Diversity and Struggles in Critical Performativity. The Case of French Community-Supported Agriculture

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Abstract. This article contributes to the debates about critical performativity (CP), a research program aimed at reorienting critical management studies toward affirmative and transformative research. While some scholars explain how CP can be engineered to create alternative organizations, others remain skeptical, exposing its potential for failure. We examine alternative organizations with a particular focus on the struggles in which they are entangled, such as competition with other performative programs and normative agendas. These struggles cause permanent reconfigurations to *agencements* and make the future effects of performative engines uncertain. To understand these reconfigurations, we look at the transformation of already established alternative organizations. We conducted a case study on French Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA), which is illustrative of CP "in the field," looking at how the CSA network can engineer local organizations. We show how the struggles between competing performative programs produce diversity, in time and space, of organizational settings and goals within the French CSA movement. Our contributions are twofold. Firstly, because of the struggles in which it is entangled, a performative engine can create diverse and potentially competing normative content rather than a single stable agenda. Secondly, deviations from the initial normative content are not neutral and may undermine the subversive potential of those *agencements*. Ultimately, we call for a research agenda which would look beyond the implementation of subversive practices to question the way subversive *agencements* develop, and which would acknowledge that CP is also about struggles between competing engines.

Keywords: critical performativity, community-supported agriculture, alternative organizations, critical management studies, performative engine

INTRODUCTION

The concept of critical performativity (CP) has recently gained traction among critical scholars. CP is broadly understood as "active and subversive intervention into managerial discourse and practices" (Spicer, Alvesson & Kärreman, 2009: 538). The new challenge is to prompt the growing critical management studies (CMS) community to take a more "affirmative" stance (Spicer et al., 2009): to engage directly with organizations by pushing forward alternative discourses, practices and organizational models. The CP research program, which rethinks the role of critical scholars, seeks to understand under what conditions CP can be done and how.

Different strategies, ranging from activism and interventions in alternative organizations (King, 2015; Reedy & King, 2017) to support middle managers in their reflexive thinking (Hartmann, 2014; Schaefer & Wickert, 2016; Wickert & Schaefer, 2015), have been proposed to promote the CP agenda. Yet many scholars have expressed their skepticism about CP's potential to transform society. For example, in downplaying the hostility toward the critical agenda, proponents of CP may underestimate its potential for failure (Fleming & Banerjee, 2016) and overlook the influence of multiple and competing agendas (Sage, Dainty & Brookes, 2013). Concerns have also been raised that it is necessary to acknowledge the plurality of understandings around the concept of performativity to unleash the full potential of a CP agenda (Cabantous, Gond, Harding & Learmonth, 2016; Learmonth, Harding, Gond & Cabantous, 2016). Performativity should not be considered as a strictly discursive process, but should be defined as "happen[ning] through the political engineering of sociomaterial agencements" (Cabantous et al., 2016: 197; Leca, Gond & Barin-Cruz, 2014). These authors seek, in particular, to incorporate developments from the sociology of science (Callon, 1998b; MacKenzie, 2003; MacKenzie, Muniesa & Siu, 2007) and gender studies (Butler, 1990).

Taking this perspective, we define CP as the *enactment of subversive practices through the competition of a subversive agencement against other agencements pursuing their own agenda*. Although we still lack empirical cases (Huault, Karreman, Perret & Spicer, 2017), there have been detailed examples that show how CP can be engineered through material devices (Leca et al., 2014). Prior empirical studies of CP have focused on the formation of new organizations. Our article contributes to the debates about the potential of CP by looking at the materialization and evolution of a critical agenda. We explore how a performative engine, and the alternative organizations it contributes to creating, struggle against competing performative engines. We look at how these struggles participate in reconfiguring *agencements* and making the future effects of performative engines uncertain.

Our research is grounded in a case study on Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA), an empirical case which we show to be illustrative of CP emanating from "actors in the wild" (Callon, 2007: 336). CSA aims to move consumption practices away from large food retailers in favor of small local places of distribution where product selection does not belong to the consumer but is negotiated according to the production capacity of farmers. It promotes the renewed direct social support of farmers by consumers, seeking to free them from the domination of agro-industrial multinational corporations (Hérault-Fournier, 2013). The first French CSA [1]was created in 2001 at Aubagne in the south east, influenced by similar US-based organizations. The model rapidly spread, with new CSAs emerging all over the country. A nationwide federation was created along with a specific charter, demonstrating the desire to institutionalize the model (Lanciano & Saleilles, 2011) around specific normative ideas, in particular organic production, direct relations and long-term engagement. Our ethnographic study focuses on CSAs in the Paris area (Ile-de-France), one of the most dynamic regions in terms of the number of CSAs, where we analyzed ten organizations. An additional perspective was gained through the study of one CSA located in the Alps. Some of the CSAs are almost twenty years old, giving us the opportunity to explore CP at an advanced stage in the organizations' life. We interviewed members and farmers, and we documented the various ways in which actors engage with

1. In France, CSA associations are called AMAPs (*Association pour le Maintien d'une Agriculture Paysanne*). Despite local variations and adaptation, AMAPs were created based on the American CSA model. For this article in English we have decided to refer to these organizations as CSAs.

their local CSA. We also documented the functioning, concrete organizing principles and the relation of these communities to the national charter and CSA federations to trace the diverse influences behind their actions.

Our results show that the CSA network actively supports the development of alternative organizations, local CSAs, by translating and circulating theoretical knowledge and organizing feedback loops between local actors and the network. This network therefore acts as a performative engine. Our analysis follows prior studies that demonstrate the competition between different performative programs (Sage et al., 2013) and includes the influence of other alternative food networks on CSA members (Ripoll, 2009). Our results show that the differences between programs are not neutral. Rather, they reveal conflicting normative principles and the enactment of diverse different critical agendas, accounting for the multi-faceted nature of French CSAs. Our analysis offers a better understanding of the potential for CP failure or success by acknowledging the lack of a stable critical agenda performed by alternative organizations.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

THE PROMISES OF A PERFORMATIVE TURN IN CMS

The concept of CP is part of a larger "performative turn" in organization studies (MacKenzie et al., 2007: 4). Performativity is broadly used to move beyond the artificial distinction between discourse and action. Various understandings of performativity have been developed (Gond, Cabantous, Harding & Learmonth, 2016) since Austin's first writings on the concept (1962). Gender studies have looked at how actors constantly constitute their identity performatively through micro-practices (Butler, 1990), while the sociology of science (Callon, 1998b) has been prolific in highlighting the feedback loops between theories and a social reality they seek to describe and how scientific theories "contribute toward enacting the realities that they describe" (Callon, 2007: 315). In management science, the different uses of performativity have helped scholars to rethink many phenomena, such as the strategic process (Cabantous & Gond, 2011; Guérard, Langley & Seidl, 2013) or the constitution of actors' identity (Tyler & Cohen, 2010).

Debates about performativity were initially beyond the scope of CMS. CMS has mainly been about denaturalizing managerial discourse and demonstrating domination at work. It has sought to develop reflexivity and a critical distance from instrumental knowledge (Alvesson, 2004: 57; Fournier & Grey, 2000). Although CMS has now been institutionalized (Hartmann, 2014), critical research has faced the risk of being marginalized because of a lack of relevance and its negative stance focused on denouncing alienation. To inspire an affirmative stance in CMS, Spicer et al. (2009) proposed a new research framework, namely critical performativity, defined as "active and subversive intervention into managerial discourse and practices" (2009: 538). If the language of managerialism can performatively create alienating and oppressive practices, then it "may equally work the other way round" (Wickert & Schaefer, 2015: 115). Accordingly, Spicer et al. proposed specific methods for interventions involving the use of mixed metaphors, working with mysteries, applying communicative actions, exploring heterotopias and engaging in micro-emancipation (2009). Critical engagement has long been characterized as perilous (King, 2015). By identifying methodologies for subverting managerial discourses, CP is designed to facilitate further engaged research.

Spicer et al.'s (2009) seminal article gave rise to a new stream of academic articles expressing interest in the CP agenda. This includes papers on how to conduct research in CMS by fostering subversive functionalism (Hartmann, 2014), creating performative engines to expand critical projects (Leca et al., 2014) and new avenues for critical studies in marketing (Tadajewski, 2010) or leadership (Alvesson & Spicer, 2012). There have also been proposals to foster incremental rather than radical change through engagement with middle managers in mainstream organizations (Schaefer & Wickert, 2016; Wickert & Schaefer, 2015). Founding research on CP highlighted the great potential of engaging with alternative organizations (Parker, Fournier & Reedy, 2007): the exploration of such organizations, such as cooperatives (Bryer, 2014), can help critical scholars focus on what might be rather than criticizing what currently exists (Spicer et al., 2009). Different types of alternative organizations have been explored in the CP literature. These include cooperatives (Leca et al., 2014), the John Lewis Partnership (Paranque & Willmott, 2014), Empresas Recuperadas (Esper, Cabantous, Barin-Cruz & Gond, 2017), a therapeutic art organization, a national campaign group or DIY activists (King, 2015). There is still much to explore and CP studies still lack strong empirical case studies (Huault et al., 2017).

LIMITS TO THE TRANSFORMATIVE POTENTIAL OF CP

This first conceptualization of CP was also heavily criticized and led to vociferous debates within the community (see particularly *Human Relations Special Issue*, 2016). The criticism centered on the overly optimistic view of the potential of CP, its failure to account for competing performative programs and incompatible views on performativity.

The idea of bringing about critical change through a CP agenda raises doubt and skepticism. Engagement with practice is always a source of tension and risk of compromise (King, 2015). It can even turn out to be paralyzing, thus paradoxically preventing further action (King & Learmonth, 2015). Critical perspectives face a hostile neo-liberal context which hinders the spread of critical practices (Fleming & Banerjee, 2016). More broadly, others have argued that theory and practice are part of two different systems unable to fully communicate with each other: failure is the rule rather than the exception (Knudsen, 2017). Understanding failure is nevertheless a fertile empirical ground for exploring CP and the limits to its transformative potential (Aggeri, 2017). Failure in CP is understood as the outcome of competition between different performative programs (Allen, Brigham & Marshall, 2018; Sage et al., 2013). Performative programs aimed at transforming reality confront other competing programs proposed by different actors. Similarly, because performativity simultaneously happens through discursive, bodily, emotional and social practices, these different practices must be taken into account to fully acknowledge the complexity of performativity (Küpers, 2017). The issue of success and failure of performative programs is thus a central concern in the current debate about CP. To pursue this debate, we will now present and follow recent theoretical developments which draw on materiality to develop a better understanding of performative process.

USING MATERIALITY TO EXPLORE DIVERSITY AND STRUGGLES IN CP

Scholars have linked the failure of CP to the way it was first theorized, mixing incompatible understandings of performativity. They

particularly emphasize its material dimension and the contributions of the sociology of science to recent studies on performativity (Cabantous et al., 2016; Learmonth et al., 2016). They insist that CP is about "engineering sociomaterial *agencements*," which affect the constitution of subjects beyond a strictly discursive perspective (Cabantous et al., 2016: 209). They contend that clarifying the theoretical understanding of performativity in CP will unleash the concept's full potential and overcome its limitations. We will follow Cabantous et al.'s (2016) emphasis on the materiality of CP. Inspired by the sociology of science (Callon, 1998b; MacKenzie et al., 2007), this allows us to understand performativity outside a purely discursive process by integrating non-human actors and *agencements*, that is "the assemblages or arrangements—which are simultaneously human and nonhuman, social and technical, textual and material—from which action springs" (MacKenzie et al., 2007: 14). The explanatory potential of material perspectives in CP has been illustrated in empirical studies on the performativity of theories: materialization of the online dating industry's ideology through algorithms (Roscoe & Chillas, 2014); the design of sociomaterial *agencements* by scholars to push forward critical theories (Esper et al., 2017); and the creation of incubators for cooperatives in Brazil, which work as *performative engines* (Leca et al., 2014).

This last case study highlights how Brazilian academics participate in the development of cooperativism by supporting local entrepreneurs who are building cooperative firms. Leca et al. (2014) develop the concept of "performative engines": organizations, such as incubators, that have an interfacing role between academics and practitioners to support the realization of a particular organizational model. These engines co-construct the cooperatives. They work to "shape different environments to support the realization of alternative bodies of knowledge" (Leca et al., 2014: 689). According to this perspective, something utopian can be progressively enacted. By discussing and operationalizing alternative material *agencements*, performative engines contribute to building alternative organizations.

Although this understanding of CP, incorporating material *agencements*, has been criticized for its definitional purity (Schaefer & Wickert, 2016) and intellectualism (Spicer, Alvesson & Kärreman, 2016), it is useful to explore the struggles and competition between different programs:

> The performativity approach makes it possible to exhibit the struggle between worlds that are trying to prevail; it makes the struggle for life between statements visible. Each statement, each model, battles to exist. But the Darwinian metaphor stops there. In reality this struggle between statements is a struggle between sociotechnical agencements. (Callon, 2007: 332)

With the significant exception of Sage et al. (2013), this question of struggles has remained absent from CP studies. Different alternative organizations may simultaneously try to enforce different and even competing subversive programs, reminding us that, in actor-network theory studies, "the norm is not the smooth performance of economics but conflicts, upsets, crises, and competition between different 'programs'" (MacKenzie et al., 2007: 16). In keeping with this understanding of CP, we define CP as the *enactment of subversive practices through the competition of a subversive agencement against other agencements pursuing their own agenda*. Accordingly, alternative organizations can be considered with the struggles in which they are entangled. For instance, the case study on Brazilian cooperatives

illustrates the process through which local entrepreneurs become *interested* in creating cooperatives, particularly when receiving technical and managerial knowledge from scholars (Leca et al., 2014). However, the long-term effects of performative engines remain unknown. Once the technical knowledge has been acquired, entrepreneurs may go on to create subsequent businesses not as cooperative but as for-profit companies, being interested in other *agencements* focused on profit maximization. The stabilization of cooperatives is beyond the scope of the study. As explained above, the broader institutional context can favor other *agencements* (Fleming & Banerjee, 2016), hindering the performative effects of the Brazilian cooperative incubators.

In this article, we explore how a specific critical agenda is materialized and stabilized and how it evolves (Cabantous et al., 2016; Learmonth et al., 2016). We extend the CP research agenda by taking account of the struggles in which alternative organizations are entangled. These struggles cause permanent reconfigurations of *agencements* and make the future effects of performative engines uncertain.

METHODOLOGY

A CASE STUDY ON CSA

To explore our research question, we conducted a case study on French CSAs[2]. CSAs are alternative food networks in which consumers buy a share of a local farmer's production on a regular basis. The first French CSA is relatively recent, established in 2001, but is part of an older global movement including the 1960s Japanese Teikei and the 1980s US CSA model (Ripoll, 2009). French CSAs were launched as a tool for sharing the risk of irregular agricultural production between farmers and consumers (Lamine, 2005), for stabilizing cash flows and income for farmers (Olivier & Coquart, 2010) and even as an empowerment device (Dubuisson-Quellier & Lamine, 2008). Different alternative food networks coexist around the idea of a "basket system" in which a prepared assortment of produce is offered to consumers (Dumain & Lanciano, 2010; Ripoll, 2009), but the French CSA network is a key actor which has gone through an institutionalization process (Lanciano & Saleilles, 2011). The regional CSA network (AMAP Île-de-France), created in 2004, handles activities such as enforcing the charter, providing training sessions, institutional relations and giving advice on how to run daily activities. This network is financed through a small fee paid by each CSA member[3], but also to a large extent by state subsidies[4]. Our case study focuses on how this network can (or fails to) engineer local CSAs.

In the greater Paris area, where we mainly focused our research, the first CSA opened in 2003, and around 15,000 households are now spread across 300 CSAs supplied by around 160 farmers. CSA has become the main regional actor for the development of organic farming (Blanc, 2012). Each CSA is a non-profit association operated by independent volunteer members. We chose this case because it is an example of an alternative organization that aims to challenge mainstream economic values (Bloemmen et al., 2015) by arranging and facilitating reciprocal transactions to challenge capitalism (Gibson-Graham, Cameron & Healy, 2013; Parker et al., 2007).

2. In our article we study organizations that declare themselves to be AMAPs (*Association pour le Maintien d'une Agriculture Paysanne)*, regardless of their actual attachment to the CSA network. The term "AMAP" is a registered trademark, but acknowledging this ambiguity is key to our research.

3. Two kinds of participants are distinguished by the informants and defined in the different institutional documents: "*amapiens*" (formed from AMAP) refers to the consumers who sign a contract with the farmer and the "*paysan en amap*" is the farmer. Only the consumers pay membership dues.

4. https://www.amap-idf.org/images/imagesFCK/file/1reseau/ag/2017/strategie_financiere.pdf Even though the network seeks to reduce its dependency on subsidies, they still account for 65% of its global funding.

DATA COLLECTION

Our case study covered eleven self-declared AMAPs (CSA associations) and we conducted twenty-four semi-structured interviews with CSA members. We contacted them through their CSA mailing lists and stated that we were interested in talking to all members, including those who were less supportive. In addition to twelve regular members, we interviewed six members who operated a CSA and one member who worked for the regional network. We were also able to interview five farmers. These interviews covered ten CSAs in the Paris area as well as a large one in the Alps to get a sense of what might be different in another region. The main topics covered were the different food networks the interviewees participate in, recollecting how and why they came to be CSA members, their activities and degree of participation in the CSA, and their overall knowledge of and familiarity with food products. The general aim was to understand the different CSA member profiles.

The interviews enabled us to get a sense of members' intentions (what they expect and get from their CSA), and to explore how they relate to competing food networks, rather than focusing solely on their participation in the CSA. These interviews revealed a broad array of practices and attitudes toward the CSAs, and we stopped doing formal interviews when we reached saturation. Triangulation with other data, presented below, and discussions with CSA members revealed that this diversity was identified as a critical issue by members of the regional network and contributed to the reliability of our findings (Silverman, 2006).

We completed our data collection by observing the deliveries at several CSAs. Through non-participant observation, we wished to understand how CSA principles are translated into a set of concrete daily practices. Our goal was to compare the principles and official discourses with the visible practices of members. Observation was also necessary to explore the materiality of the *agencements* and the potential role of non-human actors (Latour & Woolgar, 1979). In addition to our interviews, each CSA was observed during one or two distributions. As one author had been a past member of one of the CSAs, the other author conducted the observation to triangulate the data.

In a second stage, the latter also became a member of a CSA in order to conduct participant observation and to gain inside knowledge of the organization and better understand the accounts given by our interviewees (Alvesson, 2011). As the CSA's core activity only takes place once a week, full integration in the organization was necessary to better understand the daily interactions among members between two deliveries. This enabled us to find out about the issues discussed by members about activist movies and books, other alternative practices (collective housing or renewable electricity suppliers), and so on. These were more difficult to grasp and link to the CSA in interviews. Our participation allowed us to have many informal discussions with members, which corroborated our results and enabled us to qualify our analysis. It gave us the opportunity to meet and talk with regional network representatives and to get a better understanding of their intentions regarding the CSA project. Due to time constraints, it was not possible to record, transcribe and analyze all those informal discussions.

We also collected and analyzed secondary data, including e-mails sent by and to CSA members, documents from CSA networks' websites, the CSA charter, and documents and newspaper articles about French CSA history, general figures and controversies, in particular in relation to other alternative food organizations. These secondary data shed light on

the history of CSAs and how their subversive position had been progressively built, and helped us to understand how controversies and conflicts between different *agencements* had come to be framed.

DATA ANALYSIS

Our analysis aimed to explore the potential diversity of practices and organizations within French CSAs. Consistent with previous CP case studies (Esper et al., 2017; Leca et al., 2014), we created a narrative from the mass of data to include a multiplicity of perspectives on CSAs and their development in France. To analyze performativity, we needed to examine how expert knowledge and actors' activities inside and outside CSA interact through feedback loops.

We started by mapping the organizational field of CSAs in the Paris area and the different organizational modes we were able to identify. Then we described CSA *agencement*, its key actors and its network to understand how "problematization," "*interessement*" and "enrolment" happen (see Callon, (1984) for a detailed description of these processes). We conducted a thematic analysis of our interviews to identify subjectivities and identities of CSA members as well as declared practices related to our study (cooking habits, places for shopping, attitudes and practices toward social, economic and environmental concerns). We compared these elements with the CSA charter, identified as the core of the CSA mission. The charter is structured around five key principles: (1) small farming; (2) organic production; (3) food quality and affordability; (4) community education on food issues; and (5) contract-based direct sales. We then looked for connections with other performative programs, the limits of the CSA performative engine and the broad range of normative ideals enacted by actors.

Finally, we examined how the different interviewees relate to the charter and what their concrete practices are in relation to the CSA movement's declared goals. Our starting point was the CSA charter published by the national CSA network. It represents the values and principles that the first CSA actors are trying to stabilize and spread through the engineering of CSA associations.

EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

THE CSA INSTITUTIONAL NETWORK AS PERFORMATIVE ENGINE

In CSA, individuals create an association for organizing the weekly distribution of produce baskets. Each association manages the distribution site and the delivery schedule as well as ancillary activities such as farm visits or activist movie screenings. Every consumer signs a contract with a producer for a farming season (usually a semester). Through this contract, the CSA member commits to buying their share of the produce throughout the season and to sharing production risks. The farmer commits to supplying a vegetable basket every week, depending on production capacity (meaning that varieties and quantities fluctuate and are unknown to the CSA member).

In France, this movement was initiated by a couple of farmers, explicitly referring to the US-based CSA model, who created their first CSA in 2001. An effort was rapidly made to stabilize the movement and establish the values and principles advocated by French CSA. A first regional network was created the same year and two years later, in 2003, the name "AMAP" was registered and the first charter to standardize the

practices of the different French CSAs was published. The charter defines CSA's goal as the "social and ecological transformation of agriculture and our relation to food by generating new solidarities"[5]. Therefore, organizations that wish to use the AMAP name and benefit from the network's services have to abide by its charter. Before long, the national network was coordinating twelve regional networks that had emerged to structure and develop the 2000 local CSAs identified in France. Collecting a per-member annual fee, local CSAs can benefit from the network's endorsement and support. As we show below, the regional and national CSA networks correspond to the definition of performative engines through the development of knowledge circulation, chains of translation and feedback loops (Leca et al., 2014). These networks are key to understanding the development and emergence of new local CSAs (Blanc, 2012).

The vision of French CSA is informed by a body of knowledge about economic relations, farming practices, public policies, and social relations between consumers and producers. It provides an alternative understanding of the food supply chain (see Figure 1). This knowledge includes well-known ideas about organic production and lesser-known ideas about "*agriculture paysanne*"[6]. This knowledge also circulates through the networks' websites, where specific scientific literature is made available, or via training sessions and internal communication through which the knowledge is transferred to local actors (see Figure 1). Local CSAs are thus built on the knowledge disseminated by national and regional networks. CSAs also actively participate in the creation of knowledge. Scientific studies on CSA or on organic food's effects rely on the active cooperation of local CSAs and farmers. CSAs are often cited as an example of how to shift from a growth-dependent economy to a degrowth economy (Fournier, 2008; Gibson-Graham et al., 2013; Latouche, 2009). Food safety and health issues are illustrative of this knowledge circulation. Food safety was the first concern of Japanese mothers and led them to create the Teikei (Groh & McFadden, 1990). Since then, a growing body of scientific literature has emerged on the relation between health and organic food consumption, but its results remain inconclusive (for a review, see Dangour et al., 2010). It shows that academics participate in actualizing practices in conformity with the CSA project in which new agricultural paradigms will lead to better health for participants. Aiming to demonstrate the concrete potential health benefits of organic food, they participate in developing the measuring and calculation tools necessary for actualizing this specific world (Callon, 1998a, 2007). Disseminating knowledge is one way the network can act as a performative engine.

The second function of the networks is translation, particularly in relation to the official charter, which translates a set of ideas, theories and critical views on agriculture into defined principles. Local CSAs then have to adapt these principles to their local conditions (see Figure 1). Through the charter, the national network creates a broad normative framework for French CSA. Local CSAs have to define the precise ways in which they apply the charter. This translation role is the second way the network acts as an interface between local organizations and the knowledge and normative understanding of food practices.

Lastly, the networks function as a performative engine through feedback loops. Through e-mails and occasional meetings, the networks

5. AMAP charter, retrieved from http://miramap.org/IMG/pdf/charte_des_amap_mars_2014-2.pdf.`
6. In France, the term "*agriculture paysanne*" refers to small-scale, sustainable farming that adheres to certain environmental, social and economic principles in opposition to intensive industrial agriculture.

gather feedback from their members on issues such as their political positions, organizational issues or marketing opportunities. Training sessions (open to all) are an opportunity to gather feedback from local actors and discover their issues. As such, regional networks have an interfacing role between the various CSAs. This knowledge is then reintegrated into local CSAs. For instance, we observed a meeting about a price-setting issue between farmers and managers of different local CSAs. Such meetings are common when conflicts arise between members and farmers. A representative of the network was invited as a facilitator. While reiterating the CSA principles, she also referred to other CSA examples to explain what was a normal situation and what were unusual issues. This gave the members a sense of the different ways that CSA operates outside their local association.

Regional and national networks thus emerge as a performative engine which "supports the realization of the organizational model" of CSA (Leca et al., 2014: 689). This engine initiates a broad set of supporting activities for local CSAs (see Figure 1): it puts emerging CSAs in contact with available organic farmers, helps with the acquisition of agricultural land, manages institutional relations and organizes training sessions for farmers and CSA members.
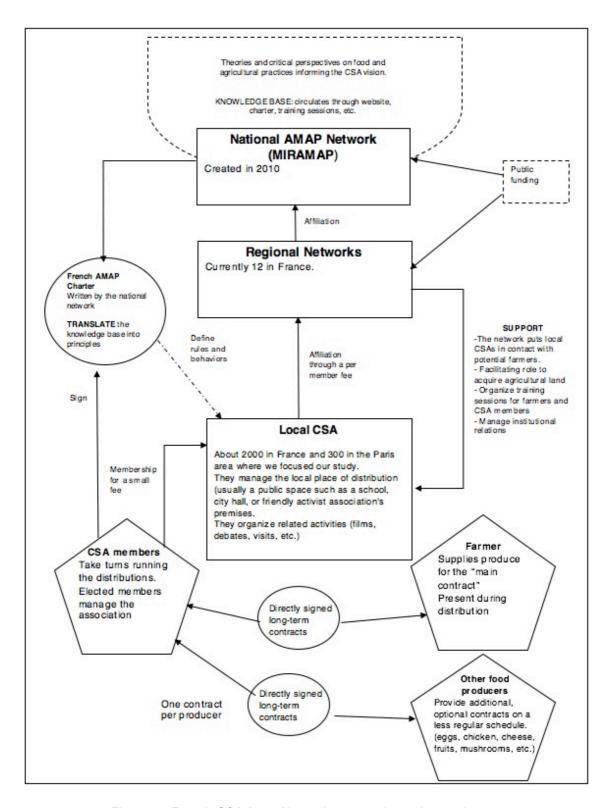
Figure 1 . French CSA Actor-Network as a performative engine

PERFORMING ALTERNATIVE FOOD PRACTICES THROUGH CSA

With a better understanding of how the performative engine works, we now explore these engineered organizations to understand what is being performed. Members' practices are shaped by the *agencements* in

which they are enrolled. CSA members engage in long-term relations with farmers, securing their access to organic food. Written contracts ensure long-term payments to farmers, guaranteeing them a steady income, labels signal compliance with alternative farming practices, and CSA members are guaranteed regular deliveries of local and organic products. Members thus engage in alternative food practices. They also learn new skills beyond just those related to economic relations with farmers. These include, for instance, cooking and recognizing different vegetables:

> Céline: "I mean, now I know how to cook celery properly, so I wouldn't hesitate to buy some. Yeah, like pumpkin squash— I've learned a few things that are part of my routine now, which absolutely wasn't the case before."

In doing this, CSA members become "drilled people" (Law, 1984) who acquire the relevant skills, revealing the performativity of *agencements*, which creates the conditions for its own realization (see Figure 2, arrow 1). Materiality and non-humans are also key to understanding CSA's performativity. We note that the specific message of CSA is conveyed through the products themselves. To support CSA's claims about natural agronomy (versus chemical and intensive practices) and its effects on the produce, the vegetables have to demonstrate their "naturalness." Unlike conventional vegetables, CSA vegetables are neither sorted nor washed, so they have uncommon shapes, colors, and sometimes bruises and soil—evidence of alternative farming techniques and corresponding consumption practices. Lettuce, for instance, demonstrates its naturalness through its capacity to attract slugs which are still present when members collect their basket. The material properties of meat also demonstrate that it has been produce through alternative farming practices: it is darker, irregular and does not produce any cooking juices. This shows that the animals are fed with grass only.

Other key material components of the short CSA supply chain are the contracts and checks between members and farmers. These documents do not involve any intermediaries. Checks are made out directly to the farmers, using their names, and two-part contracts are signed between members and farmers, with both parties being referred to by name. By naming the parties involved, these artifacts materialize the close connection between the farmers and the members and the absence of any intermediary in the value chain.

In addition, labels, mostly AB and Demeter (European labels for organic and biodynamic cultivation), are critical for creating trust and a shared basic understanding of agricultural practices. Although there are many organic labels, these are the two most commonly used. They serve as tools for combining a broad set of agronomic practices that are translated into a single label, which is recognizable (on crates for instance) and demonstrates the farmer's concern for sustainability, health and ecological considerations. The network thus creates a framework of technical devices and social relations to foster new economic relations around food and new agricultural practices consistent with its alternative vision. Finally, this shows how the network acts as a performative engine, translating a set of principles into members' concrete food practices, which shape our food systems (see Figure 2, arrow 1).

THE PERFORMATION OF DIVERSE AND POTENTIALLY
CONTRADICTORY PRACTICES

In the CSAs we studied, it was obvious that the founding CSA principles we identified in the charter were not being observed in the concrete practices of some of the members in our study. We give examples of practices that deviated from the charter's principles in Table 1. The charter is not binding; it is not meant to be infringed but the network and local CSAs lack the resources to strictly enforce it. As one representative of the network explained:

> "At the moment we have other things to do than to engage in a witch hunt about who is following strictly the charter and who is not."

This impossibility of strictly enforcing the charter explains how members are able to enact diverse practices but not why they do so, which is the question to which we now turn.

We were left to explain a paradox: why do some CSA members make the effort to join an active CSA but still behave, as one interviewee told us in an informal discussion, "as if they're shopping in a regular supermarket." To try to understand this behavior, we integrated competing *agencements* into a CP framework to identify the diversity of CSA practices and organizational models.
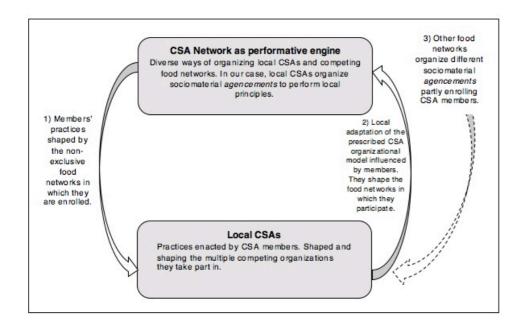
Figure 2 . Competing Food Networks performing diverse practices.

> Léa: "Anyway, you have fifty delivery networks. As for us, we insist that we are different from Food Assembly simply because we are an association. And because we are not an intermediary. (…) And I consider that we are not dealing with the same type of people in fact. We're different and… For sure, at first, we were the only network of this kind, so everybody was joining us. Well, now you have forty-five networks, so people who just want to buy local, well, they go elsewhere because they don't want to bother."

While exploring the development of CSA through the network, we found the influence of other alternative food networks to be striking. In the

above excerpt, Léa, who worked as a volunteer for the regional network, explained that CSA was competing with an increasing number of alternative food networks that might attract former CSA members. These organizations pursue their own agenda through sociotechnical *agencements* that partly overlap with CSA: the same organic labels are used and the same discourses about direct distribution are disseminated. We also learned that some farmers were supplying multiple networks simultaneously, meaning that the same vegetables circulate in diverse alternative food networks. Consumers also participate in several retail channels, thus becoming actors in various competing *agencements*. This is particularly salient in the food retail industry where individuals use a range of channels (Bellamy & Léveillé, 2007). We found that the boundaries became progressively blurred between these competing *agencements*:

> Corinne: "Yeah, I think I did not have much of an idea of CSA, you know… And then you have Food Assembly. You know they really bothered me. I'd read two or three articles and I did not want to be in a CSA at all. In fact, that was the symbol of CSA for me, Food Assembly. So I had a very bad… I mean, now I realize that CSAs work very well."

Corinne, who created a CSA at her university, explained that, at first, she was not able to draw a distinction between Food Assembly and CSA. She rejected the business orientation of Food Assembly[7] and it took her a while to realize that CSA, which was organized as a non-profit association, differs from Food Assembly.

To summarize, we found that CSAs are entangled with other alternative food networks. They share various actors and influence each other through feedback loops (see arrow 3 in Figure 2). The practices of CSA members are performatively shaped by other *agencements* in which they participate. These competing *agencements*, while trying to enroll actors, convey different subversive or mainstream projects. They also drill actors differently to carry out specific actions (Law, 1984). For instance, because other *agencements* manage to offer tomatoes in winter, CSA members are used to having a large choice of produce, even in winter—something local producers following the rules of organic labels cannot offer. These competing *agencements* attract members with varying ability to sustain the dedication required by CSA because, for instance, they do not know how to cook certain vegetables or because they will buy food from other retail channels. Overall, making CSA members more interested in these competing models may have detrimental effects that are contrary to what the CSA network aimed to engineer to begin with. This is consistent with the many testimonials of CSA managers complaining about members leaving CSA to use Food Assembly services:

> Sophie: "And if you go away for the weekend and on top of that you don't have time to cook, it might be overwhelming. Some left because they couldn't stand it anymore, they were throwing away food they couldn't cook, etc. So, if you don't benefit from the social relations, from the atmosphere of chatting with a farmer and other CSA members, well honestly, you just quit."

A second detrimental effect (from the network point of view) is local adaptation by CSAs which transform their subversive content. This happens through a feedback loop in which the members' varied practices will lead to local adaptation of CSA. Consequently, because the

7. Food Assembly is a for-profit organization that acts as a broker to connect local producers and consumers for weekly distribution without a long-term commitment. Consumers order what they want every week.

agencement has drifted, it will not perform the necessary subversive practices among members (see Figure 2). Actors in the CSA *agencement* will not necessarily create and update the *agencement* that was initially designed by the network. In other words, it will fail to perform the world it aimed to create in the first place.

> Interviewer: "And for you, the fact that it is not organic is not a problem? The fact that the vegetables are not organic?"
>
> Céline: "No, I am not—how can I put it? I am not obsessed with organic farming. I'm happy for the farmer, happy to know he's watchful, that he's not using just any chemicals, that he's reducing them as far as possible and that to grow carrots, either you weed or your carrots are eaten by the worms. In the end, it is organic in a sense. It is a largely artisanal approach in that you produce to feed people and to feed enough. I mean to have beautiful vegetable baskets and have variety and not tiny baskets because he wasn't able to produce enough, because he had, he had insects or I don't know what."
>
> (Céline has been a member of a non-organic CSA for five years)

This excerpt reveals the partial failure of the CSA performative engine. The sociomaterial *agencement*, based on the charter, aimed to perform a world of organic farming practices in which what is organic largely follows the labeling definitions and whose central tenet is the non-use of chemicals. By stating that it is "organic in a sense," Céline highlights the performative failure of the *agencement* and how the translation deviated. This impacts CSA: the farmer in Céline's community initially switched from chemical-dependent to organic production for a period of three years. After the legal period of three years had passed, he decided that it was too complicated to abide by the labels' rules; he therefore went back to using some chemicals. This led to some protests by community members. Céline did not protest and, like half the members, remained with the farmer, therefore breaking some of the CSA charter's principles. Despite this significant distortion, Céline has been engaged in CSA for five years, which shows that membership or basic behavior is not sufficient evidence to assess the CP of a specific engine. Indeed, CSA organizations are expanding but some are distancing themselves from the core objectives of the alternative movement and thus reorienting their critical stance toward different ends: a departure from what was intended to be engineered by the CSA network. Facing the emergence of many competing networks, CSAs will make their model less binding in order to keep the communities *attractive*, i.e. able to "enroll" participants and establish their identity and social relations (Callon, 1984). Table 1 presents a set of adaptations by members that we encountered in our interviews, showing the concrete ways in which CSA is "overflowing" (moving beyond its initial framework) (Callon, 1998a).

CSA subversive ideas and goals (from the charter)	Materialization of corresponding practices	Conflicts over practices	Alternative practices enacted in local CSAs
Organizational engagement	Weekly attendance at distributions	Constraint of rigid schedule	Non-members can pick up an acquaintance's basket
	Volunteers take turns organizing distributions	Hours-long presence at the distribution place	Some members skip their turn and more dedicated members have to manage the distributions more often
	Farmer's presence at the distribution	Time spent away from the farm	Drop & go deliveries by farm employees
Solidarity with the farmer	Yearly payments to provide cash flows to farmers	Long-term engagement proves difficult for students	Payment only one week in advance
	Seasonal contracts to account for variations in quantities	The farming season does not correspond to members' work schedule and holidays.	Creation of four-week contracts
	Visit and work occasionally on the farm	Long distance from urban centers and time consuming	Farm visits are optional
Social & environmental engagement	Favor local production	Lack of food diversity	Contract with a wholesaler to provide fruit
	Follow organic label rules	Constraining mode of production	Engagement with a farmer who practices "semi-organic" agriculture (not full compliance with organic rules)
	Foster biodiversity	Provision of unknown produce	Pressure to reduce production to an acceptable and "manageable" assortment of vegetables
Ethics in daily practices	Regular deliveries of "on-hand" products	No knowledge of incoming deliveries' content	Option to order and choose in advance specific vegetables
	Prices negotiated annually at general assemblies	Opacity about what is included in the price	Prices set by the farmer
	Transparency about conditions of the farm	Understanding the farmer's global market opportunities	Farmers deliver their less-appealing products to the CSA
Diffusion of the CSA model	Short supply chains make organic products affordable	Negotiated prices are still too high for low-income households	Creation of solidarity baskets paid for by better-off members
	Spread CSA principles	Need for full knowledge of the CSA stakes and principles	Members not signing/not aware of the charter
	Organize additional events on global food issues	Time-consuming events	Most CSAs did not organize such events.

Table 1 - The diverse and conflicting practices within CSAs

DISCUSSION

Critical scholars have recently developed the concept of CP to engage in affirmative critical research (Spicer et al., 2009). The aim is to foster activism and interventions in alternative organizations (King, 2015; Reedy & King, 2017) and to support middle managers in their reflexive thinking (Hartmann, 2014; Schaefer & Wickert, 2016; Wickert & Schaefer, 2015). While some scholars have expressed their skepticism about CP, others have explored how alternative organizations could be developed through performative engines (Leca et al., 2014). We extend the CP research agenda by taking account of the struggles in which alternative organizations are entangled. These struggles cause permanent

reconfigurations of *agencements* and make the future effects of performative engines uncertain. Our results show how the CSA network uses knowledge circulation, translation and feedback loops to act as a performative engine. Yet we observe a diversity of practices among CSAs. Despite a common charter and vision about subverting mainstream agricultural practices, CSA members—with different values and influenced by other food networks in which they participate—enact various practices that are not always fully aligned with the CSA program. These dynamics transform what CSA is actually doing and its critical potential.

This article offers two interrelated contributions. Firstly, through empirical evidence it shows that CP is not a stable program but is one that undergoes constant local adaptation by actors because of mutually influenced performative programs (Sage et al., 2013). The struggles affecting the performative engine explain deviations from the initial program and transformations of alternative organizations over time. Secondly, it advances our knowledge about CP's potential for failure (Fleming & Banerjee, 2016). The transformations are not neutral but indicate variations of the critical content carried by the network and its normative shifts. Without a stable critical agenda, the future of performative interventions is uncertain.

ADAPTING CRITICAL PERFORMATIVE PROGRAMS

The case of French CSA highlights the contrasting effects of the national and regional networks as performative engines. New CSAs are emerging thanks to financial support, farmer and volunteer training and the publication of a charter. Our results nevertheless corroborate older analyses that show the local adaptation of CSA principles (Ripoll, 2009). A decade after these first studies on CSA, the charter has evolved and the institutional network has structured itself, but the discrepancies remain. Our study helps to explain local deviations as resulting from competition with other performative programs (Sage et al., 2013), partially enrolling CSA members and diverse food practices. Through the charter and the engineering of local CSAs, CSA institutions have created a subversive social imaginary about food, but these local CSAs have partially resisted this vision by implementing alternative practices inspired by competing critical programs (see Figure 3).
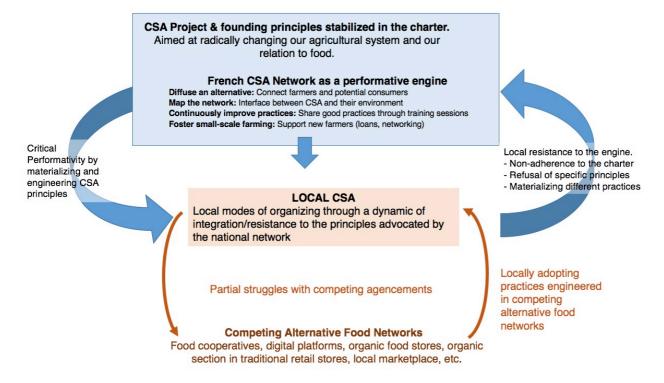
CSA Project & founding principles stabilized in the charter.
Aimed at radically changing our agricultural system and our relation to food.

French CSA Network as a performative engine
Diffuse an alternative: Connect farmers and potential consumers
Map the network: Interface between CSA and their environment
Continuously improve practices: Share good practices through training sessions
Foster small-scale farming: Support new farmers (loans, networking)

Critical Performativity by materializing and engineering CSA principles

Local resistance to the engine.
- Non-adherence to the charter
- Refusal of specific principles
- Materializing different practices

LOCAL CSA
Local modes of organizing through a dynamic of integration/resistance to the principles advocated by the national network

Partial struggles with competing agencements

Locally adopting practices engineered in competing alternative food networks

Competing Alternative Food Networks
Food cooperatives, digital platforms, organic food stores, organic section in traditional retail stores, local marketplace, etc.

Figure 3 . Diversity and Struggles in Critical Performativity

This study questions the transformative potential of CP by showing frictions in the engine. New developments in CP research (Cabantous et al., 2016; Learmonth et al., 2016; Leca et al., 2014) enable us to describe the concrete networks and material devices established to create new organizations and thus subvert the mainstream food system. But this goal has recently been challenged: "At times, it also seems as if the critical performativity argument is rooted in an urge to control the ways in which performativity operates, […] this resembles the managerial anxiety of not being in control, of not being on top of things, of not being able to determine the destiny of one's actions" (Spolestra & Svensson, 2016: 74). In the case of French CSA, we see that the engine is only partially in control. Actors locally adapt their practices and consequently are not fully driven by the engine. While it is true that performative engines participate in the development of alternative organization (Leca et al., 2014), our case study reveals permanent reconfigurations and a lack of control over the subversive project to implement. Overall, this makes it difficult to draw conclusions about the success or failure of critical performative programs.

NORMATIVE DRIFTS OF CRITICAL PERFORMATIVE PROGRAMS

Secondly, drawing on research on competition between performative programs (Allen et al., 2018; Sage et al., 2013;), we show that this competition is not neutral but involves a shifting normative framework. The different practices express different agendas, revealing diverse visions of what agricultural and food practices ought to be rather than a single project defined by the engine. Within a CP framework aimed at subverting practices (Spicer et al., 2009), this is a key issue that takes us back to the question of which critical agenda scholars would like to push forward. Defining what a critical agenda might be is not easy (Adler, Forbes & Willmott, 2007; Alvesson & Deetz, 1996), but it also appears that scholars cannot control how actors in the field will apprehend the agenda. The

uncertainty around the normative dimension of CP (Spicer et al., 2009) sheds light on the difficulties of an activist view of CP (King, 2015; King & Learmonth, 2015). If the normative basis is shifting, a critical assessment through time of the performative engine appears necessary for considering the engineered organizations in relation to engaged scholars' critical agenda. We therefore re-examine the role of critical scholars in light of a project with unstable normative grounds that may challenge their initial critical agenda. In doing this, we extend the CP research agenda by simultaneously considering alternative organizations and the diverse struggles in which they are entangled. These struggles cause permanent reconfigurations to *agencements* and make the future effects of performative engines uncertain.

Regarding the practical implications for the CSA network, our study raises the critical issue of members leaving for other food networks. Members are volunteers, which makes it difficult for them to invest time and sustainably engage in two different direct distribution networks. It is therefore vital to secure CSA members' commitment by better explaining their role in the CSA and making the distinctive effects of their engagement more visible.

LIMITATIONS

This case study remains an analysis of a performative engine developed by actors "in the wild." Further empirical research on the direct involvement of critical scholars is still needed (Huault et al., 2017). Secondly, to be able to explore the consequences of competing *agencements* in greater depth, we limited ourselves to only a few other food networks, primarily Food Assembly. Food organizations are diverse, so are food practices (Briner & Sturdy, 2008), and many more competing *agencements* should be explored to better understand the multiplicity of performativity and how subversive *agencements* are influenced by broader, sometimes more mainstream organizations (Fleming & Banerjee, 2016). Finally, our study mainly focused on CSAs in the Paris area. It revealed a multiplicity of performativities, a variety of sociomaterial *agencements* and different forms of distortion. However, it does not look at other CSA networks, other forms of CSA and other results of these struggles between competing *agencements*. The small number of interviewees allowed us to analyze different food practices and engagement with CSA, but not to quantify the prevalence of those profiles.

CONCLUSION

Our article contributes to the debates about the potential of critical performativity by looking at the struggles between different performative engines and the alternative organizations they contribute to creating. We show, through a CSA case study, how these struggles contribute to reconfiguring *agencements* and making the future effects of performative engines uncertain. These reconfigurations show that a performative engine cannot enforce a single stable critical agenda; instead it creates diverse normative contents due to the influence of other, overlapping, performative engines. These other normative contents may be less critical or carry a different critical agenda and call for consideration of how critical performative programs develop over time.

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