

# Performative Representation of “Others” in the Opera Genre

## The Case of *Have a Good Day!*

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### ABSTRACT

Western opera has a longstanding tradition (from Giovanni Battista Pergolesi to Astor Piazzolla) of the representation of the lower strata of society, which usually involves appropriation of the performativity of social groups other than the composer's own. Such procedure is made for transgressive aims in order to affect the status quo of public discourse and improve social reality. The aim of the research presented in this article is to empirically establish whether the performative representation of a socially vulnerable group in opera affects and empowers individuals belonging to the group. A case in point is a contemporary opera *Have A Good Day!* (2011) by Lithuanian authors Lina Lapelytė, Vaiva Grainytė, and Rugilė Barzdžiukaitė, which represents the professional activities of supermarket cashiers. The article presents the results of empirical research on the reception of the opera. The research was undertaken by showing the opera to participants who actually work as cashiers. Consequently, the participants were interviewed, and a qualitative content analysis of the gathered data was conducted. The argument of the article is based on theoretical insights on empowerment by Grant Kester, who suggests that artists, in an attempt to empower, might still be exercising unequal power relations. Thus, the real transgression might never take place. The argument of this article is that *Have a Good Day!* attempts to, but fails to empower its subjects.

### KEYWORDS

opera, performativity, socially vulnerable groups, ethics, reception, transgression

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# Performative Representation of “Others” in the Opera Genre The Case of *Have a Good Day!*

## Introduction

The aim of this research is to establish whether the performative representation of socially vulnerable groups in the genre of opera affects and empowers the individuals represented. Numerous examples of Western opera, such as Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart’s *La Nozze di Figaro* (1786) and *Don Giovanni* (1787), Giuseppe Verdi’s *Rigoletto* (1851) and *La Traviata* (1853), Alban Berg’s *Wozzeck* (1922), George Gershwin’s *Porgy and Bess* (1935), and many more, belong to the tradition of showcasing characters who represent a particular socio-economic category on the basis of gender, class, ethnicity, age, disability, or (more rarely) a profession other than the composer’s own. The opera characters representing a particular socio-economic category usually adopt specific features of sonic, verbal, or visual theatricality common to the social group represented. In this context, this theatricality is to be understood as performativity.

Admittedly, the borrowing of elements from different cultural domains is at the core of many art forms. For example, the deliberate inclusion of elements of folk music in a score of professional music intended for aristocratic or bourgeois audiences is common. It is also common for an author, in this case a composer, to choose the cultural or social “other” as a subject in order to improve social reality. However, the so-called social turn in the Western art tradition, related to relational aesthetics and dating back to the early 1990s,<sup>1</sup> pointed to and launched an everlasting discussion about the inherent inequality between a culture that borrows and a culture from which it borrows. Inequality occurs when the adoption of non-material property in art is based on the appropriation of both cultural and social elements, circulating outside the economic, cultural, and social field of the author.

On the following pages, the case study of *Have A Good Day!*, an opera which showcases supermarket cashiers, will be presented. Consequently, two research questions will be addressed. RQ1: How do cashiers react to the performative representation of their professional and social identity in the opera genre? RQ2: Does the performative representation of their professional and social identity in a work of art empower them? Next, the theoretical background on empowerment and appropriation in the arts will be discussed. Then the details of the empirical research will be presented as well as the main findings and arguments.

## Opera *Have A Good Day!*: The Daily Grind of a Cashier

*Have A Good Day!* is an example of an opera, produced by the independent production house Operomanija and premiered at the Lithuanian Contemporary Alternative Opera and interdisciplinary art festival NOA (New Opera Action) in 2011. The production was presented at a number of international music, theatre, and opera festivals in Lithuania, the USA, China, Russia, Latvia, Estonia, France, Germany, Switzerland, Ukraine, Portugal, the Netherlands, and Italy, and over thirty major festivals and organizations. The opera was awarded numerous

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1 Bishop 2006, 2.

prizes in Lithuania and was deliberately chosen for this research.



Figure 1: Opera *Have A Good Day!*, photo by Rugilė Barzdžiukaitė

*Have A Good Day!* is an opera for ten cashiers, supermarket sounds, and piano, created by Lithuanian artists Lina Lapelytė (music), Vaiva Grainytė (libretto), and Rugilė Barzdžiukaitė (stage director). The authors of the opera disclosed that they were interested in exploring the politics of shopping centres, the behind-the-scenes aspects of cashiers' workplaces, as well as stories of cashiers they personally knew.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, each story sung by a cashier in the opera is fictional and is grounded solely in the authors' imagination. The opera is structured by arias and choruses sung by the cashiers, accompanied by monotonous beeps indicating items being scanned. The music and libretto do not follow a clear dramatic line but present separate stories of each cashier through arias that eventually merge into a harmonious choir. The opera simulates everyday supermarket situations through a performative representation of a prototype of cashiers, with their inner monologues performed by professional artists.

The authors of *Have A Good Day!* declare that, in addition to the opera's aesthetic goals, it also has a clear political agenda. One of the primary objectives of the authors is to shed light on individuals who appear robotic, but in fact, are human.<sup>3</sup> Through ironic criticism of capitalism, the authors aim to give these invisible characters a voice and present them under a magnifying glass,<sup>4</sup> "to raise them higher than they are viewed in everyday life."<sup>5</sup> The latter objective of the authors of the opera is associated with the notion of empowerment – namely with an attempt to change the perception and self-perception of a cashier in reality.

### **Ethical Implications of Transgressive Art**

Many contemporary theatre forms engage social reality critically and raise questions about social inequality in response to political discussions. Such projects seek to transgress and transform the societal status quo. The research presented in this article dwells on the theoretical definition of transgression proposed by Jacques Rancière. Corresponding to the discussions of art and politics, Rancière proposes that examples of art that "set out to build awareness of the mechanisms of domination to turn the spectator into a conscious agent of world transformation" are the most politically effective forms of art.<sup>6</sup> Rancière's reference to Bertolt Brecht's notion

2 Juodelienė 2013.

3 Festival Passages 2015.

4 Théâtre contemporain 2015.

5 Festival Passages 2015.

6 Rancière 2004, 83.

of political theatre implies the use of artistic influence to serve as a representative voice for those who face exploitation under capitalism, subsequently improving their social well-being.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, many contemporary artists adopt Brecht's concept of political theatre, viewing art as a transgressive dialogical realm that centres on a specific social space within a specific context. This prompts viewers to focus on particular political issues. The opera *Have a Good Day!* is an example of such an artistic response to societal inequality, which depicts the daily routine of supermarket cashiers. By choosing an unusual theme, the authors encourage a critical gaze. The act of appropriating cultural or social "others" in opera invites not only political and aesthetic



*Figure 2: Opera Have A Good Day!, photo by Rugilė Barzdžiukaitė*

questions, but also ethical ones.<sup>8</sup> It must be acknowledged that the appropriation of cultures that are considered a minority is an act of oppression due to the unequal social and economic power dynamic between the appropriator and the appropriated culture.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, the notion of potential damage to the authenticity of the appropriated culture and issues of authorship must also be considered.<sup>10</sup> Thus, the empirical segment of the study will explore aspects of cultural appropriation, including the actual response of a social group performatively represented in the opera, as well as the transgressive effects of performing "others". Before delving into the empirical phase, let us examine some theoretical approaches, such as the ethical implications of appropriating cultural or social "others" in art, as well as the capability of empowerment.

Locating unprivileged subjects in an artwork involves a vertical power relation, where the artist occupies a position of power and makes a moral assessment of a specific situation.<sup>11</sup> According to Grant Kester, this can lead to an ethical deviation, as the artist self-imposes the privilege of deciding which social groups are vulnerable and can be included in the artwork. As a result, a twofold transgression may occur. Firstly, political activism conveyed through the representation of a specific social group within an artwork proposes an individual proposition to correct an imperfect society. Secondly, the author is using their professional authority as a symbolic meaning regulator, while the represented group may have a different idea.<sup>12</sup>

The latter concept implies that the author and the social group they represent may not have shared symbolic meanings. Therefore, the political message intentionally created by the author

7 Brecht 2000, 27.

8 Young 2000, 302.

9 Young 2010, ix.

10 Young 2000, 306–8.

11 Rosero 2013, 99.

12 Kester 1995, 8.

may not always be recognized by the audience, who may have different cultural and social experiences. Furthermore, in considering the representation of socially vulnerable groups within the realm of art, Kester notes that the artist often occupies a position of privilege, enjoying the specific advantages of their status while also claiming the moral authority to advocate on behalf of the exploited.<sup>13</sup> The unequal economic and social positions of the author and the group they represent imply that socially vulnerable groups are marginalized by the dominant class. Therefore, individuals from vulnerable groups do not have access to privileged networks. Kester suggests that the concept of "others" serves as a foundation for artistic products and "the necessary vehicles for the bourgeois subject's spiritual evolution."<sup>14</sup> What Kester considers to be a bourgeois subject could potentially be applied to the wider population who possess the means and desire to attend theatre.

The notion of empowerment through art is also relevant to the aim of this research, which is to establish whether the representation of socially vulnerable groups in the genre of opera affects and empowers individuals who are considered socially vulnerable. As Kester notes, an artist is understood as "empowered" – creatively, intellectually, symbolically, expressively, financially, institutionally, or otherwise, while a given subject is defined a priori as "in need of" empowerment.<sup>15</sup> Rancière, declaring a potential audience of critically engaged art as "others", notes that those who are exploited by dominant mechanisms should feel empowered and mobilized to transform the order set by the dominant mechanisms<sup>16</sup>.

Psychology contributes to the theory of empowerment, with Julian Rappaport viewing it as a mechanism that enables individuals to gain control over their own affairs.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, he states that "empowerment conveys both a psychological sense of personal control or influence and a concern with actual social influence, political power, and legal rights."<sup>18</sup> In Rappaport's theory, empowerment comprises self-acceptance, self-confidence, and the capacity to make decisive actions and engage in community decision-making.<sup>19</sup> Additionally, Marc Zimmermann emphasises the communal facets of empowerment. Zimmermann suggests that a community empowered to initiate community improvement efforts has a positive impact on the individual level. Empowered individuals possess a combination of a sense of control, critical awareness of their sociopolitical environment, and community involvement.<sup>20</sup> The empirical research presented below does not aim to include the conceptual framework of the scientific context of psychology. Yet, the comments from both art theory and the works of Rappaport and Zimmermann formed the basis of the research design's conceptual framework.

In terms of empowerment, the high symbolic capital of art and the works of art are an essential factor. Pierre Bourdieu's empirical research explains and clarifies the elitism of highbrow culture. Classical music, particularly opera, is recognised as a characteristic of the upper class<sup>21</sup> because it corresponds to the tastes and economic, social, and cultural capital of the upper class.<sup>22</sup> While the common perception of highbrow art is commonly associated with the decoding of cultural symbols, Bourdieu argues that only those in the upper class possess this ability. Attending cultural events on a regular basis is considered an important social ritual of the upper class.<sup>23</sup> Arguably, in the course of the twentieth century, efforts were made to make opera more accessible. However, in Lithuania, the elite status of opera is maintained. For instance, in a press release distributed before some of the performances at the Lithuanian National Opera and Ballet Theatre and subsequently uploaded on the website of the LNOBT, a formal dress code

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13 Kester 1995, 25.

14 Kester 1995, 25.

15 Kester 2005, 21.

16 Rancière 2004, 83.

17 Rappaport 1981, 15.

18 Rappaport 1987, 122.

19 Rappaport & Zimmermann 1988, 726.

20 Zimmermann 2000, 49-50.

21 Bourdieu relates class to the level of education: the working class is associated with a secondary education, the middle class – with a higher education (college, not providing a degree), upper-class – with a higher education (providing a degree) (Bourdieu 1984, 15–16).

22 Bourdieu 1984, 14–16.

23 Bourdieu 1984, 14–16.



requiring black tie attire is strongly recommended for attendees.<sup>24</sup>

However, in the eye of the represented subject highbrow art might produce an alienating effect, thus failing to empower. As Bourdieu argues, the differentiation between *savoir* (understanding) and *voir* (seeing) resembles a social distinction: while an upper-class spectator is able to reflect on a symbolic level and interpret cultural codes by applying cultural knowledge, a lower-class spectator reflects on a depicted object and its resemblance to reality. Additionally, the contemplation of art by lower-class audiences is based on emotional rather than intellectual experience<sup>25</sup>. As follows, a lower class audience, while coming into contact with the examples of highbrow art, encounters a less familiar conceptual framework of the artwork as well, and finds themselves disoriented in a chaotic world of art.<sup>26</sup>

Bourdieu's idea of *savoir* and *voir*, which corresponds to Kester's observations on the economic, social, and cultural differences between an artist and the social group represented, suggests that the reception of art is shaped by objective factors such as social and intellectual experience. Thus, the interpretation of a political message by different audiences may depend on various levels of reception – symbolic, explained earlier, and informational. Roland Barthes identifies the first level of reception as the informational level, which presents the performance characters, setting, and place, leaving little space for interpretation.<sup>27</sup> Later in this article, we will discuss how audiences who do not regularly encounter opera perceive its artistic content, conceptual framework, and interpret its political message, using *Have A Good Day!* as a case study. Rancière has observed issues of disassociation and highlighted the disparity between what is seen and what is thought, as well as the distinction between what is thought and what is felt.<sup>28</sup> Hence, the representation of "others" in the examples of high-brow art does not necessarily provoke the audience to critically reconsider the elements of social injustice represented in a work of art.

This research does not seek to criticise the audience's interpretation or the authors of this opera. Instead, it aims to examine the actual response of a represented social group and to critically glance at the deep-rooted tradition of performative representation of the "others" in the genre of opera. The choice of *Have A Good Day!* was determined by the popularity of the opera and its recognition in the field of music and theatre criticism, its concept based on minimalist aesthetics and simplified structures of the music and a simplified form of the opera, the authors' statements regarding the performative representation of a cashier, as well as the political message of the opera and its relevance to today's social and political context.

### Methods and Data

The empirical research focuses on the reception of the opera *Have A Good Day!* The research was undertaken while carrying out reception research on the opera *Have A Good Day!*, which was shown to seven participants who work as cashiers. The participants were found through social media. After submitting a public call for reception research, only seven potential participants responded, therefore, they were chosen for the research. By coincidence, all the participants were female. No other demographic data about the participants was collected. However, as the conception of cultural capital is essential to Bourdieu's idea of cultural competence, the participants' relationship with operatic culture is significant. Accordingly, the participants were asked about their frequency of visiting the opera house. The responses were brief: they claimed they rarely or never go. Some participants provided brief feedback indicating a preference for operetta or musical instead of operas, or expressing discontent after watching operas on TV. Nonetheless, these views suggest a lack of familiarity with the opera genre in their surroundings.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the reception research was carried out in a virtual format: the link received from the production company Operomanija was sent to the participants of the reception research individually, so the preview of the opera was performed individually. In order to retain the reception of the opera as natural and relevant to the social environment

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24 Remeika 2021.

25 Bourdieu 1984, 3.

26 Bourdieu 1984, 3.

27 Barthes 1977, 55–60.

28 Rancière 2004, 83–5.

of the cashiers, only basic information about the opera was given. Finally, the participants were interviewed using a semi-structured interview approach consisting of nine questions. The participants were asked to share their impressions of the opera, including any emotions that arose during the preview, their response to the portrayal of professional identity, and whether they identified with the cashiers depicted. The study also examined the opera's potential to foster a sense of community and its impact on the participants. Finally, the researchers inquired about the participants' familiarity with the opera genre and whether they would be willing to participate in similar artistic projects themselves. Finally, an inductive strategy was used to perform a qualitative content analysis of the collected data.

The data of the research was interpreted by forming two main categories and aiming to establish: (a) do actual cashiers identify with fictional representations of themselves and how empowered they feel; (b) how the form of an opera contributes towards a potential transgressive effect.

### **Resemblance to Reality and its Effect on Self-Perception**

Asked to give their views on the opera *Have A Good Day!*, participants compared the situation depicted in the performance with a real-life equivalent. They commented that the opera was "from the working day,"<sup>29</sup>: "honest because everything that is sung is true," and "the everyday life of a cashier is sung." Several participants reflected on their own experiences as cashiers: "The life of a cashier is very monotonous, placing goods from morning to evening, people who go shopping are commonly angry, it is hard,": "they were singing from their experience,": "the facts were correct.". Various participants found the opera to be humorous, as the situations depicted resembled real-life occurrences, such as serving customers with a full bladder. These reflections indicate that the opera was received as a faithful portrayal of reality. The performativity of a cashier in the opera genre was not considered extraordinary, weird, or exciting by the informants. They stated that "every profession can be sung" and that "there is nothing extraordinary about it", "it [my reaction] was normal", and "it makes no difference who is depicted".

Most of the participants' reflections were assigned to the informational level and were compared to social reality. Although they acknowledged the representation as a convincing artistic simulation of a cashier's identity and recognized their own performativity as cashiers, they did not provide any insights into the improvement of their self-confidence or questioning of their own sense of self. However, the participants persisted in recounting narratives rooted in their individual experiences working as cashiers.



*Figure 3: Opera Have A Good Day!, photo by Modestas Enriuška*

<sup>29</sup> All the translations from Lithuanian were done by the author of this article.

The findings indicate that the opera did not affect the participants' self-perception or their view of their professional identity and community. The participants declared they "already knew about the reality of the cashiers before watching the opera", but it was "interesting to see it from the side". The majority of participants were clear in their views: watching the opera did not lead to any change or sense of community. They provided explanations such as "I'm not looking for friendship at work", "I already knew that the cashier's job is really hard", "I try to be respectful to my colleagues anyway". Yet, when asked whether the opera would affect more if it was based on real cashiers instead of appropriated representation, all the respondents reacted positively. In addition, the majority declared their willingness to participate in an analogous artistic project based on a representation of a real cashier.

The research reveals that most of the participants in the research reflected on the informational level of the opera. As a result, the political message conveyed through the artistic language of the performance went unnoticed. The critical perspective, explicitly stated by the authors, remained undetected as the participants did not gain any insights into the phenomenon of capitalism. Additionally, the tough daily routine of a cashier was interpreted as a familiar reality rather than as exploitation carried out by the dominant mechanism.

### **Emotional Response**

As previously mentioned, the majority of the participants' feedback pertains to their informational level of reception. Consequently, only a handful of respondents delved into its conceptual aspects. While a few participants found the opera to be "interesting" or "creative", they did not expand on their comments. Other participants evaluated the aesthetics of the opera as "weird", "incomprehensible", "squeaking", "or screaming". However, they did not specify which aspects of the opera were perplexing or unusual, such as the libretto, music, synopsis, or other artistic elements. One of the participants highlighted a negative experience when viewing the opera, stating that it was "depressing" due to the "monotony of the singers' voices." However, it was not clear whether the monotony was present in the score or the execution of certain singers.

Additionally, the polyphonic texture of the vocal part of the opera was interpreted as "sutartinės" (the specific Lithuanian polyphonic form of singing). The visual concept of the opera, which included separate platforms for the singers (cashiers), was deemed "extraordinary". One participant could not relate the visuality of the opera to her previous experience regarding the opera genre. The participant was also surprised by the fact that *Have A Good Day!* "did not have one huge podium [stage] which is common for the opera genre," as well as that "the people [the audience] are not dressed as fancily as usual." The findings indicate that the participants were unable to identify the artistic means of the opera, nor did they possess a common artistic vocabulary. Consequently, they were unable to effectively articulate their reflections on the opera's artistic language and conceptuality of the opera. This implies a lack of cultural experience so that even reduced and simplified musical language sounded confusing to them.

Upon reflection on the representation of cashiers in the opera and its resemblance to real-life cashiers, the participants provided insight indicating that the evaluation of the opera was based on their emotional experience. However, the majority of the emotions expressed after watching the opera were negative. Only a minority of participants reported empathetic insights resulting from the negative emotions, with some revealing feelings of pity or self-pity. They claimed that the sense of pity stemmed from the personal experiences of the cashiers and the monotony "was felt in the opera," thus, according to them, "the screaming spirit of the saleswoman," and "the smell of depression is transmitted to the audience and causes sadness." However, the participants failed to offer any insights into the wider context, exploring the portrayal of cashiers, or proposing a new critical approach to the unprivileged existence of a cashier. Additionally, the majority of the participants reported experiencing adverse emotions while watching the opera as unacceptable and unpleasant. Furthermore, some of the informants even expressed their reluctance to continue watching the opera, claiming that "the screaming voices made me sick," and "I thought I was going mad – Jesus Christ, what was that? I can no longer listen to this." It is apparent that the uncomfortable experience of the opera viewing is perceived as an annoying and incomprehensible example of art, belonging to a different intellectual sphere, rather than as a rational critical engagement with a discourse of social injustice.



Some participants found the opera funny, but the majority could not elaborate on what caused this reaction. Certain participants revealed that their perception of the opera was influenced by their individual level of understanding. A cashier, portraying the optimistic cashier archetype in the performance, was identified as a "drinking" character. While considering the performance of this specific character in the opera, one participant stated that their "colleagues are generally normal. Some were drinking, but we said farewell to them." Additionally, another participant disclosed that they initially believed the opera was a real advertisement for the supermarket due to the production's visuals. At first, they perceived the opera as an advertisement. She stated that the idea was prompted by the performative visualization of the supermarket. However, while watching the opera, she asserted feeling sadness, pity, and "spreading depression." The participant revealed that, in the context of "strange" feelings, an image arose when the rosary was sung at the funeral. All of these elements combined to make the opera feel like the rosary prayer at a funeral.

The interpretation of the opera's artistic and political agenda that does not align with the authors' guidelines displays a dominance of individual reception. These interpretations are linked to Barthes's idea of *third meaning*,<sup>30</sup> which reflects individual reflections instead of objective factors such as cultural competence, knowledge, or social and cultural context. However, these independent interpretations and overall research findings reveal that the respondents were unaware of the authors' intended irony.

## Discussion

The social group represented in the opera belongs to a different social and cultural group from that of the opera's authors (considering Bourdieu's theory – as well as the economic group, where Bourdieu identifies it as a lower social class<sup>31</sup>). This example can be seen as a form of appropriation of the performativity of the "others". Hereby, with regards to the potential damage to the authenticity of appropriated culture,<sup>32</sup> as discussed earlier in this article, the use of a cashier's performativity initiates a discourse on stereotyping cashiers. In this context, the responsibility for establishing certain stereotypes of cashiers lies with the authors of *Have A Good Day!* Furthermore, the issue of specific objective criteria, which were not addressed in this study, that enable the classification of a social group as socially vulnerable, relates to Kester's notion of unequal social and economic positions between the author and the group they represent.<sup>33</sup> In this instance, the representation of the "others" functions as an artistic, but not politically effective, agenda of the opera; thus, *Have A Good Day!* establishes the elitist trend of activist art, while having no real positive effect on the actual "others".

However, the research findings are incongruent with Rancière's conception of transgression, indicating that critical art is engaged with the audience's intentions to transform social reality.<sup>34</sup> Instead, the idea of dissociation proposed by Rancière emerges.<sup>35</sup> The absence of a connection between what is thought and what is felt (such as the disconnection between pity and empathy declared by the participants), and a lack of cultural competence to decode symbolic meanings interrupt the dialogue between the authors and the audience. As the opera's reception is limited to the informational level and is based on Bourdieu's conception of *voir*,<sup>36</sup> the participants in the reception research did not recognise the symbolically conveyed political message and interpreted it as an accurate visualisation of analogous situations in reality. Moreover, the participants' feedback indicates that the complexity of contemporary music is perceived as obscure. This aligns with Bourdieu's theory that an audience with a dissimilar intellectual background to the composer perceives the conceptual framework of the artwork as disorderly and alien to their past artistic encounters.<sup>37</sup>

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30 Barthes 1977, 55-60.

31 Bourdieu, 1984.

32 Young 2000, 306–8.

33 Young 2000, 306–8.

34 Rancière 2004, 83.

35 Rancière 2004, 83–5.

36 Bourdieu, 1984, 14.

37 Bourdieu, 1984, 14

Finally, neither a process of self-identification with analogous identity represented in the opera genre nor emotional experiences evoked by the opera are compatible with a psychological sense of personal self-control or self-confidence, a sense of involvement in the community, or intentions to improve the social well-being of the community – all of which Rappaport and Zimmermann attribute to the conception of empowerment.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, the unfamiliar and incomprehensible aesthetics of artworks can alienate the audience from the intended political message. As a result, it hinders the encouragement of adopting a critical perspective towards the represented subject matter.

### Conclusions

Two research questions were formulated at the beginning of this article. RQ1: How do cashiers react to the performative representation of their professional and social identity in the opera genre? RQ2: Does the performative representation of their professional and social identity in a work of art empower them?

In answering those questions, it can be concluded that the reactions of “others” to the performative representation of their professional and social identity in the opera genre are based on comparing reality to the performance. In addition, the incomprehensibility of the opera’s artistic content makes it difficult for the audience to relate it to their previous cultural experience, thus resulting in negative emotions for those who lack the cultural competence necessary to appreciate it. Furthermore, accurate recognition of the professional and social identity of “others” in highbrow art does not alter the self-perception of “others”. Therefore, the performative representation of “others”, which is linked to the personal social encounter of “others,” rather than the overall issues of social inequality and exploitation, is not seen as a call to empowerment. Moreover, no other aspects of the opera’s political agenda, such as ironical critiques of capitalism, were addressed.

Therefore, the performative representation of “others” fails to generate the expected transgressive political impact by the opera’s authors. The research indicates that there is no alteration of self-perception or empowerment among the real cashiers. On the contrary – the disapproving responses of cashiers towards their professional and social representation in the opera genre reveal a subversive impact of representation of “others”. The difficulty in comprehending the conceptual aspects of highbrow contemporary art aesthetics does not only expose social distinction between the author and the “others”, but it also dissuades them from engaging in highbrow cultural consumption. This indicates an increase in social exclusion of marginalized groups. It could be contended that the performativity of the “others” in *Have a Good Day!* missed an opportunity to empower them, and that the authors’ political agenda ultimately failed.

### AUTHOR

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<sup>38</sup> Rappaport 1981, 15; Rappaport 1987, 122; Rappaport & Zimmermann 1988, 726; Zimmermann 2000, 49–50.

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