibid.). One common response to this problem is that one of the issues is a lack of skill or knowledge on the part of the poor, such narratives can be seen in the ‘All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Hunger in the United Kingdom’ which argued that “some households may also find it difficult to prepare or cook decent meals from scratch, making them much more likely to rely on ready meals or takeaways.” (*Feeding Britain: A strategy for zero hunger in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland*, 2014, p.29) and went to recommend the teaching of these skills in schools as a way of tackling the problem.

Such narratives of skill or knowledge deficit are described by food writer Jack Monroe (2018) as a “particularly poisonous bonfire”, she goes on to document the additional challenges beyond the superficial remedies of cookery lessons for the poor;

I asked for a ready meal, rather than the ingredients to make one measly portion for myself. The meal, a mushroom and onion pie with a mashed potato topping, cost £2.75. I flipped over the back and added up how much the component ingredients would cost were I to make it myself: £12.80. Indeed, if I had had the £12.80 spare I could have made six pies, but then I would have needed some kind of Tupperware to cook and store them in (another £1.50) and somewhere to keep them, and to travel home with them for three hours tomorrow in some kind of ice box (£25) in order to keep them safe for consumption in the future. Economies of scale are so very awkward in the poverty discussion, as is the misguided and utterly middle class assumption that everyone has a working cooker. My partner has not had a working cooker for two and a half years. There are many reasons why people do not cook. (Monroe, 2018)

As noted above, the scandal surrounding the provision of emergency food packages to school children in England during the Covid pandemic, where photographs of the pitiful contents and the lack of ingredients that could be put together into anything remotely resembling a healthy or substantial meal, sparked outrage and the intervention of a high profile professional footballer (Birchard, 2021). In this social and political context, image *A17.19* - with its

signifiers of lower status - starts to acquire new readings, and the veil over its classed messages starts to slip slightly.

The dominance of synthetic materials and plastics “is in essence the stuff of alchemy” (Barthes, 1973, p.104) signifying the magical transformation connoted by the acquisition of cooking skills; that the children pictured are being granted powers that enable them to master their material needs. Yet, this is the limit of this promised transformation. The mere possession of additional cooking skills will not alter their household’s access to the resources needed to use this new knowledge. Beyond this there is no evidence of the additional cultural capital required of culinary ‘know-how’ to prepare these children for future higher status roles as a *gourmand* or *Chef de Cuisine*. They are not wearing ‘chef’s whites’ nor are there any visible signifiers of the ‘classical training’ that seems to count as high status educational capital in the world of hospitality. Instead, with their red aprons, plastic utensils and serial packaged ingredients they appear instead bound for the lower echelons of the catering industry. Positions which, given the current labour shortage in the industry, may reinforce the proximity to necessity of image *A17.19* - the economy needs hospitality workers and less privileged school leavers need jobs.

This image of the three pupils cooking together depicts a collective endeavour and a sense of working together cooperatively. The image of the pupil painting in *G3.8*, by contrast, shows a solitary act, undertaken alone. The only other children in the image are barely visible, blending almost completely into an anonymous background. So invisible are this pupil’s classmates that they do not even transfer over to the illustrative image included here. Such an image fits more clearly into the individualistic narratives of education as investment so central to middle-class mythologies of meritocracy in late capitalism. The pupils of *A17.19*, however, speak to a counter-story where education still retains some sense of its function of producing a

social benefit, albeit in this case one riddled with traces of symbolic violence in its suggestion of a cultural deficit to be fixed amongst less privileged children.

Boys, cooking

There is also a more ostensibly progressive message explicitly presented in this image. School *A17* is co-educational, yet all three pupils pictured cooking in *A17.19* appear to be boys.

Gender stereotyping and bias has been found in educational imagery (Kerkhoven et al., 2016) and the domestic reproductive labour depicted being traditionally demarcated as a feminine domain subject to a struggle for a more equal redistribution of this unpaid work (Dalla Costa et al., 2019). This gendered division of labour, it is argued, produces “not only unequal power relations but qualitatively different experiences and perspectives” (Federici, 2018, p. 176). Therefore, images such as *A17.19* semiotically interrupt this reproduction and every instance of interpellation by its viewers/readers acts to normalise this redistributive project.

5.7 | Credentials and Empty Promises

Celebration: A Rite of Passage



Figure 5.12. Illustration of Image A7.26

“Many schools are aware that they are more likely to appear on the front page of their local newspaper if they play along with requests to include some pretty girls among the sixth-formers opening their results envelopes. If they are also jumping for joy, so much the better.” (Anonymous, 2011)

Image *A7.26* shows a group of young women leaping into the air clutching pieces of paper. They are caught mid air at a moment, perhaps, of triumph. It is an image of success and one that school *A7* seeks to show is on offer to prospective parents. It presents this result (signifying, in turn, the results transcribed onto the certificates so happily grasped) as the

product of the wise choice made by those parents who select to send their children to school *A7*.

This image fully conforms to the trope noted over a decade ago - “the phenomenon of leaping girls at exam time” (Anonymous, 2011). This trope features a “picture of a girl leaping in the air, midriff showing, presenting herself in a slightly provocative way, albeit unconsciously” (Anonymous, 2011). There is something in this that echoes older rites of passage from childhood to adulthood. In this image the girls are not pictured in school uniform, but in their own clothes - a rare occurrence in the imagery of State schools such as *A7*.

Rituals and rites of passage in education, such as graduations and ‘results days’, “communicate expectations and norms of behaviour” (Riconda, 2019, p.201). In the case of image *A7.26* this is the rewarding of the wise choices of *homo economicus*, educational capital as a return on parental investment. It affirms the prudence of the individualised actions of the parent who feels that their ‘due diligence’ is responsible for social mobility.

From an anthropological perspective Van Gennep (van Gennep, 2019) identified three phases within rites of passage: *séparation*, *marge*, and *agrégation*. *Séparation* can be glimpsed in *A7.26* through this removal of the school uniform, replaced by the individual - and previously prohibited - outfits of jeans and vest tops. This initiates the liminal stage - *marge* - where these young people have not entered the world of work or continued education, they have a period of holiday where they are neither/nor. The final stage - *agrégation* - signified in *A7.26* is the reentering of society in a new role, and with a new identity following the exchange of the capital contained within the exam certificate for entry into this new position of work or study.

Fetish Objects

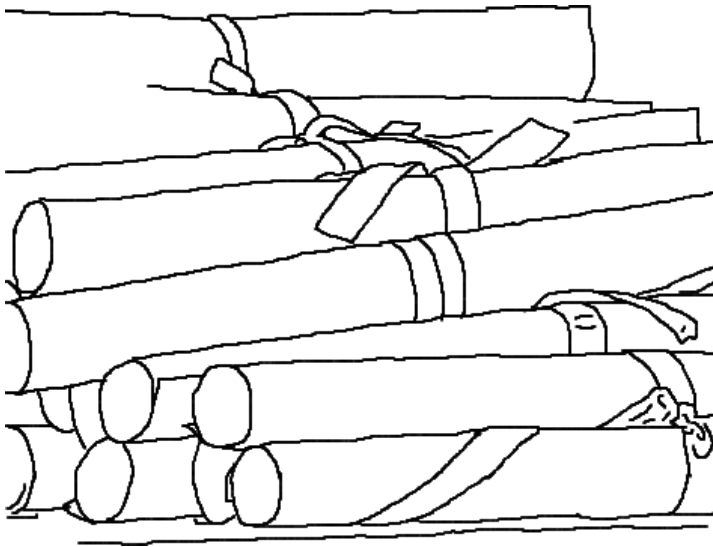


Figure 5.13. Illustration of Image L13.12

Image *L13.12* distils the sign down to the object itself. In this case the piece of paper. It shows a number of rolled up pieces of paper, tied up in ribbons, placed in a pile. From what the viewer can see there is no indication that anything is written or printed on the paper. Similar objects are sold online as ‘graduation scrolls’ and are described by one vendor as “the perfect prop for your graduation photographs!” (*Degree Scroll – Churchill Gowns*, n.d.) whilst noting that the product itself is merely a piece of cream card and a red ribbon.

Further insights can be drawn from anthropology when the concept of the fetish object is applied to the artefact of the exam certificate or graduation scroll. This is an object that is ascribed magical powers of transformation rooted in the mythologies of social mobility. These powers can be used, the mythology maintained by the object’s holder in terms of the upward social mobility and all the changes in status that accompany that. It also functions as a magical object for its bestower - the school - who display their collections of these objects in

images like *A7.26* and *L13.12* as proof of their own ability to provide this transformation for aspirational parents. Kulz describes this as the “allure of some future ‘good life’” (Kulz, 2017a, p.170) whose fairytale-like powers of transformation stand in stark contrast to the wider realities of sustained inequalities being unchanged by educational gains (Kaufmann, 2017; Major & Machin, 2019) As Ingram and Gamsu note “higher level education no longer leads straightforwardly to higher level jobs” (Ingram & Gamsu, 2022, p.3), education no longer has the power to enact the transformation it promises.

Simulation or Simulacra?

The promises contained within the object of the scroll or certificate are empty in more ways than one. Addressing the fetish, Baudrillard writes presciently of the “modern metropolitan hordes submerged in their objects and their signs” (Baudrillard, 2019, p.76). He notes its modern usage, as described above, in the *mana* that the certificate is seen as containing, of bestowing the object with magical powers. However, he returns to the etymological roots of the fetish drawing attention to its meaning of the fabrication of signs. Thus, to follow Baudrillard, the rolled up paper in *L13.12* is fetishising the signifier rather than the signified. It is the certificate or qualification itself rather than the educational achievements presumed to be represented by it that is fetishised in this image. There is nothing in *L13.12* (nor *A7.26*) to indicate any content of the qualification being signified. No clues as to level, subject or result. It is the bestowal of the certificate itself that the audience is being referred to, and the subjects in *A7.26* are depicted as celebrating. *L13.12* represents pure simulacra (Baudrillard, 1994), a hyperreal sign with no relation to reality but instead working as a simulation of itself.

Proof of Purchase: The Commodified Credential

The logic of the fetish returns when the consumption of credentials, of the hyperreal scroll of blank paper, the certificate, treats these signs as commodities. It is, Baudrillard argues,

“magical thinking” (Baudrillard, 1998), p.31). From a Marxian perspective “the commodity-form is the fundamental form of capital” (Clever, 1979), p.81) and it is the value ascribed to this commodity through the social relations it mediates that gives it precisely this “mystical character” (Marx, 1970, p.76). Of course, drawing from Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Bourdieu, 1986b, 1986a, 1996b) the form of capital in this commodity is educational and cultural capital.

Taking *L13.12* and *A7.26* at face value, therefore, suggests that the commodity being advertised for consumption in these images - a consumption purchased through the choice of this school - is educational and cultural capital. Yet the certificate is not itself that capital. It is instead a form of “promissory note” (Marx, 1987, p.400) implying that at some later date it can be exchanged for other commodities and forms of capital (employment, education, etc.) thus competing the consumption of the commodity in the form of the certificate.

The credibility, or credit worthiness, of such a form of promissory note requires “confirmation of quality” (Tomlinson & Watermeyer, 2020, p.9) - conferred by legitimated authorities - that is “designed to confer credibility and respectability to their offering” (Tomlinson & Watermeyer, 2020, p.9). This then allows schools to claim these commodified promissory notes “have provided solid ‘proof’ of Dreamfields’ potential rewards...” (Kulz, 2017a, p.112). For school *A7* this image is intended to signify precisely that. Choosing their school is an act of exchange resulting in a receipt, or proof of purchase, that can be exchanged *in that form* via application, interview etc. for other forms of capital (wages, further qualifications or credentials, social position through the division of labour etc.). It is this exchange of capital(s) that roots the sign of the rolled up paper in *A7.26* firmly within the *modus vivendi* of commodity circulation described by Marx (1970) rather than the reciprocal gifting of Mauss (2001) or the “The end of labour. The end of production.” of Baudrillard’s

symbolic exchange (Baudrillard, 2017, p.30). The sign of the rolled up paper may be pure simulacra but its products - the social and material conditions for its bearer - are not.

Consecration and the Creditworthiness

As “credentials are viewed as a currency of opportunity.” (Brown et al., 2016, p.191), this currency existing in the promissory form of the certificate or qualification requires some sort of guarantor. This comes in the guise of the examination boards, the Universities and - increasingly - the commercial operations that have been empowered to award qualifications and their regulator Ofqual. Bourdieu writes of educational institutions having the status to award qualifications (Bourdieu, 1986a, p.18) which, in turn, “impose recognition” (Bourdieu, 1986b), p.21) on the promissory notes and their bearers. This, he argues, “makes it possible to establish conversion rates between cultural capital and economic capital by guaranteeing the monetary value of a given academic capital.” (Bourdieu, 1986b, p.21).

Image *A7.26* captures this moment of consecration, where the pieces of paper clutched in the celebrating students’ hands acquire their exchange value. It is this state (and market) controlled legitimation through certification guarantees the credit required for these pieces of paper to function as currency (Bourdieu, 1993a). The very mechanisms of this consecration - the examination boards - have become an arm of the state (Steinberg, 2002) and integral to the functioning of education as an ideological state apparatus (Althusser, 2008).

Credential Inflation and Competition

“Competition for consecration, which assumes and confers the power to consecrate, condemns those agents whose province is most limited to a state of perpetual emergency” (Bourdieu, 1993a, p.123)

This climate of fear driven competition infects those institutions with the authority to consecrate and legitimate the qualifications and credentials signified in images *L13.12* and *A7.26*. The intersection of massification and marketisation in education (Tomlinson & Watermeyer, 2020) has amplified competition both within and between schools echoing the disciplinary function of competition across neoliberal managerial strategies (Dardot & Laval, 2017). Pupils, and their parents, compete to acquire higher value credentials than their peers. Schools compete to issue higher value credentials than their competitors and examination boards compete to provide the legitimation of these credentials.

As elsewhere, this competition is not conducted on a level playing field. Wealthier and more privileged parents have been found to have an increased awareness of changes to the GCSE grading system (*Parent power 2018 - Sutton Trust*, n.d.) which in turn suggests that they might be better prepared to navigate the competition for such credentials. The terrain of this playing field does not remain stable either with the need to continually update knowledge of the value of the various levels of credential on offer further disadvantage those families without the social and cultural capital to maintain their ‘insider knowledge’ of the market.

“Each generation experiences a class system that has been remade during their lifetimes, such that the reckoning points of their parents are already out-of-date and only partially usable. During the 1940s, a high school diploma represented an advanced degree. During the 1960s and ’70s, a bachelor’s degree took its place. Today, graduate degrees are gradually crowding out all other credentials.” (Roth, 2019, p.38)

Such changes can perhaps best be described as ‘credential inflation’. As Brown et al. (2019) argue, this “overproduction of qualifications” (p.193) within an increasingly marketised education system leads to both increased supply of graduate labour and a consequent growth in the pursuit of even higher credentials as a sign of educational distinction to edge out the competition. This increased demand for ever higher levels of credential comes at a cost

however. According to the UK Government (*Just a moment...*, n.d.) the average student debt of current undergraduates is likely to be around £45,000 with something like £20 billion loaned out each year. The outstanding debt, which totalled £182 billion in March 2022, is a heavy cost borne in an increasingly unreliable pursuit of the credentials needed to move up the socio-economic ladder - or even to maintain an evermore precarious position upon it). The longer-term impact has yet to be fully understood, as Standing notes:

“They will be told they should be committed, happy and loyal in jobs that are beneath their qualifications and must repay debts incurred on a promise that their certificates would gain them high-income jobs.” (Standing, 2011, p.68)

In such circumstances the empty pieces of paper in Figure 5.13 start to acquire new, bleaker, significations. The acquisition of educational qualifications becomes an empty promise unable to mitigate against declining opportunities in a changing economy, as worthless as the million dollar banknotes from the years of hyperinflation now hawked to the tourists at Zimbabwe’s Victoria Falls, with job security, career prospects and future income dwindling for many despite possession of qualifications that in earlier generations would have helped in their pursuit.

Chapter 6 | Discussion

6.1 | A Saturation of Signs

It is clear from both the semiotic case studies and the wider content analysis (above) that the images in school prospectuses are saturated with signs and meaning. Across the sample each prospectus features an average of 27 images. Each of these images contains multiple signs that could be read and potentially interpellated by the reader. Given the increasingly hegemonic valorisation of school choice many parents may read more than one prospectus in an attempt to make this choice an informed choice. These signs do not exist in a vacuum of the prospectus, they will reference - and be referenced by - signs outside of the prospectus. School websites, advertisements, news and popular media will all deploy an array of signs to construct, and reconstruct, the mythologies within which they function. This is, in the portentous words of Debord, “not a collection of images; rather it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images” (Debord, 1994, p.12).

The sheer density of messages and meanings contained within the images read by a parent choosing schools allows for a simultaneous depth and breadth in the mythologies broadcast. This creates multitudinous possibilities for interpellation on the part of the parent and with that a continuous (re)production of the social relations of late capitalism as mediated by these images. Every time the myth (of social mobility via the acquisition of credentials for example) is interpellated by a parent choosing a school under that auspice; the mythology is reborn and strengthened.

Signs and Readers

Whilst this study is focussed on the role of parental interpellation in the context of school it is worth noting that these signs, and the mythologies they refer to, have other readers who in

their turn may interpellate particular messages. Many schools, for example, leave prospectuses, copies of the school's magazine (if they have one) and so on prominently displayed in reception areas for visitors to read. In some exceptional cases, schools I have visited include books written by the Headteacher and framed cuttings of (positive) press coverage as part of this 'welcome by signs'. These other readers also contribute to the reproduction of the status of the school.

This can manifest in the recruitment of staff and their interpellation of signs based upon their own *habitus* - which in turn forms a key part of class inculcation and the transmission of cultural capital. The teachers' own *habitus* isn't fixed, however, and their process of choice (applications for, and acceptance of, employment at particular schools) may lead to their own inculcation and legitimization of the school status they interpellated through the rationalisation, justification and identification that their work requires (Variyan, 2019). Teachers are expected to play an explicit role in the marketing of schools to prospective parents through their participation in open days etc. but also in the semiotic image they project to parents (Kulz, 2017a). There were 186 images of staff across the sample of 40 school prospectuses. As seen above in the case studies of images *A17.3* and *P23.2* these images can be crowded with classed and status projecting signs. Teachers, therefore, are both subjects and objects for the messages of the school prospectus.

The signs in these images may also be interpellated at distance - 2nd or 3rd hand - through the medium of grapevine knowledge. Ball and Vincent argue that school "choice is typically embedded in 'the local' and in the circulation of social myths" (Ball & Vincent, 1998, p.379). These social myths are very much echoes or reverberations of the mythologies signified within the prospectus images around the status, purpose and suitability of given schools for given families. In this way the reputation or status of school that is manufactured by the

interpellation of signs such as those in the prospectus is reproduced by the circulation of this ‘hot knowledge’ (Ball & Vincent, 1998). The sign is not just interpellated by the original reader, but is anchored into its place in these social myths ripple around networks of prospective parents.

Interpellation and the *point de capiton*

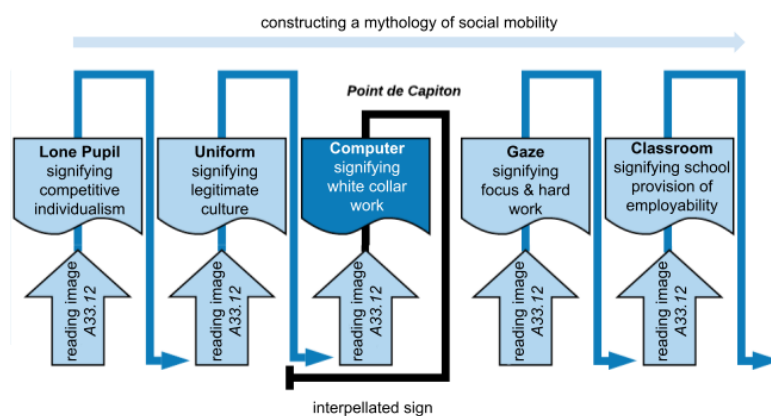


Figure 6.1. Theoretical example of the point de capiton in Image A33.12

This anchoring into place via the interpellation of a prospectus image is theorised here as a form of *point de capiton* - or quilting point. Taken in isolation the event of interpellation and anchoring, the *point de capiton*, echoes Lacan’s ‘graph of desire’ (Lacan, 2006) from which this concept of the quilting or anchoring point has been taken. This describes how the chain of equivocal signifiers (Laclau, 2007) encountered when flipping the pages of a school prospectus are fixed - as signs with meaning for that reader- through the interpellation of a particular sign, enabling the construction of a chain of equivalence. For example, if the sign of the collar and tie is interpellated by a parent responding to a message of computers signifying white collar work and the middle-class status it describes, then this event of recognition and

response may enable other signifiers in the image or the prospectus to be read as signs within this mythology. The *point de capiton* fixes the meaning of the equivocal signifiers around it.

Contrepellation Revisited

“In the same improvisatory manner, metal combs, honed to a razor-like sharpness, turned narcissism into an offensive weapon.” (Hebdige, 1979, p.104)

No evidence was found indicating the *détournement* of signs in the prospectus images. Such *contrepellation* remains possible, however, in the mythologies being presented. The mediation of such mythologies through commodified signs - meanings put on display for purchase and exchange - “opens up the world of objects to new and covertly oppositional readings.” (Hebdige, 1979, p.102)

The use of uniform as sign for legitimate (classed, gendered and racialized) culture provides a ready-made terrain for the performative rejection of this culture as witnessed in school classrooms (and the subsequent tabloid headlines) every September. The operability of uniform as contested sign is recognised by those imposing it as preferable to other acts of refusal and/or resistance because of its purely symbolic value (*Social mobility tsar: Pupils will bring knives to school if you don't enforce uniform code - LBC*, n.d.) In punk countercultures, for example, “fragments of school uniform (white brinylon shirts, school ties) were symbolically defiled (the shirts covered in graffiti, or fake blood; the ties left undone) and juxtaposed against leather drains or shocking pink mohair tops” (Hebdige, 1979, p.107).

There is anecdotal evidence (*The Creative Campus | University of Cambridge*, n.d.) of the signs of credentialism (such as images *A7.26* and *L13.12*) being attacked by student radicals during the 1960s and 1970s performatively ripping up their examination papers. The ritual of graduation that accompanies these signs is also a site for acts of protest whilst Black Lives

Matter protestors deployed the symbols of graduation when taking to the streets in their graduation caps and gowns (Garcia, 2020).

The terrain of the playing field, the muscular Christianity of Empire, features in the pervasive imagery of sport as cultural capital across all sectors, but particularly in the Independent sector. It is fertile ground for symbolic refusal and sedition from the accounts of public school students channelling counter-cultural dissent into a refusal to play rugby matches seriously (Brooke-Smith, 2019) to my own experiences of comprehensive school students protesting compulsory ‘character building’ cross-country races by running the race yet refusing to cross the finish line and receive a time. The classed value of different sports adds further scope for the *contrepellation* of the signs created by images of school sports. The antagonistic appropriation of classed sportswear can be seen in the appropriation of clothing and brands associated with high status or middle class sports (such as Golf, Yachting etc.) by working-class youth cultures, it can also be witnessed in the deployment of the symbols of football supporting by members of the elite in an attempt downplay their status.

Within the field of school choice, studies (Crozier et al., 2008; James et al., 2010) have looked at the active rejection of classed mythologies by some middle-class parents who viewed their decision to send their children to the local Secondary School rather than engage in a process of choice designed to appeal the wise judgements of the competitive neoliberal *homo economicus*. Yet, this gesture of refusal, these studies note, remains bound to an interpellation of classed, racialized and gendered signs with the intention of seeking diversity and a lack of privilege in the schools chosen.

Semiotic Pic ‘n’ Mix

Such seemingly transgressive *contrepellations* can, are, recuperated - in the Situationist sense (Knabb, 1982) - by the consumerist framework within which they take place. The rejection of the signs of middle-class schools in parental choice transforms into a strategy for the acquisition of distinction, the commodification of cosmopolitanism as cultural capital (Maxwell & Aggleton, 2016). The flood of signs encountered when choosing schools, or when trying to choose not to choose creates “the false choice offered by spectacular abundance” (Debord, 1994, p.40) “of competing yet mutually reinforcing spectacles”. This profusion of commodified signs enables the school prospectus to function in the same way as the display in a shop window where these signs are offered as a ‘range’ contextualised and differentiated by the chain of signifiers and signifieds (Baudrillard, 1998) that appear as the pages are turned.

These signs, just like the commodities in the shop window, allow for categorization and classification. They are semiotically organised as if to make browsing easier.

6.2 | Discussion of Identified Themes

One way the profusion of signs in the prospectus images can be organised is through the themes identified in Chapters 4 and 5 above.

People

“The body of another, like my own, is not inhabited, but is an object standing before the consciousness which thinks about or constitutes it” (Merleau-Ponty, 1995, p.349)

Butler (2015) draws upon Merleau-Ponty in discussing the relationship between subject formation and interpellation, and in the images of people found in the sample for this study

one might suggest a similar relationship between the presence of the bodies of others as subjects play a part in the formation of the subject in their viewer. The “scene of the address” where the interpellation occurs, Butler argues, operates “at the level of the body” (Butler, 2015, p. 14)

This act of interpellation, as formulated by Althusser, owes a debt to Lacan’s work on the ‘mirror-stage’ (Althusser, 2001) with its antagonism between recognition - and misrecognition - of the self.

The Invisible Parents

Strikingly (almost) absent are images of the parents/carers despite their role as interpellators and choosers in this process. One could be forgiven for expecting to see depictions of parents for readers to identify with - ‘people like them’. Such images only occur in one or two of the Independent School prospectus and are extremely rare even there. This might reflect the intergenerational aspect of school choice. The ‘investment’ being made in that ‘wise decision’ is - largely - one made in, and for, the next generation. As Foucault describes:

“A wealthy family, that is to say, a high income family, that is to say, a family whose components have a high human capital, will have as its immediate and rational economic project the transmission of a human capital at least as high to its children, which implies a set of investments, both in financial terms and in terms of time, on the part of the parents.” (Foucault, 2008, p.244)

The paucity of images of parents perhaps suggests that the social capital derived from being a parent of a child at ‘high status’ school may not be deployed as a visually prominent selling point - at least not as embodied in the representation of parents in these images. On the other hand, some social capital may be accrued - particularly by the aspirational middle-class - through the performative wise choices made for their children. The ‘child as pupil’ becomes the site where this social and cultural capital is located. This can be seen elsewhere in the

proud display of school and graduation photographs. Perhaps, it could be speculated that this is a manifestation of middle-class anxiety in a reversal of the Lacanian ‘mirror-stage’ where the infant recognises itself in the mirror and then turns to their parent for validation (Lacan, 2016), instead here it is the ego of the parent that is validated by the child being recognised in the mirror of the interpellated image.

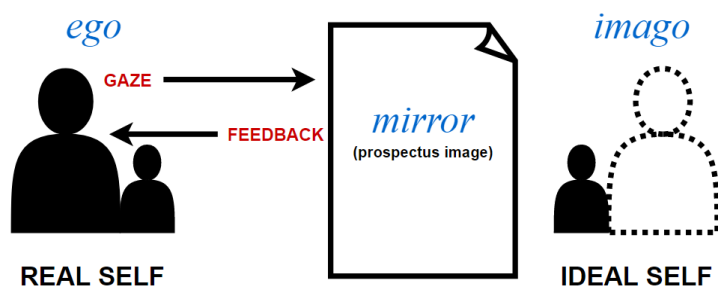


Figure 6.2 Prospectus Images and the mirror stage

Pupils | Production of the neoliberal subject

In contrast to the invisible parents, pupils were the overwhelmingly most commonly depicted subject in the sample images with 1010 out of 1326 pictures explicitly featuring pupils.

Whilst this may lend some credence to the conjectured mirror-stage variation suggested above, it also serves as a reminder that it is the child at the centre of a social relationship mediated through schools. Schools are not, to bastardise Thatcher’s infamous quote, ‘merely children and their families’ but are an essentially social and public institution. The interpellation occurring in the framework of school choice takes place within the terrain of a “state apparatus” (Althusser, 2008) with the/a function of the “reproduction of the relations of production” (Althusser, 2008, p.31). A reproduction of relations reliant upon “mastery of” or “subjection to” the ruling ideology (Althusser, 2008, p.7).

The production of the neo-liberal subject in, and through, the pupil that is a major theme of the signs depicting the pupils. They are shown working on themselves by incessantly perfecting results and performance in a display of “entrepreneurial self-government” (Dardot & Laval, 2017, p.261). The images of pupils with signs of higher status illustrate the mastery of the ruling ideology - their accumulation of cultural capital and the class positions this affords them, whilst those with framed by lower status signs are accompanied by messages relating to their subjection to the ruling ideology - the need to discipline and train them for their future class positions.

Common to all of the pupil images is the durable and systemic modification of the pupils through the “prolonged action of inculcation” (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p.177) as neo-liberal subjects. This involves not just the allocation of the appropriate cultural capital and *habitus* for their reproduced class position but also a sustained work on changing the soul - as Thatcher put it (Thatcher & Butt, 1981) - which is “completed by the subject’s identification with the enterprise” (Dardot & Laval, 2017, p.269). This, of course, echoes the interpellation of the image of the pupil at the start of this process, the identification with the signs recognised in the imagery of the school prospectus.

The pupil acts as a vehicle for other embodied signs too. Whether they are pictured in school uniform or not (and if so, what kind of school uniform) is a powerful signifier of a number of mythologies and displays of cultural capital. The pupils’ disposition (both in the popular and the Bourdieusian sense) also broadcasts powerful messages. Pupils depicted smiling and having fun is saying something very different from those shown hunched over desks, brows furrowed in concentration - which in turn differs from those whose focussed gaze is directed (usually upwards) towards the (often unseen) teacher (very much fulfilling the role of big Other in these photographs). Examples of all of these are found regularly in the sample,

unsurprisingly though no pupils are shown with expressions or postures relating to negative emotions. These emotions - fear, anxiety, anger, boredom, stress... - are a part of every child's experience in every school, yet are never present in these depictions of 'school life' that fill the pages of school prospectuses. It is an obvious omission, so obvious that it bears taking a moment to make the effort to not pass over this absence.

Similarly, embodied signs are present in the activity a pupil is depicted as engaged in. The activity itself is, of course, a discrete sign in its own right with messages of cultural capital and proximity to necessity embedded within it. What enables such signs to hail their interpellates is, however, their performance by the pupils (and staff). It is the presence of the body that adds phenomenological weight to how these images are perceived (Merleau-Ponty, 1995).

The Appearance of Status and the Status of Appearance

Although this study focussed on class position and social status in its discussion of privilege and disadvantage in the social relationships of capitalism it is worth noting how the presence/absence of diverse bodies in these images may also broadcast signs for interpellation by parents.

When some early findings from this research were presented at a conference, one question asked was about the representation of visible disabilities in the images. Notably, disabled bodies were generally absent from the sampled images. Further studies into the inclusion of visible disabilities in pupil (and staff) representation in both mainstream and special education may provide useful insights into this.

Whilst gender and ethnicity were not recorded or coded during data analysis, it is possible to observe in passing that there appears to be some recognition of their representation in the selection of images. Numerous images depicted girls ‘doing Science’ and similarly boys were shown engaged in cooking and food preparation. This suggests that there is an awareness of the desirability of challenging gendered stereotypes. Equally, a range of ethnicities appeared to be shown across each prospectus and whilst it is neither within the aim or the scope of this research to assess whether such depictions are representative, nor is the lens of critical race theory being used to approach the data, some contemplation of how these might intersect with hierarchies of social class would be worthwhile.

“in social systems where status, especially through the legitimising action of the educational system, is deemed to be the product of individual merit. It is precisely in this respect, however, that the significance of body-weight stands out. In fact, as discussed in the beginning of this chapter, a person’s weight is distinguished from other, equally visible aspects of his or her appearance in that it is deemed to be largely under individual control and hence seen as a matter of personal responsibility”
(Vandebroeck, 2017, p.124)

Again, the photogeny of the bodies pictured in the sample images, is neither recorded nor operationalised. Judgements and classifications of their size, shape or any other aspect of their physical appearance have not been made. Yet, as Vandebroeck points out above, these factors are inherent in status display. Working through the guise of ‘photos that look good’ decisions will be made in the selection of photographs for inclusion in the prospectus that include certain physical appearances and exclude others. None of the images in the sample that focussed on one or two individuals featured bodies that were notably obese or which suffered from acne. Indeed, prospectus *G4* - and particularly images *G4.5* and *G4.6* - was striking in its overt fetishisation of a masculine ideal physique in its embodied aesthetic.

Staff

“If you’re not comfortable with controlling others, then leave the room, the book shop, whatever. Put this book down. If you bought it, I’ll refund you. In fact, no I won’t, because you made the stupid decision to come into teaching. If you feel that the little

darlings will come round to you eventually if you let them express themselves as they see fit, then run, I said run, don't walk, out of education, because you're not safe with kids. Honestly, have some yourself if you like, and screw those ones up, but don't you dare play loony teacher with someone else's children because I will personally come round and chin you, you vile reptile." (Bennett, 2010, p.9)

The above passage comes from a book chapter by the leader of the Department for Education's behaviour hubs initiative arguing for the centrality of dominance over others in the role of a teacher. Such views, though often omitting the tone of *machismo* seen above, are circulated and promoted by voices both loud and quiet in Education. They manifest in the behaviour management strategies variously known as 'zero tolerance', 'warm-strict' etc. and tend to be associated with Academies led by 'tough love' celebrity headteachers (Carr, 2020; Kulz, 2017a, 2017b; Watson, 2020) with one Headteacher using her regular media appearances to promote this brand of "bootcamp discipline" (Birbalsingh, 2016). It would be problematic, in many ways, to explicitly illustrate such stances through the medium of prospectus photography, yet signifiers hinting at such positions can be found. Such behaviour strategies are often promoted as part of a broader ideological suite of measures favoured by those who promoting a 'neo-traditionalist' approach to education. These include, but are not limited to; prescriptive dress codes, desks arranged in rows, direct instruction on the part of the teacher and a rejection of group or pupil-led learning.

In the sample of images in this study alongside environmental and architectural signs one way this might be signified is through the depiction of teachers on their own, or standing at the front working as a sign for the authoritarian relationship between teacher as authority figure and pupil as subaltern. The most interesting contrast found with this sign is its complete absence from Local Authority schools whereas it appeared most frequently in the Academy sector. The images of teachers found amongst the Local Authority sample were exclusively of teachers *with* pupils. Across all sectors schools were more likely to show teachers with their pupils rather than alone but the Academy sectors contained the exceptions to this in schools

A9 and *A3*. It was also the case that the Academy sector was more likely to show images of their leadership than any sector apart from the Independent schools. This provides some suggestion that Academies are more likely to have bought into the authoritarian ethos described above than schools in other sectors.

Teaching & Learning

Progs vs. Trads

This divide between neo-traditionalist and more progressive pedagogies can be found in other signs present in the sample. From the form(s) of uniform through the layout of classrooms to the types of teaching and learning chosen to be depicted these signs were everywhere across the sample.

Whilst an over-simplified binary, the tensions between progressive and neo-traditionalist positions run through as a common fault line across much contemporary educational discourse, yet trying to trace patterns, trends and prevalence of progressive/traditionalist signs did not result in a neat correlation of pedagogies and status. Whilst overt appeals to tradition were limited to schools in the selective and Independent sectors there was a contradiction with the more veiled signs of neo-traditionalist pedagogical approaches. The Independent sector, in particular, was far more likely to depict signs of progressivism (relaxed attitudes towards uniform, mobile phone use, exploratory learning, whilst neo-traditionalist themes of discipline, authority and direct instruction were concentrated most heavily in the Academy sector. This seems counterintuitive at first, and needs viewing through this study's initial lens of social reproduction and the role of the school in (re)creating the social relations, and

hierarchical division of labour, of capitalism. From this perspective, the ‘Trad’ concerns around behaviour, authority and top-down instruction coincide with capital’s need for a disciplined and trained supply of labour. In a purely instrumentalist education system it would be logical that the schools from which this pool of labour is drawn (i.e. the non-selective State sector) would be most effective adopting this neo-traditionalist ethos. Supporting this contention some of the most high profile advocates of the ‘Trad’ approach, as seen above, are working in schools with primarily working-class intakes, and conversely the schools of the elite and privileged are reported to be adopting more progressive pedagogies (Benn, 2020).

Curriculum and the Hierarchy of Knowledge

One theme where both Bourdieusian and Trad/Prog signs are commonly visible is that of the curriculum. Both a traditional, Oxbridge endorsed, hierarchy of subjects and curricular status based upon a distance from necessity were noted in signs found in the sample images. These distinctions broadly correlated to the status differences between the independent, selective and state sectors. A particularly interesting contrast could be seen between the Independent Schools - who often portrayed themselves teaching traditionally high status subjects in a progressive manner - and schools in the Academy sector who could be viewed delivering some traditionally lower status subjects using more traditionalist pedagogies. The reasons for this potentially counterintuitive finding can perhaps be found by connecting this pattern to the other classed signs found in these sectors and referring back to the arguments that schools function in order to reproduce a classed division of labour.

The British Government's recent White Papers *Opportunity for All: Strong Schools with Great Teachers for Your Child* (2022) and *Skills for Jobs: Lifelong Learning for Opportunity and*

Growth (2021) when read together - as intended - make explicit the agenda being pursued.

They are, as the latter makes clear, “putting employers at the heart of the system so that education and training leads to jobs that can improve productivity and fill skills gaps.”

(https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/957856/Skills_for_jobs_lifelong_learning_for_opportunity_and_growth__web_version_.pdf, n.d., p.4). The vision of the role of education in this is in “building an agile and adaptable workforce”

(https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/957856/Skills_for_jobs_lifelong_learning_for_opportunity_and_growth__web_version_.pdf, n.d., p.4). One way these proposals intend to do this is by aiming for all schools to join the Academy sector as part of a multi academy trust by 2030 (Opportunity for all. Strong schools with great teachers for your child, 2022). The patterns in curricular status noted above can be seen in the desire to “prioritise the courses and qualifications that enable people to get great jobs and which will support our economy to compete with the world’s best”

(https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/957856/Skills_for_jobs_lifelong_learning_for_opportunity_and_growth__web_version_.pdf, n.d.) (p.3). Such qualifications and courses - practical, vocational and close to necessity - are prioritised on the basis of improving productivity and competitiveness

(https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/957856/Skills_for_jobs_lifelong_learning_for_opportunity_and_growth__web_version_.pdf, n.d.) - and are concentrated in schools with a less privileged intake. The division of labour necessary to reproduce the social relations of capitalism is, therefore, present in both sign and legislative intent.

This dovetails in the proposed legislation, and in the signs found in the sample images, with a renewed focus on the need to create a disciplined and orderly pupil body. As seen above there

is a vocal push amongst prominent Academy Headteachers and advisors towards a more authoritarian line on behaviour and school rules. This is echoed in the White Paper with its exhortation that “Schools must be calm, orderly, safe and supportive spaces” (Opportunity for all. Strong schools with great teachers for your child, 2022, p.31), an approach reflected in the connotations of discipline and authority found, particularly, in the sample images from the Academy sector. As the need for a disciplined labour force is, perhaps, crucial to improving productivity from an employer’s perspective it is no surprise to see this convergence of themes manifested on a classed basis within education policy, practice and discourse.

Status, Value and Forms of Capital

Returning broadly to Bourdieu’s forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1986b) it is worth noting the presence, and absence, of signs broadcasting schools’ role in the accumulation and acquisition of these different forms of capital.

Economic Capital

Economic capital, as held by the schools, was on display in images across the sample, across all sectors. Most generally this took the form in the photos that showcased resources such as buildings, sports facilities or IT equipment. Not all of this ‘material capital’ is of equal status however. Factors such as age and the organic qualities of materials can contribute to the status connoted by these images, whilst space and its abundance signified (via the perceived value of land) the holding of non-liquid economic capital - a depth of wealth - by high status schools.

Almost entirely across the sample were signs of economic capital held (or potentially acquired) by the pupils. Barring a couple of images from school *P8* (see below) there was no signification of present or future wealth for the students. Similarly, there were no indications of pupils suffering from deprivation or poverty in any of the images.

Social Capital

One way in which some schools explicitly deployed images of social capital was through the inclusion of alumni in the photographs. The display of a formal post-school network is a clear sign that attendance at that school provides the opportunity to acquire social capital in the form of lasting connections. The existence of such networks - often known colloquially as the “old school tie” - and the mutual assistance and access they provide is a well established part of elite reproduction in England. It came as no surprise therefore to find that these images were concentrated almost exclusively in the Independent sector with only one school (*G4*) in the selective state sector and one school (*A9*) in the Academy sector featuring alumni in their prospectus images. However, school *A9* has only recently entered the state sector after a long history as an Independent boarding school, whilst *G4* deployed its alumni imagery rather differently. *G4* opted to include recognisable photographs of well-known and/or famous alumni in its images, opting not for a display of network as social capital as described above but more of a social capital of association.

There was little other evidence of social capital being signified in the sample images. School *P8* featured alumni accessorised with with signifiers of certain high status careers (a legal wig for example) which have connotations of potential social capital acquisition, but this message is likely secondary to messages about the more mundane access to well-paying and high status careers that individual alumni gain from their attendance at *P8*.

Cultural Capital

Cultural capital on the other hand consistently permeated the sample images. Whilst cultural capital can be found in a wide range of signs on display from vegetation to architecture to curricula - it is perhaps at its most overt in the imagery of cultural activity (art, music, drama etc.) and extra-curricular enrichment. With Ofsted now looking at whether schools are

“equipping pupils with the knowledge and cultural capital they need to succeed in life.”

(*School inspection handbook* - GOV.UK, n.d.) (paragraph 206) it is in the activities depicted in these most overt displays that are prominent in the expectations for acquisition of cultural capital. The data reported in Chapter 4 above shows that every school in Independent, Selective and Free School samples included images explicitly showing pupils engaged in activities that may provide this kind of cultural capital along with but one of the Local Authority schools. In the Academy sector, however, five schools in the sample did not include such imagery.

Such depictions of cultural capital acquisition were not equal, the schools in the Independent sector sample showed - on average - three times as many images of this than any other sector sample. At the same time there are distinctions within the broad terrain of cultural capital in terms of the status and value of its different forms. Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1986a), for example, sees culture regarded with a hierarchy of legitimacy linked with class(ed) tastes. This can be seen here in the sector differences in the type of musical instruments shown (see *Figure 4.12*) with, for example, classical music being notably more prominent in the Independent sample than in the State samples.

Educational Capital

The most overt display of the educational capital is through the imagery of certificates and ‘results day’ celebrations. These are examined in detail in the case studies of images *A7.26* and *L13.12* in Chapter 5.7. Whilst such images were found across all sectors of the sample - with the exception of the Selective and Free School samples. They occurred in relatively small numbers however, with no sector reaching an average of one image per prospectus depicting the acquisition of educational capital in this way. This is possibly surprising given the hegemonic presence of the quantification of achievement (via test scores and exam

results) across educational discourse in England. Perhaps such messages are better suited to numerical signification within the text of school prospectuses, however, given the density of signification within the images and the ‘results based’ or ‘outcomes focussed’ paradigms by which schools are judged it remains a puzzling absence.

6.3 | The Classed Mythologies of School Prospectuses

For the array of signs recorded above to be potentially intelligible to their audience, they need to be within a shared symbolic grammar or vocabulary. For Barthes the concepts expressed by a semiotic sign are not abstract, they are “filled with a situation”(Barthes, 1973, p.128) and this filling is the myth. Reminiscent of the Lacanian idea of the *point de capiton* - as drawn from extensively in this research - Barthes argues that “myth has an imperative, buttonholing character” (p.134), and echoing Althusser he describes it as form of “interpellant speech” (p. 135). Mythology, for Barthes, *arrests* the reader and in the moment takes on the appearance of a generality, of “a display of *what-goes-without-saying*” (p.11).

From the semiotic and content analysis above a number of mythologies appear with regularity as ideology hidden in plain sight.

Choice

Choice, and the freedom to choose, is an underlying theme that unites all the signs in the sample. These signs - in the form of prospectus images - only exist because schools in England are firmly located in a marketplace where parental choice of school is ‘as if natural’.

Whilst some of the specifics of this right to choose are questioned and challenged - such as the continued existence of fee paying or selective schools - the power to choose is not. The meta-choice of ‘choosing not to choose’ is fundamentally absent from these images. Instead,

the hegemonic mythology is that of choice, and of informed choice. That parents will choose - however fallibly - on the basis of what school they think is 'best' for their children. Schools, therefore, are locked into a position of providing and displaying grounds for this choice. Beyond the legal obligations to make certain information available to the public on their website (*What academies, free schools and colleges should publish online - GOV.UK, n.d.*; *What maintained schools must publish online - GOV.UK, n.d.*) this study found that 88% of schools checked had prospectuses available either online or by request. Whilst this varied according to sector (see *Figure 4.1*) this suggests that this need to market themselves is an explicit recognition of the school's role in presenting themselves to be chosen.

In the act of presenting themselves to be chosen schools focus on presenting their 'best selves'. None of the images in the sample can unambiguously be viewed as negative. There were no illustrations of the problems or challenges that the schools face. There were no photographs of unhappy children, nor of buildings in need of refurbishment or redecoration and the sun was universally shining. As Princess Diana is (apocryphally) reputed to have said 'everywhere I go smells of fresh paint'. Such 'glossification' is discussed above, as is the potential impact upon representation, but in presenting solely the positives the schools' imagery is appealing to another mythology - that of *homo economicus* and choices as investments.

Wise Investments

Most obviously the Independent sector appeals to parents to make a literal investment in their choice of school through the payment of fees in return for a specific education. However, the narrative is broader than this straight-forward financial investment. The economic strand to investment extends to the payment for tuition to pass the entrance exams for selective schools in the State sector and to the additional cost of housing in the catchment areas of desirable

schools. Beyond this, the discourse of investment extends to the willingness (or ability) of parents to gather the knowledge - and 'know-how' - to both navigate the processes of school choice but also to distinguish between 'wise' and 'poor' choices of school. Part of this may involve being able to decipher a school prospectus both in terms of understanding the textual information and in terms of reading the visual signs. It is for this reading, and the informed choice beyond it, that the messages within prospectuses are constructed.

The findings of this study suggest that the higher the status of the school the greater the quantity of information provided to prospective parents. As reported above in Chapter 4 97% of Independent schools checked provided a prospectus, whilst across the State sectors only 82% did. The quantity of information that was provided also showed a marked discrepancy within the sample with State school prospectuses averaging 12.5 pages in length in contrast with the average length of 32 pages across the Independent school sample.

The implication of these findings is, therefore, that as they are provided with more information those parents considering sending their children to Independent schools are thus better informed than State school counterparts. However, it is of course not quite that straight forward.

The Virtue of Hard Work

Such investment is given the standing of a virtue through its association with 'hard work'. As noted above the origins of this can be seen in mercantile theologies described by Weber (Weber, 2001) and the fetishized rhetoric of the 'hard working family' (Reyes, 2005; Runswick-Cole et al., 2016) that has become so prominent in recent years. There is evidence of this mythology occupying a prominent place within the imagery chosen by the schools in this sample. Chapter 5.1 records examples of this in the case studies of image *A17.3* and its

signification of the working Headteacher and of the pupils focussed on their work in images *L14.4* and *A33.12*. If teaching and learning is understood as the ‘work’ undertaken in a school it can be seen that across the sample there were over 400 signs of this in the images.

Returning to the idea of ‘glossification’ noted above, it is also clear that these photographs depict pupils and teachers working hard. There are no images of children not writing, not reading or not engaged with the task at hand. Instead we find images such as *A19.4* of a pupil with their hand raised high, eager to answer the teacher’s question or photographs like *A28.2* where the young person is depicted - by the signification of their gaze (up and to the front) - fully focussed on what they are being taught.

There are, however, images depicting pupils at play and enjoying their leisure time at school. At first glance this might appear to contradict or undermine this mythology of the virtue of hard work. Upon closer inspection many of these images can be ruled out as truly of leisure, instead being of co-curricular work or the school yard equivalent of the commute - pupils in transit to or from their learning. Images *P14.6* and *P29.1* with their depiction of young people striding purposefully and equipped for work illustrate this idea clearly. *L13.18* provides a more distanced view of the crowd of indistinguishable pupils moving Lowry-like from one class to another.

There is also a classed element to the images appearing to show pupils at leisure however. Photographs depicting leisure in Veblen’s sense of the “non-productive consumption of time” (Veblen, 2005, p.21) - such as *P29.8* showing a group of pupils sat chatting in the sunshine - are present almost exclusively in the Independent sample. A number of these photographs are illustrating activities (for example *P18.27* showing pupils playing pool or *P11.12* depicting two children playing swingball in the garden) that pupils do in the additional free time at school caused by boarding (weekends, evenings etc.). On the one hand, this could be read as a

vindication of Veblen's idea of a 'leisure class' - those privileged enough to be able afford time away from productive use of time - with its echoes, too, of Bourdieu's 'distance from necessity'. It could also be interpreted as actually just another form of 'work' - that of the accumulation of social capital.

Meritocracy & Social Mobility

The virtue contained in the mythology of hard work overlaps with another key component of educational discourse, that of meritocracy and its consequence of social mobility. Both of these concepts have been subject to significant critique, but their power and prominence in the discourse around education, qualifications and employment is undisputed. They remain potent mythologies despite the daily evidence that undermines them, perhaps because we are no longer presented with any viable alternatives.

In the context of this study these mythologies are part of the common grammar of meaning permeating the rhetoric of schooling that enables the signs identified in this study to work. Within, and behind, the mythologies of choice investment and hard work there is the seductive promise of reward. In schools this superficially takes the form of the credentials and qualifications illustrated in the signification of the 26 images of certificates and exam results celebrations and the 13 images of awards and prizes. However, the promise of social mobility offers rewards that last beyond these. It is the potential of moving upwards - increased capital(s), higher status jobs, greater security etc. than the parents involved. This is a longer term reward, one that speaks to the middle-class value of 'deferred gratification' framed by the logic of investment return. The signifiers of this temporal shift are harder to isolate, but can be found in the images of alumni, particularly those in high status careers (such as those in prospectus *P8*), in the liminal imagery of stairs and entrances (such as *F1.1*, *P14.6* or

P29.1). It can also be read into the imagery of ‘legitimate culture’ (see below) as pupils are shown performing the role of middle-class adults by their activities and attire. In turn this draws upon the rhetoric of aspiration and ambition. Remembering that these images are viewed within the process of choosing a school for their children, such signification works within the context of the wider discourse around social mobility and education that has gained such prominence at the time of writing.

The Undeserving Poor

The perceived rewards for making wise choices - the opportunity for social mobility and an improved social position in the future has a necessary corollary in the apparent consequences for failing to make wise choices. As noted above, as a glossified promotional tool explicitly negative imagery was excluded from the sample. There were, of course, no photographs of ‘failure’. However, this “absent signifier” (Fuery, 1989, p.79) retains the ability to give the signified - failure - a presence of sorts. The photographs of the celebrating graduates clutching their examination results featured only small numbers of students. Image *A7.26*, for example, shows 7 students celebrating. Where are the rest of the cohort? Despite what certain innumerate Education Ministers might claim (*House of Commons - Uncorrected Evidence - uc1786-i*, 2012) not everybody can be above average. The “normalising gaze” (Foucault, 1995, p.184) of the examination system is designed to sort and rank its entrants. Where there are winners, therefore, there will be losers. Of course, even within a meritocratic paradigm, schools are unlikely to advertise the possibility of failure whilst promoting the choice of their school. Instead the gaze remains fixed upon the winners, those who deserve their success. This is shown across the sample in the imagery of hard-working pupils - in the direct sense of images such as *L14.4* and *P33.11*, and in the more mediated depictions of pupils with their attention focussed upon the content being delivered to them as exemplified in images like *A19.15* and *A28.2*.

The Fear of the Unruly Mob (Revisited)

The othering of the losers in the mythology of meritocratic competition is taken beyond being merely undeserving but often manifests as being depicted as a threat to the more worthy winners. Again, explicit depictions of pupils engaged in the attitudes and behaviours that might label them ‘undeserving’ are unlikely promotional messages so their signification needs to be more of an unseen threat. This signification of this threat is discussed above with particular reference to image *L13.18*, but a number of themes found across the sample might allow the unseen threat of the unruly mob to be read into the images presented.

‘Poor behaviour’ is a prominent trope in educational discourse, with considerable time and resources spent on designing behaviour management strategies. So central is the theme of behaviour that a number of self-identifying behaviour experts are at the heart of Governmental reforms in education (Booth, 2022; Siddique, 2021). The behaviour, in so far as that that can be grasped, on display in the images is that of students engaged in their work eager to answer questions (*A19.4*) or focussed on the the lesson content (*A28.2*) or moving purposefully towards their next task (*P14.6*). When shown socialising, or at play (which as discussed above is rare) it is always calm and controlled. The pupils on display act in a disciplined manner, yet the instruments of discipline (rules, sanctions etc.) are never explicitly shown. Instead, this disciplinary machinery becomes apparent when viewing the signs with a Foucauldian lens. As noted in the interpretation of themes and case study images above

The pathologization of behaviour in schools, and the procedural attempts to control it, echo Foucault’s description of “a fear formulated in medical terms but animated, basically, by a moral myth ” (Foucault, 1989), p.202). The fear of contagion, or ‘taint’ as Foucault puts it

(Foucault, 1989) by those pupils engaged in the ‘unreason’ of behaviour unaligned with the legitimate and the ideal as promoted by school behaviour codes is noted with regard to middle class parents looking at schools with working class populations (Reay, 2017). This is connoted in the signs of enclosure and the distribution of bodies (Foucault, 1995) found within the sample images. The presence of walls, doors, corridors etc. in over 100 of the photographs reassure potentially fearful parents that the student body - in both senses - is contained and organised. It should come as no surprise, then, that these signs of separation are most heavily concentrated amongst the Independent School sample access and entry to the pupil cohort is most exclusive. Furthermore, when combined with signs of ‘people like them’ through the classed depiction of *habitus* and cultural capital this suggests a segregation away from the invisible, feared ‘other’.

Legitimate Culture

Just as social segregation can be signified through cultural imagery so too is the division between good and bad behaviour often fundamentally cultural in form. Bourdieu’s terminology of ‘legitimate culture’ (Bourdieu, 1986a) extends across classed forms of social, cultural and moral tastes. He describes the “petit-bourgeois pretension to personal opinion” (p.416) and the production of the ‘right to speak’ in schools, a distinction that can be seen reproduced in the discourse around pedagogies and behaviour management in the contested mythologies of education in English schools discussed above. Examples of signs connoting these classed legitimacies can be seen in the division between the images of pupils sat passively receiving their teacher’s knowledge, or waiting patiently with their hand raised (for example image *A19.4*) for the permission to speak - that are concentrated in the sample drawn from the Academy sector contrasted with those from the Independent sector where the

photographs include more depictions of pupils exercising a legitimised expression of their personal opinions/right to speak in their learning.

More explicitly the classed nature of legitimate culture as connoted in the sample comes in the form of the illustration of arts and culture. As discussed in Chapter 4.2 there is a clear distinction in the tastes of music and the arts shown between the different sectors of schools. The higher status Independent schools continue to depict higher status genres than the schools in the state sector. Alongside the acquisition of cultural capital, this legitimising process reproduces the classed division of tastes described by Bourdieu, albeit in a 21st century English form.

Division of Labour

This cultural hierarchy takes a very material form in the division of labour that begins in the mythologies of education. The most explicit form in which this might be illustrated is in the links that can be read between the activities the pupils are shown undertaking and the nature of their future employment echoed in these activities. For example, in the depiction of practical or vocational subjects and the manual skills the students are shown developing in images such as *L14.4*. As noted above this, in part, reflects the assertion made by Bourdieu that “habitus is a virtue made of necessity” (Bourdieu, 1986a, p.373) and that the distance from necessity shown in the various sample images acts as a signifier of social status.

In a more prosaic manner the classed division of labour central to capitalist social relations can be seen illustrated by the objects, or perhaps ‘props’, included in the sample images. These include the depictions of pupils using ‘tools for learning’ which included apparatus, pens and pencils. Books were deployed in different forms that echoed the division of labour that would follow for their bearers. More tangible signifiers can be found in the portrayal of

backpacks versus folders and of lab coats versus aprons. In both of these cases there is a stark distinction between the Independent sector sample and the State sector samples. The reading of lab coats and folders as signifiers of higher status work would appear to be reflected in the difference in their representation between these key divides in school status. The division of labour shown so overtly is Maxwell's demon at work (Bourdieu, 1998) in its reproduction.

6.4 | Sector Descriptions and Comparisons

Whilst there are obviously a whole range of factors and variations between (and within) individual schools in the sample it is still possible to identify some broad themes and patterns that can be associated with the sector of the schools in the sample. The social status of the different schools and sectors is too complex to apply the blunt hierarchy of an Ofsted style league table or ranking to. It is, however, conceivable to aggregate and compare some of the findings above to explore general themes of social status linked with the range of school sectors found within the sample. Although the increased accessibility of digital technology has enabled a greater parity in the superficial format and presentation of prospectuses and other promotional materials, this study shows that schools remain positionally embedded in a hierarchical social order.

Independent Schools

Around 7% of the population in the United Kingdom are educated at Independent Schools, drawn overwhelmingly from the wealthiest percentiles and going on to be significantly overrepresented across all elite sections of society in adulthood (*Elitist Britain 2019*, 2019). It would, therefore, be reasonable to use the Independent sector as a benchmark for what is considered high social status in schooling.

The analyses above would appear to confirm this. This sector depicts signifiers of legitimate culture and representations of cultural capital more frequently and in higher numbers than other sectors in the sample. Some of this might appear obvious and the result of conscious marketing the heavy inclusion of images related to well-known and traditionally high status cultural activities such as theatre and classical music. However, a consistent distance from necessity can also be seen in the themes of many of the images in the Independent sector. This is echoed by the atmospheres shown with a higher proportion of high value palettes and materials used within their imagery. Perhaps counter-intuitively, the pedagogical signification is less traditionalist with a greater inclusion of progressive signs regarding the teaching, learning and behavioural regimes present in these schools. The Independent sample was more comfortable showing their pupils out of uniform, working in groups and - as exemplified by Image P29.7 showing students using phones in class - being permitted to act in ways that might be strictly controlled or even forbidden in many State schools. This is less likely to signify a lax or *laissez-faire* approach to pedagogy and more likely to reflect the increased autonomy and individual power held by the more elite sections of the workforce that are the probable destinations of these pupils. The nature and role of the disciplinary and controlling functions of school will differ depending upon which class, and thus which strata of capitalist social relations, makes up the school population as will be seen below.

The State Sector(s)

The State sector in the sample area of the South East of England is complicated by the fact that five of the local authorities within it - Buckinghamshire, Kent, Medway, Reading and Slough - retain the so-called Grammar school system (and a couple of partially selective schools too) . Alongside this the ongoing reform programmes of Academisation and Free School creation continue to diversify the nature of the state sector in the population area for this study.

Grammar Schools

These state funded schools are academically selective and are popularly associated with middle-class aspiration and - anecdotally - compete with some local Independent Schools for pupils and parents. This is not clearly identifiable by the findings for the small numbers of selective State schools in the sample. Whilst they contain a number of high status signifiers, these are not consistent across all themes. They retain a degree of atmospheric high status from their architecture and the composition used in some of the images. *G2* is an old - formerly Independent - school whilst *G4* is an example of strikingly composed and designed prospectus with an unusual degree of deliberate intent explicit in its use of images. The focus on academic selection, and consequently upon academic results, as these schools' purported *raison d'être* leads - perhaps - to a lesser emphasis upon signs of cultural capital in the form of co-curricular activities etc. The indications in this study would suggest that perceptions that Grammar Schools sit between the Independent Schools and the rest of the State sectors in terms of social/class status, perhaps serving an audience of aspirational middle-class families who cannot afford the fees for a private education. With such a small sample such conclusions remain speculative however. Like the schools themselves, the findings here are something of a peripheral and anomalous artefact.

Academies

The remaining State sectors are harder to place on class-based hierarchy of status. There was little evidence that the Academy sector was 'borrowing signs' from Independent Schools. Instead, the key difference between Academies and the Local Authority schools in the sample was instead pedagogical and ideological. The influence of traditionalist and Behaviourist pedagogies were most apparent in the Academy sample with themes of discipline and authority explicit in many images. The fear and insecurity engendered by neoliberal mythologies of competition and meritocracy was a common thread underlying the signs

deployed in many of the Academy sample's images. This was combined with a proximity to necessity in the activities featured, the use of mass produced synthetic materials and panoptic architecture to create consistent messaging in the images about the role of these schools in producing a disciplined supply of compliant labour. As the vanguard of Governmental education reforms within the wider neoliberal project, this alignment with the more general mythologies of the market is no surprise

Local Authority

Often serving, and drawing from, similar communities as the Academy sector Local Authority school images in the sample shared many characteristics with the Academy sample. There were often the same signs of low atmospheric status in the materials and colours and spatial signification. There was also a proximity to necessity in many of the activities depicted. High status cultural capital was also not present in the volume it was in the Independent sample. There were also, however, hints towards a considerable difference to the Academy sector in terms of pedagogy and ideology. As the holdouts of the post-war Comprehensive project there were remnants of this progressiveness to be found amongst the signs on display. Whilst themes of behaviouralism, traditionalist pedagogy and the disciplinary role of the school were present there also remained signs of more progressive ideas such as group work, less emphasis on teacher-led direct instruction and so on.

Free Schools

The Free School sample was perhaps the least illuminating, yet most intriguing, sector examined. Despite emerging as part of the same proxy privatisation as the Academies project the visual rhetoric of the business world and managerialism was in short supply here. Whilst, again, a small sample that ensures extreme caution should be used in making generalisations these prospectuses were visually the least 'professional' in the samples taken. The relative

coherence of the ideological and pedagogical intent of the Academy sector was largely absent as these prospectuses perhaps bore the strongest resemblance to the old State school materials described in earlier studies (Gewirtz et al., 1995). As with the Grammar Schools in the sample, there is almost a sense that these schools are relics of obsolescence within the system, yet also as with the Grammar sample such conclusions are speculative at best given the general dearth of data the sample provided on these schools.

Chapter 7 | Conclusions

7.1 | Conclusion Chapter - Introduction

This thesis took a sample of over 1400 images from Secondary School prospectuses across the South East of England and analysed them for meanings and messages that may contribute to the reproduction of privilege and disadvantage. Its contention was that parents interpellate the classed signs contained within these images and, as part of the basis of their choice of schools, this perpetuates a hierarchy of schools segregated by social class and/or status.

Using the recorded gulf between the Independent sector - which educates the wealthiest 6% or so of the population - and the State sector as a starting point for identifying marks of

distinction, the thesis undertook a content analysis of the sample images to record subjects, objects and themes found within them and to map them across sectors looking for patterns and trends. These objects and subjects were then operationalised and categorised drawing from the ideas of Bourdieu, Baudrillard and others to paint a picture of the shifting signs of status across the different school sectors. Clear patterns were found across the themes marking significant divergence between the State and Independent sectors. Across all themes, unsurprisingly, the sample images from the Independent sector contained more signs of high status and fewer signs of lower status than the sample images from the State sectors. Within the State sectors - Academies, Local Authority schools, Free Schools and selective (Grammar) schools - the picture was more complicated. This was to be expected as their populations covered a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds comprising the majority of the population outside the elite. One surprising finding was that the Academy sector, despite some of the rhetoric surrounding it, did not generally include 'aspirational' signs of higher status. Instead, when deconstructing the images to identify the mythologies signified by the contents, heavily classed themes were found. These themes often focussed on working-class pupils (and by extension their parents and communities) as 'the other' to be feared, to be disciplined and to be trained into a compliant source of labour for the economy. These messages were, however, rooted in the mythologies of meritocracy and individualised 'wise choices'. Elsewhere, what was found in the Local Authority sector sample were remnants of the values of comprehensive education - education as a collective endeavour rather than individual competition - alongside some of the classed symbolic violence found in the Academy sample. The Grammar Schools sample was quite narrow in its signification. There was less emphasis on signs of highbrow cultural capital (although these were present in small numbers) and little of the symbolic violence found in the non-selective state schools. Its messaging tended towards a more instrumentalist view of education that straddled the general division between State and Independent sectors.

Working, almost like an archaeologist scraping away layers of history, on deconstructing selected case study images in the style of Barthes' 'Rhetoric of the Image' (Barthes, 1984a) enabled the identification of embedded meanings and messages within individual images. This allowed the recognition of common mythologies in educational discourse around ideas of discipline, behaviour, individualism and work.

The importance of these topics is apparent in the prominence of both England's issues with inequality and social mobility but also in the increasingly hegemonic presence of the mythologies identified here in the discourse around these questions. The appointment of a prominent Headteacher as Social Mobility Commissioner (Siddique, 2021) highlights the importance given to schools, and the work they do, in the approach to equity and mobility. The problems identified at the start of this research show no sign of improving, a global pandemic, the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the intensifying climate crisis combine to create a bleaker economic outlook than when this research was started. Governmental strategies around economic equity and education continue along the path identified at the start of this research and, at the time of writing, show no signs of changing course.

Parental choice of school remains enshrined as a basic right, and duty, schools across all sectors face increased financial pressures and the graduate path to secure, well-paid employment is becoming increasingly unreliable. Therefore, within the dominant paradigm of individual responsibility, making the 'wise investment' in the right choice of school is only going to increase in urgency and concern, and schools will be left with little choice but to appeal to this in order to secure their own financial positions. The marketing and promotion of schools is, therefore, likely to remain (or even grow) in importance and priority. This currently understudied, but rapidly developing, source of data and information will remain a

valuable area for research in order to add to the understanding of the direction(s) education is going and why social stratification and inequality stubbornly remain despite the best efforts of educators.

The analysis undertaken above of over 1400 school promotional images has found that these images are saturated with meaning. Much of this meaning relates directly or indirectly to social status and the advantages and disadvantages that these social relations produce.

Signs of social status were found in almost every image. There were naked displays of wealth and status in some of the depictions of buildings, grounds and assets of some of the schools in the sample. Economic capital as a measure of status featured in many of the photographs of the schools themselves. For example, space, in areas where property prices and land values are high - and rising, features as an unspoken marker of wealth in a number of the images. Schools who are able to showcase open spaces (both indoors and out) are showing that they have a 'surplus' of this asset that they are wealthy enough not to need to draw upon to meet their costs. Across the sample schools from all sectors included photographs presenting displays of new or expensive resources in a range of forms from sports facilities to IT suites to new buildings. These exhibitions of investment echo the investment demanded from parents in the process of school choice.

Other forms of capital, particularly cultural capital, were on explicit display in many images and the acquisition of these capitals was promoted as a feature of a number of the sample schools. The inclusion of images of well-known sources of cultural capital (such as the Arts and co-curricular activities) was frequent suggesting that there is at least a degree of awareness of their status signifying role. Social capital was more rarely explicitly depicted, and seemed largely cautious when used.

Social status was also signified through the distance from necessity of the activities pictured. There were clear signs of pupils engaging in activities close to necessity in the form of both functional skills such as cooking and more commonly in the form of activities leading directly towards credentials and employment. There were also explicit signs of activities further away from necessity as a mark of distinction, these often worked in combination with signs of cultural capital such as the practice of fine art or classical music.

Whilst these signs of status were found across the sample in great numbers there were some clear patterns, trends and distinctions that could be seen between the different sectors of school in the sample. Unsurprisingly, images from the Independent sector contained a higher density and frequency of signs of high status. The analysis above shows that they were far more likely to show wealth, legitimate culture and cultural capital and tended to be further away from the necessity in the activities depicted. Despite some attempts by schools in the State sectors to include explicit signs of cultural capital through photographs of the Arts or sports these tended towards more popular or ‘middle-brow’ forms of these activities with a clear distinction between these and the activities shown in the Independent school sample.

Such a distinction is, perhaps, predictable as there is an almost tautological process of status reproduction at work. Less expected, however, were the patterns and trends identified in the wider signification of pedagogy and the function of schooling. There was more evidence of progressive pedagogies and of education as a collective, social process in the Independent sample than there was in the State sample where a more Behaviourist approach was evident.

The distinction in the signification of pedagogy and function was highly classed. Mythologies of meritocracy and individual mobility underpinned many of the signs in the sample, but especially across the State sectors the ideology of *homo economicus* and the need to invest in ‘wise choices’ was embedded in the rationale of choosing a school. Images of hard, individual, work were juxtaposed with panoptical architecture and displays of authority to remind the reader that where there are ‘winners’ there are necessarily ‘losers’. Drawing upon the rhetoric of ‘strivers’ and ‘shirkers’, of the ‘undeserving poor’ and of joining the Other, these signs played upon fears and insecurities to encourage a need for compliance, sacrifice and discipline opposed to the ‘luxury of self-indulgence’ afforded in the education of more privileged sections of society.

The distinctions identified between go beyond a representation of the division of labour in the social relations of capital. They *work* in reproducing them. In drawing upon common mythologies and grammars of visual meaning they can function as an appeal to the *habitus* of those choosing the schools for their children. The question of ‘fit’, of being a ‘fish in water’ might be partially answered by this appeal to habitus through the mechanism of *interpellation* and quilting described above. Simply put, if people go to school where ‘people like them’ go then these cohorts and intakes are reproduced. When this ‘hailing’ is made on the basis of signs of status and class then an education system divided into classed strata will reproduce these classed strata leaving the distinction between education for the privileged and education for the less privileged entrenched. Such social reproduction maintains, rather than challenges, continuing inequalities.

7.2 | Contribution to knowledge

This research, being the first of its kind in decades, makes a novel and largely unprecedented contribution to knowledge in its deconstruction of the imagery used by, and present in, schools across the South East of England.

In examining and analysing the visual depictions of people within the mythological frameworks at work in English education this thesis offers a critical lens for who can, and cannot, be afforded the status of individuality, autonomy or agency in a hierarchically stratified system. Relationships of power and privilege are found to be the determinants of this. Pedagogical, behavioural and disciplinary work is shown to differ according to the status of the school and its pupils/teachers.

The visual signs identified in the analysis above - red pens, plastic aprons, seating plans and wooden walls etc. - the small details that are “apparently innocent” function as “small acts of cunning”(Foucault, 2020, p.139) that root and anchor distinction and the mythologies that enable the reproduction of inequality.

This critical ‘macro lens’ on such small acts of cunning is both rare, and necessary, in these times where a heady cocktail of neoliberal marketisation and a resurgent ‘edupopulism’ are combining to accelerate many of the distinctions found in the visual expressions of schools, with the more privileged populations of the Independent sector more likely to be spared behaviourist and managerialist pedagogies if the visual data found here is accurate.

Theory is deployed in a combination that is both original in its synthesis of disparate sources and also sharply focussed on the minutiae of daily life in England’s schools. Its role is to cut through, or unveil, the layers of mythology and ideology that blanket the experience of school

(and school choice) in its material and embodied forms. These manifestations are uniquely collected and identified here in the thousands of signs found and described from the data sample.

Density of Signs

As schools become adept at using information technology to produce richer, glossier materials alongside the increasing imperative to sell themselves to would-be parents the sheer saturation of images and density of signification has not really been noted before. Whilst the profusion of signs and an increasingly immersed in visual advertising has been the subject of scholarship, critique and interest consistently since World War II and the rise of the so-called consumer society, the application of these theories to school produced imagery has been limited and last explored in the 1990s. What this research first clearly demonstrates through its analysis of over 1400 images is the sheer quantity of imagery employed by schools today to communicate with others. The analysis of these images then identifies how richly meaningful each of these images can be to different readers. The smallest detail in a photograph - a red pen, a school tie, a plastic apron, the direction of a child's gaze and so on - can link to a shared semiological grammar of meaning rooted in collective mythologies and hegemonic ideology. The pictures used by schools are crammed full of messages about the social status of the school and its use of classed pedagogies and values.

Forms of Capital

Building upon the work of others such as Bourdieu (and in an English context researchers such as Ball, Kulz, and Reay) this research was able to identify signifiers of various forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1986b) in every image from every school. From the display of economic capital in the presentation of spacious grounds or expensive facilities through to the social capital pictured in shots of successful alumni the photographs used by schools in their

prospectuses made consistent, and clear statements about the capital they possess and promise to pass on to their pupils. The most ubiquitous, and well-documented, form of capital associated with social reproduction schools is, of course, cultural capital. It comes as no surprise that schools across the sample, from all sectors, included illustrations of the cultural capital that they could provide. Yet, despite this being a near universal concern, the distinctions that Bourdieu talked about (Bourdieu, 1986a) remain largely intact and mapped starkly across the social divide between the State and Independent sectors. Beyond this explicit projection of status, this analysis was able to discern supporting messages of status from the material and atmospheric qualities (Baudrillard, 2005) that the schools possess. These too mapped across the status divide of schools in a striking fashion, marking the primary gulf in status between the schools of the elite and the schools of ‘the rest’.

Themes and Mythologies

The shared semiotic grammar that enables the reading(s) of the signs in the images analysed here is not limited to the illustration of capitals to portray status and social class. A number of common themes were identified during the content analysis of the photographs. These themes; uniform, discipline, buildings & space, teaching & learning and so on are more than just a convenient way to sort and organise the contents. They are a system or form of communication that Barthes termed ‘mythologies’ (Barthes, 1973). The identification and recognition of these mythologies within school prospectuses allows the study of “ideas-in-form” (Barthes, 1973, p.121). These ideas-in-form tell us about the concrete manifestation of ideology in educational practice, conflicts between social and individualised aims, the belief in meritocracy as a means for social mobility, the desire to contain ‘unruly mobs’ and produce ‘docile bodies’. The analysis over the sample images in this research argues that by looking at the patterns of presence and absence of these mythologies across different school sectors (and

particularly between the State and Independent sectors), it can be seen how these are classed in form and performing ideological work on behalf of capital.

Social Reproduction and School Choice

This research also suggests how this ideological work of social reproduction - maintaining the social conditions needed for capitalism to continue - might occur through parental readings of these images and mythologies at the point of choosing schools. Its contention that the interpellation of the signs in a school prospectus image anchors, or quilts, the ideological mythologies described above into a concrete and material reproduction of the social relations of capital is placed in almost banal, everyday occurrence familiar to many parents of school-aged children. This situation of the *point de capiton* in everyday action, and within the legitimate process of schooling, offers the inverse of Marx's "All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned" (Marx & Engels, 2002, p.223) sees our "real conditions of life" framed by the mythologies broadcast by the signs upon which school choice might be based (at least in part). Whilst this research does not answer questions about the parental perspective on this process, it instead limits itself to a proposed model of how all the messages and meanings identified in the sample might take material form in an act of school choice based upon signs of social class.

In drawing up this argument and developing methods for identifying and analysing the meanings and messages found within school prospectus images this research has built upon and developed a theoretical approach that both uses ideas familiar to the field of education - such as those of Bourdieu, Foucault and Marx - and introduced others more novel in the field - such as those of Barthes, Baudrillard and Lacan. It renews the use of semiotics applied to content analysis of educational artefacts perhaps best exemplified by Gewirtz's 1995 analysis of 'Schooling in the Marketplace' (Gewirtz et al., 1995), whilst inspired in part by Kulz's

analysis of a school dress code (Kulz, 2017a), applying them as part of a visual approach more familiar in the deconstruction of advertising (Cook, 1992; Goldman, 2011; J. Williamson, 1978) and Art History (Berger, 1973). The redevelopment of these research methods, and their application in the (relatively) newly visually literate promotion of themselves by schools across all sectors offers an additional and timely set of tools with which to investigate and interpret the meaning(s) of English schooling in late Capitalism.

The methods and theories used here explicitly situate these meanings within their social, political and economic context. They enable for interpretations and conclusions found here to be viewed in parallel with developments in other sectors of Education (such as the current situation in Higher Education) and parts of society. Not unironically, some of the critical theory and educational ideas that support this study are coming under explicit, political, attack from the media and the government. It is more important than ever, therefore, to ensure critical lenses remain available for research.

7.3 | Implications for practise or policy

Implications for Practice

Parental Readings

Whilst parents as a discrete group are not a likely audience for this research, the researcher's own position as parent and teacher immediately brings a number of interested parents into contact with the findings of this research, alongside those teachers, education workers and academics who may also have the role of parent. Parents are fundamental actors in the processes presented here and have a significant degree of power and agency in the reproductive work described. Drawing upon autonomist and feminist theories of social

reproduction and the social factory (Federici, 2012; Negri, 2018) it can be argued that this power occupies some similar terrain as the proletariat in classical Marxist theory. The work undertaken by the images in this sample is, in fact, work undertaken by the parents at the *point de capiton* - this social reproduction depends upon the immaterial labour (Lazzarato, n.d.) in the act of school choice.

Increased semiological awareness, perhaps obtained through case study deconstructions, might empower parents to uncover “what-goes-without-saying” (Barthes, 1973, p.11) in the images that are presented to them by schools. In turn this may act as a counter to the deterministic impulses of the process outlined here.

Classroom Practitioners

For classroom practitioners, particularly teachers, the key implication for practice is an awareness and acknowledgement of the meanings and messages that they/we broadcast visually, through dress, environment and judgments of the legitimate.

In a very practical sense, this can be engaged with by considering environmental signifiers: the layout of the classroom - are the pupils desks in rows, a circle, grouped together? Where and how is the teacher positioned? What is displayed on the walls? As described above, all of these aesthetic choices carry messages and meanings that may be read by the pupils and viewers of the classroom. Greater awareness of these potential broadcasts might enable teachers to be more conscious in their choice of messaging and the connotations of these decisions.

Teachers might not control a school’s uniform policy, but they/we can control how to respond to it. It may not always be possible, or indeed desirable, to simply ignore it but the framing of

its implementation is within the power of the teacher. An obvious example that has been the subject of recent discussion is around the vocabulary of the “inappropriate” - and this is a heavily gendered, racialized and classed judgement. To enforce a uniform using this language is a clear example of the symbolic violence of dress as signifier. Instead, the findings of this study suggest that, given the work school uniform does in reinforcing mythology and acting as a fetish object for all kinds of social and political agendas, teachers approach such rules with extreme caution and reflection.

Similarly, notwithstanding any pedagogical concerns, teachers should consider their/our own *habitus* and the meanings that may be read into it. Tone of voice, position and movement in the classroom, clothing, assumptions made about shared cultural capital etc. can all be part of a semiotic environment that is captured in the snapshots that make up the images in this study.

School Leadership

School Leadership Teams are, perhaps, best placed to change the visual content of their prospectuses. They will be the ones - in the main - commissioning, approving and distributing the prospectuses and the images contained within them. A greater degree of self-awareness about the signs they project will enable them to more accurately paint the pictures of their schools that they intend. School leaders are not generally in a position to withdraw their setting from the quasi-market of school choice, but they can ensure that their promotional images reflect, and serve, the communities they work for rather than the symbolic violence of the imposition of the legitimate culture of a narrow, suburban white middle-class.

School leaders are also in a position to alter, adjust and design the visual environments of their schools. Although constrained by budgetary concerns, those messages broadcast through the use of colours, materials, architecture and space are within the remit of leadership teams to

consider and change. This may also be reflected in the selection of photographs chosen to represent the school.

Reflection upon these signs depicted in their brochures may also, should also, prompt examination of how these images depict pedagogical and cultural values in their school.

Implications for Policy

At School Level

At a school level it is also the Senior Leadership Teams that are responsible for the drafting and implementation of school policies around some of the themes highlighted in this research.

School uniform policies, for example, are a clear expression of both symbolic violence based upon the imposition of classed legitimate culture, but also a fetish object within a wider mythology of discipline and behaviour. The notable discrepancy between the representation of school uniform between the higher status Independent schools and those in the state sector suggests that it is an imposed form of dress rather than simply reflective of the type of employment predominant amongst the schools community. School leaders could address this by moving away from policies that valorize traditional white collar working outfits - suits and ties - and move towards dress codes (should they be needed) that are more inclusive of a diverse range of backgrounds and cultures.

Similarly policies around behaviour and sanctions valorize the mythologies identified here - predominantly in the Academy sector - applying themes of classed legitimacies around habitus and demeanour alongside a carceral approach to the containment of the 'unruly mob' (i.e. working-class children) and the creation of 'docile bodies' ready to supply the labour

market. School leaders can, and should, consider how their policies may manifest as symbolic violence and are rooted in a classed view of what behaviour in schools should look like. Increasingly prominent approaches such as the ‘warm-strict’ or ‘zero tolerance’ approach promoted by influential figures such as Bennett (Bennett, 2010, 2020) and Birbalsingh (Birbalsingh, 2016) fetishize these classed mythologies of ‘good/bad behaviour’ and place them at the heart of schools’ identities. Proscriptive, and prescriptive, policies inspired by the work of Lemov (Lemov, 2021) - particularly SLANT (Sit up, Listen, Ask and answer, Nod your head, and Track the speaker) - have increased in visibility and can be seen as the policy manifestation of the images found in this sample of pupils sat with focussed gaze upon the invisible teacher in front of, and slightly above, them.

As the increasingly dominant view of education, closely linked with the Academies programme, this is also being promoted and imposed by Governmental policy.

At Governmental Level

The recent White Paper presented by the Government (Opportunity for all. Strong schools with great teachers for your child, 2022) highlights the policy approach taken regarding the themes and issues raised in this research.

The White Paper set out the Government's desire that all teachers “benefit from the high-quality, evidence-based training and development” (p.19) and specifically spotlights “behaviour management” as its sole example of this “expertise in high-quality teaching practice” (p.19). Further, it echos the language used by the advocates of zero tolerance schools with its references to top-down culture and so on:

“Leaders are responsible for setting the culture for their school and making sure that all children attend school and learn in calm, orderly, safe and supportive environments, with high expectations for what every child can achieve.” (p.25)

The continuation of the imposition of classed legitimate culture can be seen in the missionary zeal with which they will “incentivise new teachers to work in places where they are needed most” (p.23), an aim that needs to read and understood in conjunction with possibility of closing off access to higher education for pupils from those areas with the ongoing reforms and cuts in the University sector.

At the time of writing further detail on the Government’s approach to behaviour is being published (Department for Education, 2022b) which includes amongst its legal requirements promoting a “proper regard for authority” (p.7).

However, at the same time the White Paper recognises the centrality of the acquisition of cultural capital to schooling highlighted in the themes outlined in this research and sets out its aim to address this through “a cultural education plan” (p.29) in 2023.

Parental choice, the expansion of the Academisation programme and the legal protection of the Grammar School Sector (Department for Education, 2022a) are enshrined in the Government’s policy agenda, reflecting the continuation of the segregation between sectors identified in this study. It is unlikely that current or prospective governments have the desire or interest in moving away from this path. However, should a future administration wish to interrupt this reproduction of privilege and disadvantage a number of policies could be undertaken. Fundamentally, a rejection of market values such as choice and competition would be required with schools no longer competing with others for funding or league table positions. The obligation to publish prospectuses as marketing tools should be removed. The parental ‘right to choose’ should be emphasised in favour of a ‘right to a good local school’

with equal opportunities for cultural enrichment based upon valuing and celebrating the culture(s) of the communities the school serves rather white, middle-class mythologies.

7.4 | Limitations and areas for potential further research

Through the course of this study a series of further questions have been identified which require further discrete research in order to extend the findings presented here.

Parental Reading of the Images

The primary question which this study does not address is that of the audience for the messages, signs and mythologies described above. Whilst a compelling case for the sheer richness of meaning(s) is presented, what is not known from this research is whether these meanings are read in the manner conjectured here.

The process of interpellation and quilting suggested in this study has not been tested. It would require a project of similar scale to examine parental responses to schools' promotional imagery. Whilst there have been a number of studies looking at the reasons underlying parental choice of schools there is nothing looking at the impact of visual material on these choices. Methods could be appropriated from the advertising industry such as focus group reactions to a collection of images and adapted to investigate the readings parents have of the photographs used in school prospectuses and so on. Such a project could discover whether the themes and meanings found in this study are also found by this section of the images' primary audience. Similarly research could be conducted, perhaps through interview, to analyse the level and nature of the permeation of the mythologies described here into parental school choice discourse.

Such investigations will be crucial for assessing and tracking the impact of what is suggested here in the process of school choice. They would be needed for determining whether these mythologies and meanings do, therefore, work on the reproduction of socially segregated schools through these visual *points de capiton*. What such further research would not do, however, is examine the motivations and intentions of those who commission, produce and broadcast the messages discovered here.

Leadership and Marketing

During the course of this research I was able to 'sit in' on the design and production of a school prospectus. As it was not part of this study's research design, and my participation was not in the role of researcher, no findings from this experience can be included here. However, this insight can inform some further suggested research. Prospectuses, and the images contained within them are part of a deliberate and considered marketing process. This process may vary from school to school and may include a range of different participants - from Senior Leaders to Governors and, where schools have them, marketing departments. The views of these groups about what they are trying to say with the photographs they choose or approve would help shine further light onto both the mythologies they are tapping into to promote their schools, but also onto how significant a factor social reproduction might be in their marketing rationale(s). The findings could be tested against and between different types of schools in order to ascertain any patterns related to sector or location. They would also provide a valuable check to the critical lens in this study allowing alternative perspectives on meaning, status and function to be applied to promotional imagery.

Since this research was written I have been approached by a number of people involved in school marketing and I know of at least two school websites where images have been changed

following these discussions. This impact, however, is sporadic and peripheral and has not been undertaken as part of any structured or strategic initiative.

The Intersection of Class, Race, Gender and Disability etc.

A major, but deliberate, limitation in this research is a consideration of other dimensions of power and status beyond loosely defined class identities and positions. The images analysed in this study could, and should, also be viewed through the lens of gendered, racialised and abled mythologies. Indeed, it was impossible not to partially apply these lenses to some of the case study images such as the clear colonialist connotations of images *PI.13* and *PI.16* or the attempt at addressing gendered mythologies in *A17.19*. When presenting some early provisional findings from this research at a conference a question was asked about the (re)presentation of disabled bodies which fell beyond the scope of the analysis discussed here. Yet, such questions continued to be raised, even with investigation of the presentation of bodies through the lens of the classed embodiment of *habitus*. The mythologies and shared semiological grammar central to the analysis made here are those drawn from the social stratum of the researcher. I am as vulnerable to the process of interpellation as any other reader of the images, although (perhaps) better armed to deconstruct the messages I am being hailed by. Other researchers will be differently placed - their knowing will be anchored and situated in other positions enabling them to explore these images and processes through other lenses and thus hopefully contribute to a shared, collective, intersectional understanding of the way in which these images work.

Contrepellation - Student and Parental Acts of Refusal

Another key focus for further research, particularly to counter deterministic readings of this study, would be the notion of *contrepellation* introduced above. Parents, children and others involved in the reproductive process possess agency and power of their own, one does not

simply walk into social reproduction - it is an antagonistic process where the eternal struggle between capital and labour finds its form on social terrain. Gestures of refusal around the symbolic violence of uniform are commonplace enough to have produced a genre of annual tabloid newspaper story - where a (usually working-class) family balefully display an innocuous hair style or item of clothing that their child has been excluded from school for at the start of the new term. These are occasionally accompanied by collective acts of defiance where pupils refuse, *en masse*, to comply with the legitimate culture imposed upon them. Research into the motives and organisational forms of such protests would help illuminate the meanings read into signs such as school uniform by students.

Similarly, parents act to counter the process of interpellation embedded in these promotional images by choosing schools with which they do not identify. There is some research on middle-class parents actively choosing to send their children alongside the aspirational refusal to interpellate by working-class parents trying to send their children to higher status schools (James, Reay et al., 2010). What seems to be missing however is an investigation into the phenomenon - as far as it exists - of parents making the 'metachoice' of refusing to choose, and ignoring the interpellational call of 'Hey you!' completely..

7.6 | Final Reflections

In these times of perpetual crisis it may seem indulgent to take the time to spend several years out to undertake an ambitious research project as broad and flawed as this, but the skills and knowledge gained in doing so not only make a contribution to the scholarship around issues of equity and inequality in education and the ideological work of schools but also will be (and already have been) taken back into the classroom as a part of a renewed teaching praxis rooted in critical pedagogy, becoming - in Giroux's words - a teacher as a "transformative intellectual" (Giroux, 1988, p.125) equipped to fight for the inclusion of possibility and

democracy in our schools. To finish, let me simply repeat Marx's famous call to arms; "the philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point is to *change* it" (Marx, 1970,p.123).

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Appendices

Data Protection Declaration for Ethical Approval

This document can be used to provide assurances to your ethics committee where confirmation of data protection training and awareness is required for ethical approval.

By signing this declaration I confirm that:

- I have read and understood the requirements for data protection within the *Data Protection for Researchers* document located here:

http://www.reading.ac.uk/web/files/imps/Data_Protection_for_Researchers_Aug_18.v1.pdf

- I have asked for advice on any elements that I am *unclear on* prior to submitting my ethics approval request, either from my supervisor, or the data protection team at: imps@reading.ac.uk
- I understand that I am responsible for the secure handling, and protection of, my research data
- I know who to contact in the event of an information security incident, a data protection complaint or a request made under data subject access rights

Researcher to complete

Project/Study Title: **How does the signification of social status by English schools through their marketing material contribute to the reproduction of privilege and disadvantage? A Visual Analysis of School Prospectuses in the South East of England**

NAME	STUDENT ID NUMBER	DATE
Stuart Bracewell		23/02/21

Supervisor signature

Note for supervisors: Please verify that your student has completed the above actions

NAME	STAFF ID NUMBER	DATE
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Submit your completed signed copy to your ethical approval committee.

Copies to be retained by ethics committee.

1.0	IMPS	Annually	IMPS	