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Reconciling contradictory paths: identity play and work in a career transition

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to understand the interconnection of identity play and identity work during transitions.

Design/methodology/approach – The authors have conducted a 46-year longitudinal and process-based study on film director Denys Arcand. The focus is on his contested career shift from being a political documentary filmmaker to a box-office success and maker of television commercials. Films and media interviews were largely and systematically analyzed.

Findings – In order to explain how to maintain a sense of authenticity in transitioning between contradictory paths, the authors highlight how identity play and identity work appear in self-fuelling interaction through four processes (fragmenting, developing, mixing, and extracting).

Practical implications – The authors suggest new ways to deal with career transitions as well as identity construction in constraining environments.

Originality/value – The authors offer a theoretical framework that makes it possible to combine understandings of identity play and identity work. In particular, the authors develop on how, through play, individuals can create circumstances favourable for performing identity work in the future.

Keywords Identity work, Career transition, Film analysis, Identity play

Paper type Case study

Introduction

In moments of high uncertainty and self-doubt, we are stimulated to stabilize our self-conceptions by searching for and constructing our identities. During transitions, or in other situations that present challenges to our self-understandings, we are able to express a new identity through ongoing revisions of our self-narratives by drawing from a repertoire of possibilities (Ibarra and Barbulescu, 2010). In these instances, individuals are understood to work their identities to achieve an "optimal balance" between integrating their self-understandings ("who am I?") and collective values ("who are we?") (Kreiner *et al.*, 2006). While previous research emphasizes individuals' ongoing efforts to validate an identity in the face of social constraints, we argue that this identity work is driven by the imaginative, introspective, and playful engagements in self-discovery that deviate from social expectations rather than comply with them.

Indeed, transitions involve not only the sustaining of "who I am" but also the discovery itself of "who I want to become". This process of exploration may open up multiple, unthought-of possibilities for the future, which may or not be eventually adopted, involving dreams and even fantasies that may not yet be sufficiently mature

to be displayed in interaction. Thus, besides the social struggles involved in identity work, in which people draw from available discourses to validate their identities, we argue that this process also involves play and diversion from social norms (De Certeau, 1988). However, since identity play and identity work have mainly been treated within separate streams of research, we know little about how these orientations interact. While Ibarra and Petriglieri's (2010) conceptual contribution provides us with important insights by opposing these two concepts, the divide between play and work appears instead to be reinforced.

Hence, by focusing on the interaction between play and work in identity construction, our research question is this:

RQ1. How do individuals discover new paths in experimenting with ongoing and often conflicting understandings of "who I am", "who I was", and "who I want to become"?

More precisely, we seek to investigate how individuals deal with the tension between reinventing themselves and striving for continuity when the future appears in opposition with the past. Thus, by exploring the interconnection between experimentation and social validation, our main contributions relate to the identity play and work literatures.

We study identity play and work with a case study on Canadian film director Denys Arcand. We focus on his career shift from directing politically oriented documentaries, with a critical view on capitalism, to directing both box-office successes and corporate advertisements. Since Arcand appears to have become what he used to attack, his rather drastic career shift enables us examine how he creatively deals with the contradictions, uncertainties, and even anxieties of his transitional period.

The analysis addresses mainly a large corpus of Arcand's interviews with movie critics and on the film *Jésus de Montréal*. These longitudinal data (from 1962 to 2008), which we analyze retrospectively, enable us to theorize the transition process (Langley, 1999, 2009). Our data range from real-time direct public interaction (media interviews) to more intimate and imaginative processes of identity (the film's creation). The analysis of *Jésus de Montréal* allows us to determine how Arcand narrates his transition with many fictional elements that help him not only to make sense of but also to (re)create his transition in the course of social interaction.

We base our study on a narrative understanding in which identity is a reflexively crafted, organized, sustained, and revised. Identity concerns not only reflexivity but also the connection of the intimate to the social through a narrative (Giddens, 1991). Many stories about the self can be told in diverse contexts, being subject to ongoing reinterpretation and revision by several actors (Boje, 1991). Consequently, we treat all our data as self-narratives that make a point about the author (Ricoeur, 1991).

Based on the findings emerging from our research, we propose three main new contributions. First, we show how individuals create circumstances through identity play from which they will subsequently work their identities. We argue that individuals explore and amplify their unknown identity possibilities in a gradual co-constructive process of social creation for subsequent identity work. Second, we go beyond the understanding of identity play and identity work as isolated or dichotomous concepts. By interconnecting these two understandings through time, we explore their interactions in continuity. Third, by analyzing a creation produced during the transitional period, we are able to provide more detailed and practical insights concerning processes of identity experimentation. This strategy suggests

a new methodological avenue for studying identity play-based directly on how people produce something in social settings (Prior, 2003) rather than what people say they have produced to a researcher.

We organize the paper in the four following sections. In the first section, we discuss studies on identity work and relate them with more playful understandings of identity construction in transitions. In the second section, we present the methodology designed for our process-based and longitudinal case study. Third, we present the analysis and the theoretical framework that emerged from the study. The framework is composed of four processes: fragmenting, developing, mixing, and extracting. Fourth, we discuss our findings and contributions to the literatures on identity work and identity play, as well their implications for practice.

Identity work in transitions

We refer to identity as individuals' ongoing search for answers for both themselves and others to two interrelated questions: "who am I?" and "how should I live?" (Giddens, 1991; Ricoeur, 1991). Our focus, more precisely, is on the stream of literature oriented towards approaching identity as a process (see Schultz *et al.*, 2012) rather than relatively fixed individual perceptions (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). This orientation assumes that identity is in constant reconstruction, with an important concern for how people search for ontological security in dealing with complex and often contradictory experiences (Giddens, 1991). In organizational contexts, this orientation involves, for example, the study of how individuals deal with perceived mismatches between their sense of self and their professions in challenging situations of career flexibility (Grote and Raeder, 2009), organizational change (Reissner, 2010), and structural transformations (Hotho, 2008).

Indeed, these active efforts of identity construction are particularly heightened in such moments of fragility or uncertainty. Identity work, as an ongoing effort towards positive constructions of self, is triggered particularly in moments of intense questioning, self-doubt, and even anxiety (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003). In struggling with these challenges, individuals craft a self-narrative by drawing on available discourses to build a coherent and distinct identity. In this way, identity work appears as an ongoing process of drawing on various sources of influence in order to integrate a narrative of self (Watson, 2009).

For example, in their study on macro work role transitions, Ibarra and Barbulescu (2010) focus on self-narratives as identity work. To deal with the rapidly changing circumstances of a transition, these authors argue that identity work involves connecting past and future identities through an ongoing reconstruction and revision of self-understandings. In this way, the authors explain how people draw from a repertoire in fashioning their identities during a transition. For example, in receiving feedback, people are able to retain certain stories (and discard others), refining their self-narratives. In the process, the past is constantly seen in the light of new understandings, in ongoing revisions. Through a constantly revised self-narrative, people build narrative coherence and are able to justify their transition to different audiences.

While with the understanding of identity work we have gained insight into identity as a performance, we still have limited understanding of the introspective, perhaps more imaginative, processes involved in identity construction. Indeed, processes of revision, refinement, and fine-tuning of identities imply that identity work is, from the outset, oriented towards a desired or expected future. This assumption is limited to explanation of how individuals deal with contradictory experiences during a transition

in which "who I want to become" is still unknown. We turn to understandings of play to explore these instances of identity construction.

All work and no play?
We understand that identity is not only anchored to external validation; it is also a self-focused process. As Ibarra and Petriglieri (2010) point out, identity construction also involves dreams about the future that may not yet be mature (or safe) enough to test in social interaction. Indeed, rather than focusing on an identity goal (identity work), this relatively small body of literature on play focuses on processes of discovery, exploration, and imagination that may open up multiple, unthought-of possibilities for the future. Table I, based on previous studies, shows how play is viewed in contrast to work in organizational contexts.

Play is seen to facilitate the motivational dimensions of the creative process (Hunter *et al.*, 2010; Sandelands, 2010). Petriglieri and Petriglieri (2010) explain how "identity workspaces" help the creativity flow because, in contrast to the everyday work environment, these spaces provide for safety identity experimentation. This space is not only physical but also social, and it involves sensemaking processes in the intersubjective sharing of experiences among people (Fenwick, 2007). Play can also be seen as an escape from the dominance of accumulation, goal-rationality, and utilitarian thinking (Caillois, 1961) and as the deviation of regulatory discourses through invention in everyday life (De Certeau, 1988).

Experimental aspects of identity in the context of a transition are introduced by the notion of possible selves, defined as "individuals' ideas of what they might become, what they would like to become, and what they are afraid of becoming" (Markus and Nurius, 1986, p. 954). Ibarra (1999) builds on this notion in her study of the transition of junior professionals from technical and managerial roles to client advisory positions. With a focus on experimentation, the author argues that representations of desired identities in the future propel identity development in the present. She explains how people adapt to new roles through trials of these possible identities, which are not fully developed but are bridges between current and future identities. Based on these

	Identity play	Identity work
Purpose	Reinvention of oneself according to one's own internal motives and guidelines	Preservation of existing identities or compliance with externally imposed image requirements
Direction	Inward	Outward
Driver	Discovery	Validation
Focus	Means (non-instrumental)	Ends (instrumental)
Aim	Future possibilities	Past histories and current identities
External constraints	Weak (fantasy and dreams)	Strong (firm roots in broader context)
Self-awareness	Identity is still unknown	Identity is the current understanding of self
Change	Escape and deviation from social constraints	Ongoing struggles with social constraints
Tensions	Deviating, escaping	Facing, struggling
Ground	Safe (internal)	Battlefield (interaction)
Research	Ibarra and Petriglieri (2010), Petriglieri and Petriglieri (2010), Ibarra (1999)	Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003), Watson (2009), Kreiner *et al.* (2006)

Table I.
Play and work in previous studies

understandings, Ibarra (1999) argues that a transition involves three tasks: observing role models, experimenting with provisional selves, and revising these experiments on the basis of feedback.

While Ibarra (1999) provides us with a comprehensive understanding of how observation enables identification of identity possibilities and how individuals balance internal and external understandings, we are still limited to explanation of how the task of experimentation takes place. In particular, while Ibarra (1999) presents imitation and authenticity as broader reciprocal orientations associated with play, she appears to skim the surface of potentially more fragmented constructions that appear to have underpinned these orientations.

Similarly, the relatively few empirical contributions on experimental identity processes are based on interviews. We believe that in such studies we mainly gain access to the performance of play, i.e. identity work (see Alvesson, 2003). As respondents put, with hindsight, their strategies in a coherent narrative for the identity aims of a particular setting, we believe that our access to the very playful and often discontinuous processes of identity that we intend to analyze becomes limited.

In short, identity work and identity play have mainly been treated in isolation, in distinct bodies of literature. Ibarra and Petriglieri (2010) have provided insights by combining work and play, but contrasting these two notions, they appear dichotomous. Moreover, methodologically, studies that concentrate on the process of identity discovery are based on interviews conducted after rather than during the process. While these studies enable us to gain insights about experimentation as people explain it, identity play is not analyzed directly; rather, the focus is on how playful processes are reconstructed *a posteriori*.

In our study, rather than considering play and work in isolation, we interconnect these two concepts. We develop them as we focus our inquiry on understanding how individuals discover new paths in experimenting with conflicting understandings of "who they are", particularly when discrepancies between "old" and "new" identities appear. Our aim with this interconnection is to provide insights for both the identity work and identity play literatures. In the next section, based on naturally occurring data, we explain how we do this through a longitudinal study on a career transition. In particular, we analyze naturally occurring interactions and a film, a creative self-narrative produced during the transitional period, to study experimental identity processes.

Methodology
Empirical setting
Drawing on a qualitative-oriented research tradition, we explore identity in a career transition by means of a 46-year longitudinal case study (Eisenhardt, 1989; Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007) on Canadian film director Denys Arcand. While Arcand is renowned for the box-office success of *The Barbarian Invasions* (2003), which won an Oscar for best foreign film, earlier in his career he had very different commitments. From the 1960s to the early 1980s, he was a documentary maker engaged in portraying the working class and the political situation of Quebec. In this earlier phase, he rejected any sort of involvement with advertising, seeing it as a compromise with capitalism. In the late 1980s, however, Arcand appeared to shift in his engagements. He started making feature films and advertisements, often being accused during this period of betraying his previous, "nobler", values. In this later period of his career, he was becoming much of what he had rejected earlier in his career. Our focus is on this transitional period. Table II shows how we first mapped Arcand's career in a broad- and context-based manner. In a second phase,

Period	Career orientation	Main sources of data
Politically engaged filmmaker 1962-1982	Arcand appears mainly as a socially active and politically engaged documentary maker. His films seek to capture reality directly and represent it fully. In this period, he focuses on actual situations of oppression, politics, and power in the province of Quebec	14 films directed by Arcand (1962-1982) 22 newspaper and film magazine interviews (1971-1982) 6 texts written by Denys Arcand (1964-1981)
Transitioning 1982-1992	Manifesting strong disenchantment with politics and filmmaking conditions, Arcand starts moving towards feature films. In 1986, Arcand makes The Decline of the American Empire. While (and probably because) this movie is a box-office success, local movie critics and peers find it merely entertaining, and accuse Arcand of betraying his "nobler" engagements. He is also criticized for directing publicity and compromising with capitalism. Admittedly inspired and influenced by these critics, Arcand makes Jésus de Montrèal, a film that deals with the tensions he was dealing with during this period	The film *Le Crime D'Ovide Plouffe* (1984) The film *The Decline of the American Empire* (1986) The film *Jésus de Montréal* (1989) 8 reviews of *The Decline of the American Empire* (1986-1988) 9 reviews of *Jésus de Montréal* (1989-1992) 52 newspaper and film magazine interviews (1982-1992) 2 video interviews (1986) 5 texts written by Denys Arcand (1984-1990)
Feature filmmaker 1992-2008	Arcand makes feature films, including the Oscar winning *Barbarian Invasions* (2003). While some questioning about the betrayal of his past engagements remains, criticisms are rather focused on the latest film	5 movies directed by Denys Arcand (1993-2007) 78 newspaper and film magazine interviews (1992-2008) 13 video interviews (1994-2008) 7 audio interviews (2005-2006) 3 texts written by Denys Arcand (2000-2006)

Table II.
Data analysis of
Denys Arcand's
career

we paid especial attention to the transitional period, which is most explicitly apparent from 1982 to 1992.

When selecting our case, we were already familiar with the films of Denys Arcand. We were also aware of his rather politically and socially engaged past, and we were intrigued by how his transition to feature films had come about. With his recognition in Quebec as a prime filmmaker, the study of Arcand could draw on an exceptional amount of data, granting us access, retrospectively, to a large body of detailed material about the transition as it occurred in that period. Furthermore, through his films, we could explore the construction of a more playful narrative construction of self.

Data
All data in our study are naturally-occurring. In other words, all of Arcand's self-narratives were produced in their everyday context, regardless of the conduct of this research. Relying on mainly media interviews and films, our data are archival,

and all of them were generated before we started this study. These data allowed us to study identity construction in its context of occurrence, minimizing the hindsight bias and impression management that may arise when identities are constructed with and for the researcher in an interview setting (Alvesson, 2003; Prior, 2003).

More precisely, as can be seen in Table III, our full data set included interviews (in text, audio, and video) as well as texts written and films directed by Denys Arcand from 1962 to 2008. We analyzed them in the original language (French or English) and translated into English the selected sequences presented in this paper. This material was collected by the first author in the archives of film societies, museums, and libraries in Montreal, as well as by searching for "Denys Arcand" on several web sites (e.g. YouTube) from January to March 2009. An overview of the empirical material is set out in Table III.

Process of qualitative analysis
While our data span 46 years, our study focuses retrospectively on the 1962-2008 period. After a theoretical overview and the data collection, we proceeded with the analysis for a period of ten months, starting in April 2009. Furthermore, we used

Data type	Quantity	Sources	Date range
Interviews with Denys Arcand	142	Newspapers with interviews (e.g. La Presse) Cinema magazines with interviews (e.g. 24 Images) Non-cinema magazines with interviews (e.g. Elle Québec) Books with interviews with directors (e.g. Ciment, Michel (2003) – Petite planète cinematographique Interviews on web sites (e.g. www.6bears.com/denysarcand.html)	1971-2008
Texts written by Denys Arcand	14	Books (e.g. Hors Champs: écrits divers 1961-2005) Book chapters (e.g. Problèmes de réalization) Articles in cinema magazines (e.g. Être acteur in Copie-Zéro) Letters (Lettre de Denys Arcand au Festival-Symposium sur l'Office national du film) Screenplays (e.g. *Jésus de Montréal* – scénario) Texts on DVD covers/booklets (e.g. *Jésus de Montréal*)	1964-2006
Audio interviews given by Denys Arcand	7	Audio interviews from the internet (e.g. Radio-Canada)	2005
Video interviews given by Denys Arcand	15	Interviews in the "extras" of a DVD (e.g. "15 ans après" in the DVD of Le Déclin de l'Empire Américain) Interviews in documentaries about Denys Arcand (e.g. Denys Arcand L'Oeuvre documentaire intégrale 1962 -1981) Video interviews found on the internet (e.g. series of interviews in L'Encyclopédie de la creation – www.contacttv.net/i_extraits_video.php?id_rubrique = 704)	1984-2008
Films written and directed by Denys Arcand	22	Film analyzed in-depth: *Jesus of Montreal* Other films (e.g. *On est au Coton*) were analyzed based on their main orientation (e.g. politically engaged documentaries)	1962-2007

Table III.
Data

a "temporal bracketing strategy" (Langley, 1999) and adopted a process-based approach (Langley, 2009) to processing data and theorizing from them. This strategy to deal with process data requires a clear breakdown into defining phases. In our case study, we do this by focusing on the main events involving a rupture with a career path (Table II), which we analyze in four stages. We shaped the findings that emerge from our data into a series of connected phases.

Our study considers in one case in detail. This strategy favours theory-building by focusing on generalization at the level of process rather than the empirical one (Langley, 1999). In so doing, while we recognize the specificity of each context, we argue that different settings may share similar underlying processes. However, until our inductive study is tested on more empirical material, it is moderate in terms of generalizing its findings (Langley, 1999).

Our qualitative research involved both discourse (Fairclough, 2003) and film analysis (Chatman, 1978; Monaco, 2009). The former was our main approach to data analysis, including the screenplay of the film *Jésus de Montréal*. The latter was complementary because it allowed us to consider some audio-visual elements to enhance our interpretation of certain parts of the storytelling. For example, we were able to see in the film how local movie critics often appeared as caricatures (through gestures, clothes, tone of voice, etc.). This portrayal was not clear from the script alone. In this way, with the help of the film, we were able to see how Arcand suggested a link between some characters and "real-life" individuals. This complementary form of data enabled gave us further understanding of how Arcand makes sense of himself in the broader context of Quebec filmmaking. Both interviews and films were nevertheless mainly analyzed as texts, which we treated as narratives produced in quite different contexts. We consider all these data to be different narratives about the self in relation to identity processes.

As shown in Table IV, the process of analysis moved through two main sequential stages. First, we worked on an overview of Arcand's career, in which we found two principal stages. Next, we focused on this transitional period from which we developed our conceptual framework.

Once we had gathered all the data to be used for this study, our first analytical phase consisted in overall analysis in chronological order of all the textual material and Arcand's most important films. We were able to detect patterns in our coding, of both texts and films that yielded clearer identification of two distinct stages in Arcand's career. Table V shows how these two phases of Arcand's career appear to reflect the content of his films.

Analytical phase	Objective	Data	Findings
1. Overview of the career	Elaborate identity categories and analyze self-constructions from from 1962 to 2008	Full data set (see Table III) from 1962-2008	Two main stages in Denys Arcand's career (1962-1980s and 1980s-2008)
2. Focus on the career transition (1980s)	Gain a fine understanding of the chosen transitional period	52 interviews (from 1982 to 1992) Film *Jésus de Montreal* (1989)	Four processes involved in the career transition

Table IV.
Analytical phases

Political orientation and modest revenues	Personal orientation and some box-offices successes
Politically oriented documentaries: films about the struggles of the working class or about the political situation in Quebec 1963 *Champlain* 1970 *On est au coton* 1972 *Québec: Duplessis et après* 1975 *La lutte des travailleurs d'hôpitaux* 1981 *Le confort et l'indifférence*	*Personal-oriented movies*: fictional movies created mostly from Denys Arcand's personal experiences 1986 *Le déclin de l'empire américain* 1989 *Jésus de Montréal* 1996 *Joyeux Calvaire* 2000 *Stardom* 2003 *Les invasions barbares* 2007 *L'âge de ténèbres*
Politically oriented documentary/fiction films: films with fictional characters who can be directly related to Quebec politicians 1972 *La Mauditte Gallete* 1973 *Rejeane Padovani* 1975 *Gina*	

Table V.
The two phases of
Denys Arcand's
career identified
on the basis of his
main films

Moreover, during the analysis of our material, a divide in his career also appeared to be suggested by Denys Arcand himself:

> During the sixties and eighties, until the referendum crisis, which was very important for me, **I rejected advertising**, I despised it, I thought it was a compromise with capitalism, I believed that such work did not deserve the respect of my contemporaries. [...] I was poor and sick [laughs], then, I thought, that's enough, I can't be more catholic than the pope: **I can do commercials like everyone else**. Then, I improved my economic situation a lot [laughs], I was paid extremely well. It's not what I love most in the world, but I am not at all unhappy. I've met really nice designers. It helped me live, and I used equipment that I can't afford even today (Denys Arcand in Télé-Québec (DVD), 2008).

During our analysis, we were particularly interested in how these apparently opposing phases of Arcand's career were interconnected, and we were curious to understand how Arcand could become the type of director he had once despised. Then, in the second phase of our analysis, we no longer relied on our full data set. Rather, this phase involved fine-grained analysis of this specific transitional period, which we found more explicitly apparent in 52 interviews from 1982 to 1992.

Along with the analysis of the interviews of this transitional period, we learned about a film emblematic of this transition. Arcand himself declares this film, *Jésus de Montréal,* to be "an assessment of my career, providing answers to questions about my profession" (Denys Arcand in Brioni, 2003). In various interviews, Arcand has argued that *Jésus de Montréal* was the transposition of his own path into film and that it was significantly influenced by the change in his career (Denys Arcand in Roy, 1989; in Rousseau, 1989; in Perreault, 1989). Indeed, *Jésus de Montréal* appears to relate directly to Arcand's own story because it involves a group of artists struggling with often derogatory commercial pursuits. We were then able to analyze the interplay of fictional and non-fictional constructions of Arcand's identity to different audiences.

Analysis of the film "Jésus de Montréal"
Jésus de Montréal is a film about an actor, Daniel Coulombe, who is hired by a priest to produce a play about the life of Jesus. Daniel has to write the story and recruit actors to perform the play. To this end, Daniel does research, revises and rewrites the passion

of Christ and assembles a group of actors, drawing them away from non-artistic pursuits (including dubbing porn). We see in the movie how the lives of the actors and that of the play and Jesus intermesh, and how the film becomes an allegory.

Indeed, there are numerous scenes in *Jésus de Montréal* that relate to the Gospels. We learn from the interviews that when Daniel Coulombe chases the advertisement managers away from the studio, Arcand is alluding to Jesus driving merchants out of the temple (Denys Arcand in Bonneville, 1989). We may also assume, towards the end of the film, that when Coulombe goes from hospital to hospital in Montreal, there is an allusion to Jesus moving among the stations of the cross. The city of Montreal surrounds the hero, a place where art is travestied and damaged by commercial culture. In many parts of *Jésus de Montréal,* Daniel Coulombe calls his disciples away from commerce and back to art, which is also an allusion to Jesus and the disciples.

We first watched the film and classified the main characters in relation to an artistic or political vs a commercial orientation, the main tension appearing in Arcand's transition. We then compared our own interpretation with those of Denys Arcand expressed in his interviews. This enabled us to identify how Arcand gives sense to the film and the creative process with sensitivity to details and aspects. For example, in Bonneville (1989), Denys Arcand explains how Cardinal, the lawyer, relates to the devil, which he associates with the film industry. It also allowed us to see divergent interpretations not only between different people but also by Arcand himself in different situations. We paid close attention in our analysis to how interpretations of the film differ and are negotiated, and how they construct Arcand as a film director. The analysis of this film along with the textual data in the 1982-1992 period enabled us to identify four processes accounting for Denys Arcand's career transition.

Processes in identity dynamics during career transitions

During our analysis, four processes emerged as significant in explaining the connections between identity play and work. These processes help explain how Denys Arcand builds coherence, for self and others, between being a politically critically engaged documentary maker and a box-office moviemaker. Who Arcand becomes, and what elements change and remain from his past, take the form of an ongoing context-dependent negotiation, and they are often ambiguous. With an emphasis on "becoming" rather than "being", we focus precisely on how Arcand creates and explores this ambiguity in building his career transition.

Indeed, meanings about who Arcand is as a film director, based on his most recent work, have arisen from an ongoing negotiation between Arcand and his movie critics throughout his career. Consider, for example, the film *The Barbarian Invasions* (*2003*). Arcand appears to be rather politically engaged (similarly to his past commitments) if the constructs are oriented to the rather negative portrayal of the Quebec health system in this film (e.g. Denys Arcand in Phillips, 2003). But in other instances, Arcand instead constructs this film as a personal one, arguing that the story is based on his own experiences and those of people he has met. Rather than seeing this film as a political statement, this time Arcand frames the story as one of a dying hedonistic man, based on his own personal fears, and in which the hospital is a mere background to the story (similar to newer commitments) (e.g. Denys Arcand in Perreault, 2003a, b). We explore these processes of multiple meaning negotiation about the self by starting from the creation of *Jésus de Montréal,* the film that (re)writes Arcand's transition.

Considering Arcand's transitional period from 1982 to 1992, we identified four processes: fragmenting, developing, mixing, and extracting. The first three relate to

sensemaking in the writing of the transitional narrative, starting with dilemmas that may trigger the process. In developing and mixing, we start seeing outward movement. In these instances, while there are efforts to interact with others in making the self-narrative structured and coherent, the story also becomes imbued with symbolism. These phases relate to drafts, preliminary versions, and a shooting script, in which the visual approach is more strongly communicated (characters' clothes, angles, etc.). The fourth phase, extracting, differs from the first three because it takes place when the story has been "published". At this stage, the story can no longer be edited directly, yet its interpretation can be guided towards new meanings (both for Arcand and others). In our case, while most efforts to promote the film were made immediately after its release, *Jésus de Montréal* was still talked about until 1992, when the next film starts taking its place. As we can see in Table VI, while we analyzed the same film and set of interviews to reconstruct each of these processes, we analyzed each of the phases very differently.

As can be seen in Figure 1, these processes follow a sequential logic, in the sense that individuals gradually move from internal reflections (identity play) to external engagements (identity work) in the overall process of transition. Along a continuum, we may conceptualize the process of career transition as moving from identity play to identity work. Although we also understand that play and work can happen in isolation, we do not see them as a dichotomy. We consider play to overlap (mainly in "developing" and "mixing"). Conceptually, we thus focused on how identity play gradually becomes identity work during transitions.

The process of fragmenting
Fragmenting involves separating parts of the self, isolating internal elements that appear to be in tension (e.g. an artistic side vs a commercial side). In the case of Denys Arcand, as we can see in the extract below, when he writes a screenplay, he

Process	Description	Stage in Arcand's filmmaking process	Focus of the analysis of interviews (1982-1992)	Focus of the analysis of *Jésus de Montréal*
Fragmenting	Isolating seemingly contradicting parts of self (e.g. art and commerce)	Drafts (1986-1987)	How Arcand talks about the tensions, struggles, and dilemmas he was experiencing	How Arcand's "real-life" dilemmas appear in fiction
Developing	Elaborating these fragments into possible versions of self	First complete version of the story (1987-1988)	How Arcand explains the creative process, including pragmatic constraints	How initial inspirations are embedded into a broader cultural discourse
Mixing	Shielding the self-narrative by encoding it with intense symbolism	Shooting script (1988-1989)	How movie critics provide different interpretations of the film	How do certain parts of the film open space for multiple interpretations
Extracting	Mobilizing meanings that were previously encoded depending on the identity aims of each interaction	Promotion (1989-1992)	How Arcand guides interpretations of his film in different interactions	How does our "reading" of the film change after Arcand further gives meaning to it

Table VI.
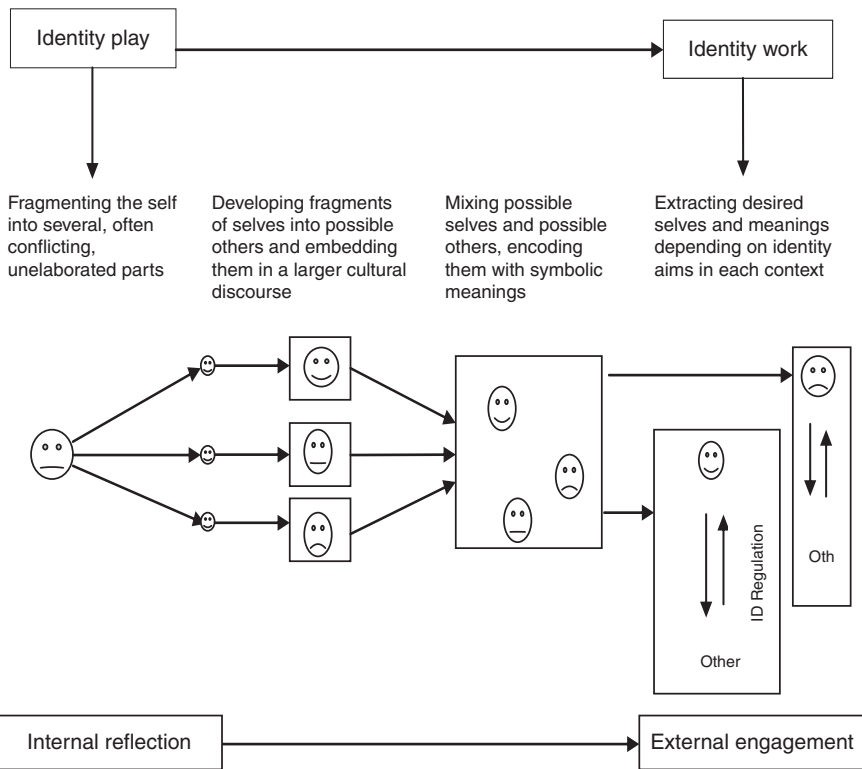Analysis and emerging processes in identity play and work

Figure 1.
From identity play
to identity work in
career transitions

includes parts of himself in different characters. This is an internal process of exploration and discovery that may yield possibilities that are at present unknown. In a sense, Arcand has relatively little restraint in exploring himself through imagination, dreams, and fantasies. The focus here is not on the outcome (i.e. validating an identity), but on the process itself, a self-reflective understanding of who he is and may or may not become:

> I try to split myself among my characters. They represent the contradictions and the opposing voices within me so that I can deal with things that I question and for which I have no solutions. It means being so close to them that they are all right, in a way. They all have something authentic and particular that persists in them (Denys Arcand in Bergeron, 1991).

In this way, we were able to identify the "real-life" struggles that Arcand was experiencing at the time through his interviews. We are able to see in the film how these past contradictory experiences appear to have inspired the crafting of the characters (Table VII).

Fragmenting is an internal process and does not imply a new identity until (and if) it has been worked out in interaction. When Arcand drafts the plots of his films, he is writing for himself, putting parts of himself into his characters, who are largely inspired by his own dilemmas. Arcand engages in playful identity processes to seek alternatives to an identity that he has come to doubt. Indeed, Arcand compares making a movie to therapy, noting that the difference is that he gets paid rather than paying for it (Denys Arcand in Perreault, 1989). This reflexively organized and playful endeavour does not constitute different identities but opens multiple possibilities for further commitment.

Fragmented experience	Denys Arcand talking about his "real-life" struggles and contradictory experiences in interviews (examples)	Fragment of self (how we see these dilemmas in the film)
Art for art's sake	"I don't consider it to have any economic value. I follow my taste, my reactions" (Denys Arcand in Gural and Patar, 1982)	A character who dies doing art: Daniel Coulombe
Compromise	"If I could no longer pay my grocery bill, I would probably make a lot more compromises" (Denys Arcand in Gural and Patar, 1982) "I'm not dying to go to Hollywood, but I might go if there is an offer of a half-decent film" (Denys Arcand in Barker, 1990) "If I don't make any more money, I am going to do television series and commercials" (Denys Arcand in Racine, 1986) "Well, it's easy to say that I'm a prostitute. Who is going to pay my rent? The critics? Meanwhile, I have to earn a living. What do you want me to do?" (Denys Arcand in Patar, 1984-1985)	Characters who constantly try to reconcile art and commerce in different ways in constant oscillation: Martin Durocher, Mireille Fontaine, Constance Lazure, Réné Sylvestre
Commercial	"The main interest in advertising is the money; we are well-paid. That allows us to make money fast without having very long engagements [...] Other than that, we do not learn much; all we do is direct products that a designer has thought of (Denys Arcand in Wera, 1986)	A character who becomes rich by directing television commercials and despises art: Jerry Strelisky

Table VII.
Denys Arcand's
characters inspired
by fragmented
experiences

The process of developing
In developing, Arcand starts leaving the realm of internal reflection to join activities that demand interaction with others and with available social discourses. In effect, Denys Arcand embeds his unelaborated understanding of self from fragmenting in a larger cultural discourse, that of the Gospels, which is used in the story of *Jesus de Montréal* as shown in Table VIII.

In this process, Arcand starts opening up to the social by crafting not only the possibilities of who he can be but also with whom these imagined versions of self could interact (Table IX). In this way, he is able to learn more about who he is and who he may (or may not) become in a social context. Indeed, the film makes strong connections to elements outside the film (including a caricature of his critics) but it does so in a transposed form allowing for a relatively safer connection of his understandings to others, creating a relatively safer space in which to connect his understandings to others.

While fragmenting is mainly internal, the process of developing is in ongoing interaction with the social environment to construct, though not yet to strongly validate, his possible understandings of himself. By interacting with others when doing research for his screenplay, Arcand obtains inspiration for his self-understanding and can already preliminarily test some of his ideas. For example, since his film involved actors, he observed them closely, and exchanged ideas about his film, thereby refining them and stimulating his creativity (Denys Arcand in Ramasse, 1989). In turn, a new

understanding of himself through writing his film influences his further interactions, when, for example, he does research by talking to judges in order to devise a character for his film (Denys Arcand in Marsolais and Racine, 1989). In this way, the narrative is kept going with rather informal interactions, and without directly exposing an identity (yet). The following passage shows how Arcand develops his work by uniting it with himself:

> Essentially, it is always about myself. These are filaments of self, nurtured by people I've met, talked to, and who have touched me. It is rare that a character is constructed from a particular person, because that does not bring us anything that is really interesting. I, for example, am a boring person. I would never make a film about someone like me because the public would be bored to death. So characters are made of parts of me, but exaggerated, pushed to an extreme, more fascinating and more interesting (Denys Arcand in Bergeron, 1991).

Moreover, contextual conditions of the production of his film influenced the reflexive and creative process. Arcand's inspirations, research, and fantasies were gradually adjusted to expected financial considerations which limited the time required for shooting and the number of characters in the film (Denys Arcand in Chabot and Tana, 1989). These instrumental concerns can, at this stage, be both enabling and constraining. As Arcand explains, whilst having resources can allow the materialization of ideas (i.e. a film that would be too expensive would never be made), the lack of them can lead to the exploration of unsought possibilities (i.e. working out the constraints on making

Character (provisional self)	Daniel Coulombe	Réné, Mireille, Martin, Constance	Publicity director
Fragment of self	Artistic	Compromise	Commerce
Trajectory in film	Tries to save art from commerce and dies	Oscillates between art and commerce	Betrays art
Biblical correspondent	Jesus	Disciples of Jesus	Judas
Trajectory in Gospel	Jesus tries to save us and dies	Disciples oscillate between good and evil	Judas betrays Jesus

Table VIII.
Provisional selves in a broader cultural discourse

Character	Lawyer-agent	Judge	Priest	Journalists	Publicity producer
System represented	Hollywood, celebrity	Legal systems, order	Quebec society (1940 to 1989)	Public judgement	Consumer society
In Holy Gospels	Satan	Pontius Pilatus	Jesus's society (0 AC to 33 AC)	Not explicit	Merchants of temple
Example of interaction with provisional selves	Lawyer-agent tempts Daniel Coulombe to become rich and famous	Judge judges Daniel Coulombe after his breaking of advertisement rules	Priest is indifferent and comfortable in his position, not wanting to change to help Daniel Coulombe	Journalists contradict each other and try to profit from Daniel Coulombe 's success	Advertising producer tries to "prostitute" Mireille
Relation to the Gospels	Satan tempts Jesus	Pontius Pilate judges Jesus	People in Jesus' s time were indifferent to his judgement	Not explicit. Direct caricatures of Quebec journalists	Merchants in the temple who are expelled by Jesus

Table IX.
Provisional others in a broader cultural discourse

a movie can inspire the creative process) (Denys Arcand in Chabot and Tana, 1988). This process involves a construction of self in the face of pragmatic constraints.

In developing, Denys Arcand develops his characters by relating his internal understandings to the "outside world" with socially available references. In this way, making sense of oneself is also about interacting with others. On considering identity as an interactive accomplishment, from fragmenting to developing, we can see a gradual shift from internal self-reflection to social validation. The more fantasy-like kind of play is gradually confronted by constraints of the "real-world". These constraints, however, may also be enabling and fuel discovery. The process of developing a version of self into a story is a start in moving from an internal, reflexive understanding to an outward, external engagement.

The process of mixing
Mixing involves encoding a story. This process creates space for interpretation for both self and others, when preferred versions of self can be extracted according to each interaction. In our case, we can see how Arcand opens up opportunities and creates his own repertoire to elaborate his identity further in his various milieux. The immersion of selves in intense symbolism allows experimentation with, or the rehearsing of, who he can become. The process of mixing is also one of deferral of meanings. It involves capitalizing on the restlessness and slipperiness of meanings for further extraction when doing situated identity work.

Mixing as encoding selves in the story expands the number of possible interpretations by others. Arcand embeds potential versions of himself in a wide cultural discourse, a canonical one indeed: the story of Jesus. Moreover, not only does Arcand use the Gospels, which recount a story that in itself is already ambiguous and open to multiple interpretations; he also inserts new characters into the allegorical story, so that making sense of it becomes more challenging. (As we will see later in the extracting process, there is no one and "true" meaning.) The following passage written by Denys Arcand for the DVD cover of *Jésus of Montreal* demonstrates how "fuzzy" the story is. Because it is highly ambiguous, meanings can be extracted in different ways:

> Jésus de Montreal is about the Gospel according to Saint Mark, Eau de Cologne advertising, the Brothers Karazamov, the dubbing of porn movies, the Big-Bang, the fortune of Coca-Cola Classic, Hamlet's soliloquy, the inconvenience of being born in Burkina-Faso, a Roman soldier called Pantera, fascists receiving the daily communion, organ transplants, and the brand of Paul Newman. In short, everything that is inescapable (Denys Arcand in Jesus de Montréal [DVD cover], 1989).

The interaction of possible versions of Arcand can lead to multiple interpretations, with slippery meanings and different layers of symbolism. In the scene where Daniel Coulombe is in court (a scene alluding to the judgement of Jesus) because he had broken publicity equipment (a previous scene alluding to the story of Jesus expelling the merchants from the temple) (Denys Arcand in Bonneville, 1989), the judge is Denys Arcand himself, in a cameo appearance where he questions Daniel. In this scene, the judge alludes to Pontius Pilate (Denys Arcand in Marsolais and Racine, 1989), and Daniel is questioned, for example, about his rage against publicity, as well as other issues that resonate with concerns that Arcand himself had manifested in interviews (see Table VII for some examples). This scene could be interpreted as Arcand judging himself, or as depicting the way in which he understands how others are or would be judging him, implying a more comprehensive understanding of self and others.

The dialogues in the film, through provisional selves and others, appear as a stage set in which Arcand elaborates his reflections. Later in the same judgement scene, the psychologist says to Daniel: "If you had been born in California, you could have played in Hollywood. Or if you had been born in New York, London, or even Stockholm, you could have met Ingmar Bergman. There is not much here, is there?" Daniel then replies: "Indeed, that's an inconvenience, and I can't do much about it. But it could have been worse. I could have been born in Burkina-Faso". With these sliding symbolic universes, we see how the story becomes an intermesh among the preoccupations of Denys Arcand dispersed through the interaction of Daniel Coulombe (representing Jesus), a judge (representing Pontius Pilate and played by Denys Arcand), a lawyer (representing Satan), and a psychologist (likely also representing someone/something else), in a context (Daniel's judgement) that alludes to another context (Jesus' judgement). This amalgam not only makes the story ambiguous but also helps Arcand understand his past, present, and (potential) future(s). Imbued with intense symbolism, the story and how Arcand relates to it are open to a wide array of interpretations. Indeed, ambiguity is emphasized rather than avoided, opening the way for further interpretations and reinterpretations. Moreover, this process stimulates reflection and self-understanding. The aspects interpreted and negotiated in different contexts have an impact on the creator's identity, as evidenced by extracting processes.

The process of extracting

Extracting information from the creation can serve as a resource for engaging in identity work. Since by means of the mixing process Arcand has created a story that is difficult to decipher, he opens up possibilities for identity work that can be performed by mobilizing the ambiguities embedded in his own story. At this point, the story of self is not as ambiguous for Arcand himself as it is for others. Then, since he has more control over his own story, he has agency with which to work on his identity by guiding and revising interpretations in order to construct the desired identity in public interactions. Depending on the situation, Arcand guides diverse interpretations of *Jésus de Montréal* and constructs his identity according to the aims and specificities of each context.

For example, to help us solve the mystery of his cameo role as the judge – a character which in mixing we considered to have different possibilities of interpretation – Arcand does not provide us with any uniform explanation. Rather, the meaning of the judge role is contradictory in different interactions. For example, in an interview given to Perreault (1989), Arcand is more strongly attached to the judge, and says that "It is no coincidence that I play the judge in the film. I am a moviemaker: I have a budget and constraints". He mobilizes this construction to argue that he is unable to make the film he wants to make, but only the film he can make. In this way, in reaction to criticisms that he has "sold-out", Arcand mobilizes his creation to further argue that doing commerce is not a choice, but a necessity. However, in an interview given to Marsolais and Racine (1989), Arcand distances himself from the judge, and states as follows: "the fact that I play the role of the judge in the film has no specific meaning. Though I agree he does indeed remind us of precisely the figure of Pontius Pilate". In this case, he does not link his character to financial considerations, but to judging more literally. This brings us back to the film, where we can see how Daniel Coulombe, is being judged. However, Arcand's attachment to the main character is also conditional, making his identity fluid in its openness to ongoing revision. As we will see below, in some interactions Arcand constructs this scene of the film by suggesting that it is he (Arcand himself) who is being harshly and unfairly judged by his critics in the "real-world".

Indeed, in regard to Daniel Coulombe, the character who plays Jesus in the film, Arcand says, to Rousseau (1989), "the main character and people that surround him is the story of my life". Yet, to Perreault (1989) Arcand says "I don't have the innocence of [Lothaire] Bluteau's [the actor who plays Daniel Coulombe] character. I have a budget, constraints". We see how, in Rousseau (1989), he associates himself with the main character; yet in Perreault (1989) this association appears more conditional in that it does not encompass all the characteristics of the main character. Creating the possibility to further revise and refine the story grants agency to construct the self in interaction. Indeed, some interpretations contradict each other because they may only be coherent in a specific interaction.

But also during the course of the same interaction, Arcand also manages to extract somewhat contradictory meanings – although with much less room for manoeuvre than when constructing himself in different settings. When talking to Perreault (1989), Arcand is able to relate *Jésus de Montréal* to his more immediate context in order to elaborate his identity. In this interview with Perreault (1989), the budget in artistic production arises as a subject of discussion. In order to construct himself as someone oriented towards art, rather than commerce, Arcand uses the symbolism of his film constantly to assist him in identity work. At one point in this interview, Arcand says that there is direct link between his life and that of the character of Jesus played by Daniel Coulombe. However, when questioned about budget, Arcand dissociates from this character to argue that in the "real-world" one cannot survive by being purely (and perhaps even innocently and blindly) guided by a creative calling. (In the film, this character dies.) Extracting the desired meanings of the ambiguous intermesh between his provisional self (Daniel Coulombe) and external references (Jesus), rather than only more immediate "real-world" references, Arcand shifts symbolic universes, and this gives him further possibilities for identity work. In this way, Arcand gains agency to respond to identity threats.

Thus, depending on the situation and the interaction, the extraction of meanings becomes a different task. For example, in one situation, association with a particular part of the creation may be desired, while in another one, such an association may be avoided. We also expect that in more intimate contexts (wife, friends, etc.) Arcand relates to his film differently than he does in public interaction. Since the story was imbued with intense symbolism, enabling provisional selves to have several meanings, threats to his identity in an interaction are inhibited. Because he had opened up room for different interpretations, Arcand gains agency to further work his identity by extracting meanings depending on the constraints and identity aims of each context. We discuss this ongoing relationship between play and work in the next section.

Discussion

The main purpose of this paper has been to explore the interconnection between identity play and identity work in the context of a career transition. In this section, we discuss our findings in relation to previous studies on identity work, the notion of identity play in career transitions, and how play and work are complementary rather than dichotomous. We also discuss the limitations our findings, consider implications for practice and research methodology, and provide suggestions for further research.

Creating favourable conditions for identity work through play
Our contribution to the study of identity work has been to show how agency to construct an identity involves previous creation of discursive resources. While previous

studies have focused on how identity work is triggered by contextual circumstances, we have also provided insights on how people can create the very circumstances from which to work their identities. In this way, we do not assume that discourses are merely "available" for people to "draw" from. We have demonstrated that play may be triggered by discovering inner motivations (fragmenting), followed by the creation of discursive resources (developing) which can be sufficiently ambiguous (mixing) to further enable the mobilizing of elements of the self-narrative in different social interactions in doing identity work (extracting). In this way, by connecting internal motives to the social, we have shown how an individual not only reacts to but also creates the context of change.

We have also proposed a conception of identity work as longer term integration, in different contexts, of fragmented, multiple, shifting, and competing versions of self. In our case, it is apparent that favourable constructions of self are situational, and that certain identities can be positive in one context and negative in another, as well as being more difficult to work out depending on the interaction. We have explained through our framework how opening up future possibilities, for example by creating ambiguity, makes it possible to develop a favourable construction of self amid the constraints of a specific interaction.

Consequently, considering that identity work is not an event but an ongoing process, we have suggested that it involves not only struggling (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003) but also creating conditions for constructing a sense of self in the future (whether or not one has some vision of who one wants to become). This orientation involves relaxing identity concerns in the present (identity play) to gain more agency in the future (identity work). Simply put, we believe that identity work involves preparation (of self and others) and appropriate timing to minimize onerous identity work in a further presentation of self.

Playing in career transitions

This study has contributed to the understanding of career transitions by shedding light on how imagination, dreams, and fantasies can propel change. While previous studies have focused on identity work as a bridge between understandings, we argue that identity construction involves both building the bridge and creating the "other side". In this way, our case study based on a transition enables us to provide insights on identity processes in situations when the "future career" is still unknown.

Previous studies have focused on identity construction in a career-related context as the interconnection, from the outset, between two divergent and relatively well acknowledged points. Some studies have explored how identity work appears in relation to a given contrast between discourse and practice, as in Pratt *et al.'s* (2006) study on medical residents' efforts to bridge perceptions of "who we were" and "what we did". Identity work also appears as the connection between personal aspiration and social demands, as in Kreiner *et al.'s* (2006) study on how priests negotiate their vocation and the demands of their job. Similarly, Ibarra and Barbulescu (2010, p. 138) talk about narrative identity work in a role transition as the "social efforts to craft self-narratives that meet a person's identity aims". In short, while we gain understandings of how people enact an identity, we have little understanding of how people discover the identity that they aim to validate.

We argue that future identities are not always clear from the outset in a transition, as these studies suggest. For example, in Adler's (1975) study of transformational experiences the first stage is about contrasting how one understands oneself in relation

to the new environment. These frameworks are instrumental for people who already have rather clear goals in their transitions because they elucidate processes with which to validate such choices. However, they are of limited usefulness for those who are immersed in a situation of considerable uncertainty, and perhaps with only a general understanding of what they do not want to do in the future.

Mobilizing the notion of play, we have suggested that a career transition may also involve exploration of yet unknown identity possibilities in gradual co-constructive processes of social testing and validation. More precisely, our foregoing analysis yields understanding that transition involves not only a quest for a desired future but also the discovery and construction of that future. We have highlighted how opening identity possibilities can grant agency for further "on the spot" identity work. In this way, we have combined play with work in a self-fuelling relationship in the everyday construction of a transition.

Playing and working at the same time
Our study has also contributed by combining literatures that develop on notions of play and work in identity construction. These understandings have been mostly treated in separate streams of research or combined in opposition to each other. While Ibarra and Petriglieri (2010) suggest that play and work are complementary, they contrast these two concepts, which appear opposed in a dichotomy. In this way, we have a limited understanding of how these two notions interact, and therefore of how people transition from play to work.

Our framework has treated identity play and identity work as a continuum with self-fuelling possibilities. While we have identified moments where play may indeed be relatively detached from work (fragmenting and extracting), we do not see them as opposing poles but rather as synergic ones. In particular we have identified specific and imbricated moments of some work in play (developing) and some play in work (mixing). Also, by analyzing the process through time, we were able to see how playful processes open up identity possibilities, granting more agency to do identity work in the future. We see these conceptualizations as a key to understanding the link between discovering internal motives and engaging in external validation during a career transition.

Generalizability potential and limitations
Although our framework is more related to creative-intensive contexts, it provides valuable insights for professionals in other lines of work. We propose that a transition involves intensive questioning and self-understanding (fragmenting) through which key themes are further elaborated (developing), making the transition sufficiently rich and even ambiguous (mixing) to afford possibilities for further revision (extracting). While not every professional can make a film in a transition, we believe that people still dream, create, reflect, and tell stories. In a way, we argue that a career transition involves an imaginative process of self-reflection and understanding that connects to identity work in future interactions. This process involves gradually connecting self-understandings to the social (developing) and creating possibilities to explore identities in the future (mixing).

As an example, researchers, too, are subject to intense internal questioning and external scrutiny. Qualitative research in particular is seen to be always "in the making", involving openness to altering research questions while dealing with unexpected data (Van Maanen, 1988). Ideas in the initial stages of research may be very different from a paper in its published form. The process may involve trial out and even

explosion of ideas that may gradually be refined in different versions of the paper. This process involves a rather exploratory, internal phase that undergoes different instances of social validation such as friendly feedback, conference presentations, and formal reviews. Entrepreneurs writing a business plan to obtain financing would also relate to these understandings of identity construction. In the process, people may discover new paths in an ongoing construction of their projects and of who they are.

We note that our study enables generalization at the level of process, not at the empirical one. Hence, since we have adopted a "temporal bracketing strategy", our theory can only allow for moderate generalization, which could be strengthened by testing it with further data (Langley, 1999). We argue, however, that similar patterns and other implications of our findings would appear in quite different settings, as we exemplify in the following section.

Implications for practice
As regards practice, our framework can directly relate to professionals dissatisfied with their careers and beginning to contemplate a change apparently opposite to the current path. This understanding indicates an impact on a broader scale, like helping individuals to cope with career transitions beyond their control. More specifically, it applies in situations where the current career is mostly valued by others, with a discrepancy between internal and external aspects of identity, so that a stronger shift is likely to be intensively questioned – by self and others, in interaction.

We stress that such understanding is timely because the increasing turbulence, instability, and fragmentation of society require new ways to deal actively with identities (Giddens, 1991). In particular, our elaboration of play can be helpful for individuals who work in environments strongly oriented towards identity regulation through recruitment, training, and evaluation practices (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). If play involves provisional (and potentially "disposable") versions of self that may be tested out in interaction, this orientation may make it possible to "dribble" managerial discourses because the identity target for regulation is diffuse. In this way, an orientation to play enables workers to sustain their main self-understandings as they test potential versions of self.

We also argue that concerns about external constraints should not influence career transition at its initial stages because they may lead to the discarding of otherwise promising career paths. Our framework suggests that the discovery of a new career should start without considering constraints, and then move to gradual experimentation and testing without initial clear exposure. We do not see these imaginative processes as forming a "new" professional identity to be pursued. Rather, we see them as the starting point of a discovery that generates previously unthought-of possibilities as it is gradually refined and validated in interaction. We believe that this understanding can also be useful for career counsellors because, we argue, they should function as catalysers rather than actors in the initial phases of a transition.

Complementary naturally occurring data
We used complementary data (films and interviews) to explore the ambiguity of the social world. We found this strategy valuable for exploring different interpretations in apparent discrepant versions of self in our data set. In particular, some contradictions came to light and enabled us to develop our theory. For example, the extracting process emerged when we found that Arcand explained his film, in sometimes opposing ways, to different interlocutors (identity work). Analyzing the interviews invited us to revisit

the film. In doing so, we were also able to learn more about the creative processes (identity play). In this way, different types of narratives, in different spaces of creation and production, allowed us further to explore identity as the fashioning of multiple possibilities of self.

In particular, we have been able to develop the study of play, an area of study with little empirical development. The analysis of a film as a story of self with many fictional and "hidden" elements has allowed us to explore imaginative processes that happened beyond immediate social constraints. Accordingly, we argue that conducting interviews does not grant access to identity play, but to work. For example, in Ibarra's (1999) study on provisional selves we rather see the reconstruction, in hindsight, of previous experimentations. In our study, through a film, we have demonstrated how identity play can be studied by analyzing the creation directly. In short, we argue that the analysis of virtually any creation (in our case, a film), produced within constraints and possibilities quite different from public interaction, enables a more comprehensive understanding of identity processes.

Indeed, analyzing the film enabled us to observe creative processes through a different medium of expression. For example, while Denys Arcand was restrained from attacking journalists in interviews directly, he was able to do so through his films, where more hidden symbols can be seen in different ways by different audiences. By means of two different stories about the self, we have seen how meanings are suggested so as to allow for further commitment to certain elements of a particular story.

The use of a variety media of interviews has also enabled us to see identity in multiple sites through time. While previous studies are mainly based on interviews in interaction with the researcher, we were able to see how narratives of self are adjusted for different audiences by promoting positive constructions situated for each interaction. We believe that analyzing how people construct themselves in different sites and through different media can provide further insights on identity construction processes.

Further research
Although our data are real-time, our framework was developed retrospectively. In this way, the "outcome" was already set when we started our analysis. We recommend that further research should explore in a prospective manner sets of processes similar to those that we derived. We believe that observing processes as they unfold can yield an experience closer to that of participants in experiencing a transition. For example, an ethnography may enable closer observation of a change initiative that may be just beginning. Further research could also investigate how play can have a positive effect on the morale of individuals undergoing a rather turbulent career transition, focusing on how their initial and perhaps contradictory motivations inspired them to construct a new path.

Conclusion
Our study provides understanding, on the basis of a four-process model, of how individuals reinvent and validate themselves in a transition. Indeed, previous research has focused on the reinvention of self-identities (downplaying social validating processes) or maintenance and revision of identity (downplaying reinvention processes); or it has treated the two processes as dichotomous. We have interrelated play and work and identified processes that relate mainly to professionals in transitions and in constraining settings.

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