15 Market Structure, the Creative Process, and Popular Culture: Toward an Organizational Reinterpretation of Mass-Culture Theory

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Long-term change in the quality of a society's popular culture is easy to notice, but difficult to characterize. In twentieth-century America, we can note the apparent decline in importance of folk cultures, and the concommitant rise of such commercial "mass" media as cinema, radio, and television; but the ultimate effect of such changes on the cultural landscape of the society itself – their impact on the range and quality of materials available to different publics is not easily assessed. The terms of much of the sociological discourse on this topic have been defined by critics of what have been called "mass culture" and "mass society." Put briefly, these writers have discerned a gradual decline in the quality of American culture from a condition of abundance, diversity, and vitality to one of homogeneity, blandness, and triviality.

Mass-society theorists have argued that urbanization, industrialization, and the rise of national markets and mass communications have caused traditional communities to decline in importance. As more and more of the individual's needs are served by agencies that are national in scope, and fewer and fewer by local primary and secondary groups (for example, the family or the P.T.A.), the importance and vitality of such groups diminishes. They lose their identities, social boundaries break down, and individuals face the world in relative isolation, as part of a mass public described by one commentator as "a huge, inchoate, sociocultural compost in which everything is mixed up together."[1]

Mass society, its critics assert, has its own kind of culture. Whereas, in the past, a people's tastes were formed through intense interaction in family, workplace, and community, in mass society taste is detached from its social moorings. Cultures of class and region vanish and, in their place, stands a single national culture shared by all but, perhaps, a small elite that can appreciate traditional high culture. Conservatives suggest that mass culture's contents are determined solely by the demands of the masses who, estranged from the wholesome influence of traditional communal groups, let their libidinal urges reign. Radicals argue that the disoriented mass accepts with enthusiasm whatever it is served: manipulative elites provide a steady diet of cultural TV dinners to program their ostensibly free subjects into apathy and dull acquiescence. Leisure is "colonized" and creative pursuits succumb to "those

passive amusements, entertainments, and spectacles ... offered as substitutes for life itself."[2] In both the conservative and radical view, taste is first leveled, then homogenized. Significant innovation becomes rare and the thematic range of popular culture narrows as the search for a mass audience forces corporate producers to transcend "the peculiar interests and preoccupations of the special and segmented organized groups and direct their appeal to the mass."[3]

The trouble with mass-culture theory is that, in place of concrete analysis, mass-culture critics have offered one or the other of two vulgar economic suppositions. Conservatives adhere to an implicit theory of pure competition: what the public wants, the public will get. Radicals write from an implicit theory of pure monopoly behavior: the public will lap up whatever it is offered. Both camps fail to take into account the fact that, in western industrial democracies like the United States, most items of popular culture – books, motion pictures, records, television programs – are produced by profit-making firms operating under the contraints of the marketplace.

In fact, the core characteristics of "mass culture" can be seen as attributes of industries, not of societies. On the one hand, the industries that produce trade books, records, movies, and special-interest magazines create materials for specialized audiences and promote and distribute them through separate advertising media and market channels. On the other hand, certain culture producers *do* act as mass-culture theory suggests they should. Industries that create television programs, mass-circulation magazines, and, to a lesser extent, elementary and secondary-school textbooks and the mass-market paperbacks sold on newstands and supermarket racks provide similar materials to all segments of the public, utilizing the techniques of mass production and mass distribution. This coexistence of two very different kinds of popular culture within the same system suggests that changes in the degree of cultural innovation and diversity are not traceable entirely to broad socio-demographic tendencies. Rather, such economic and organizational factors as how a popular-culture form is distributed and how the market for it is segmented may determine in large part the level of independence granted creators and the degree of innovation and diversity in the products themselves.

This observation leads to two sets of questions. First, why do some culture-producing industries fit the mass-culture model, while others diverge? What economic forces and organizational strategies enable certain firms profitably to distribute mass-cultural fare, while others supply diverse goods to smaller markets? Second, will the market structures and patterns of organization that permit homogeneous materials to yield profits spread with time, as mass-culture theorists suggest, or is the current mix a stable one?

A Tentative Model

Let us begin by attempting to apply to a society's culture as a whole the implicit analytic model developed by Peterson and Berger in their seminal articles on the American popular-music industry.[4] Studying popular-music production over a twenty-year span, Peterson and Berger noted that at times the products of the recording industry were mass-cultural and at times they were not. Periods in which only a few companies accounted for a large share of the industry's sales

were characterized by homogeneity and stagnation. By contrast, periods of creative ferment – the rise of rock and roll, the psychedelic sound – seemed to follow, rather than precede, increased competition in the popular-music marketplace. What is more, the authors noted that the degree of competition seemed also to affect the roles that producers and artists played in the creative process. During periods of oligopolistic control, creative decision-making was relatively centralized and artists and producers had a minumum of autonomy; during periods of competition, artists played a more important role in the recording process and producers themselves demonstrated increased independence from management.

The Model then goes as follows:

| market structure | organization of the creative process | degree of innovation and diversity of popular-culture products |

According to this model, the market structure of an industry, in particular the degree of what economists call "seller concentration," determines the degree of control over the market that firms hold and the certainty of corporate managers that their products will be sold. This, in turn, strongly influences the independence granted popular-culture creators which, in turn, affects the degree of innovation and diversity in the products that the industry manufactures. Peterson and Berger have shown that such a model accurately describes one major cultural-production system. Can it be generalized to the cultural economy as a whole?

Three major assumptions are implicit in this model. First, it is assumed that managers of organizations place a high value on predictability. Certainty that the performance of similar tasks in similar ways will lead consistently to a desired outcome – whether it be a working transistor or a best-selling novel – facilitates the establishment of stable procedures, routines, communications channels, and interpersonal relationships that ensure continued performance and minimize risk, administrative overload, and interpersonal and intergroup conflict over goals and means. Research on individual psychology and organizational behavior alike indicates that individuals, including managers of firms, find uncertainty stressful and will go to great lengths to minimize it.

Second, it is assumed that consumers desire a diverse range of cultural products and that the demand for diversity usually exceeds the supply. Peterson and Berger document this for the music industry.[5] The existence of latent demand is also illustrated by public acceptance of independent film-making in the 1960's; the recent financial success of pay television and, increasingly, of cable television more generally; and the survival of small presses and recording companies in the absence of commercially practical marketing and distribution systems.

Finally, it is assumed that creators of culture in contemporary American society have a nearly universal desire to innovate, to generate new cultural forms, and to deal with new areas of content. While there may be instances of innovation being instigated from above, nearly every study of a cultural institution has identified endemic conflict between creators and their patrons over issues of creativity and control.

If these three assumptions are correct, managers in popular-culture industries are faced with two major dilemmas. First, they must control their markets: they must

maintain enough economic power to prevent competitors from entering the market and satisfying latent cultural demand. Second, they must control and coordinate their own creative divisions, so that creation remains routine, predictable, and guaranteed to produce materials acceptable to the widest possible range of individuals in the controlled market. To the extent that managers in an industry succeed on both counts, the popular culture produced by that industry will be mass cultural. To the extent that they are unable both to inhibit competition and to control creators, the industry will provide varied cultural offerings. During the last twenty years, for example, the television industry has successfully controlled both its own creative personnel and the market for its goods. Three networks, dominant throughout this period, now account for 90 percent of viewing time; as they have tightened their control, the blandness and homogeneity of their fare has become an intellectual *cause célèbre*. The recording industry has controlled its market and personnel with varying success. Between 1953 and 1973 the number of major pop labels rose from twenty-three to ninety then fell to sixty-one, and musical styles ranged from placid and repetitive to wildly innovative. Finally, publishers have, in general, been unable to control either markets or authors, instead developing strategies to deal with uncertainty by limiting expenses and providing a wide variety of materials. At the beginning of this decade between one thousand and six thousand book publishers competed for the book buyer's dollar. By the criteria set out above – abundance and thematic range – television programming is the most mass cultural, book publishing the least, and recorded music somewhere in between. A society with a mass culture would be one in which firms in industries that produced popular culture had all solved both these problems of control.

Having set out this tentative model, I should like now to explore some of its more problematic elements, particularly the notions of innovation and uncertainty as they apply to the creation of popular culture. To do this let us draw on some of the work of economists who have studied the relationship between market structure and innovation.

Innovation and Uncertainty in the Production of Popular Culture

Economists who study market structure and economic concentration have noted that the conduct of oligopolistic firms – those in industries dominated by a few sellers – can have a major impact on the market as a whole. Degree of oligopoly, or market control, is represented by what are called "concentration ratios" – the percentage of all domestic shipments of a good provided by the leading four or eight manufacturers. Where concentration is high (over 50 percent), oligopolists may erect significant barriers to entry for would-be competitors, control prices, maintain a high level of corporate productivity and profits, and pursue technological innovation.[6]

What does this have to do with popular culture? Remember our first assumption, that managers place a premium on predictability, routine, and control. To the extent that significant innovation incurs a risk, managers of firms in highly concentrated industries may successfully use their market power to avoid providing significantly innovative (and thus disruptive and chancy) materials to their publics. In fact,

economists have studied the relationship between concentration or firm size and innovativeness since Schumpeter first asserted that only giant corporations had the resources necessary to innovate. Their findings have been mixed but, in sum, it appears that, while large firms possess the means to *develop* and *exploit* expensive new technologies, most significant inventions have *originated* with individuals, or smaller organizations. As Scherer puts it:

> In a small firm, the decision to go ahead with an ambitious project typically involves a very few people who know one another well. In a large corporation, the decision must filter through a whole chain of command – the person with the idea, his section chief, the laboratory manager, the vice-president for research, and if substantial financial commitments are required, several members of top management. Each participant is risking his reputation, if not his money, in backing the project. (p. 354)

In the book publishing, recording, and movie industries, where fashions change rapidly and new styles are frequently introduced, many of the most important cultural innovations have come from small firms and independent producers. For example, the best-selling manual *Women: Our Bodies, Our Selves* was first published by a Boston-area women's collective; Elvis Presley and Jerry Lee Lewis first recorded their unique brand of rockabilly for the lilliputian *Sun* label. By contrast, in television change comes more slowly. Gaining approval for a new program concept is exceedingly difficult, precisely because of the number of individuals involved. An ABC programming vice-president has written:

> Usually, anyone from the program executive level up is empowered to receive a program submission, though at the lower levels, this power is strictly negative – they can say no if they are cool to an idea. They cannot say yes. Instead, if they like an idea, they pass it up the chain of command in the form of a recommendation. Many yeses can begin at the director level and yes power increases as you move up. Still, there are all kinds of yeses. Even a president is circumscribed in his power to say a really big yes – putting a program into the prime-time schedule, for instance. This is usually legislated in committee by a group that may be called the Program Board which consists of one or more presidents, the chairman of the Board of the company, and the highest layer of program vice-presidents – plus vice-presidents of Sales, Research, Affiliates, Business Affairs, Standards and Practices.[7]

The work of economists is suggestive, but we must extrapolate from it with caution. For one thing, their research on the effects of market structure has been somewhat inconclusive. For another, much of their work compares the roster of giant firms (e.g., the top two hundred), from which culture suppliers are nearly all absent, to smaller firms, some of which would dwarf even medium-sized publishers or record companies. Furthermore, except for certain kinds of publishers, no concentration ratios are available for industries producing popular culture.

The major problem, however, concerns the definition of innovation used by economists and by many organizational sociologists as well. Innovation is usually taken to mean major changes in technology, product design, or product specifications. Such changes would include 45-RPM records, 32-track studies, dolbies, and

quadrophonic sound in the recording industry; CRT-typesetting and high-speed printing for publishers: and satellite video transmission or large-screen receivers in television. The innovation we are concerned with here – significant change in themes, values, modes of presentation, or concerns in popular culture – is of a very different sort.

There is a *third* kind of innovation, as well, which is critical to this argument: I will call it *product generation*. This kind of innovation is not variable; rather it constitutes the very mission of culture-producing organizations, to generate a constant stream of unique (if often similar) products with severely limited life spans. Product generation is important because it represents an inherent source of instability in even those organizations that exercise the greatest control over their markets.

Since all culture-producing firms must generate new products, the question is not who can afford to innovate, as it is for large-scale technical research and development, but who can afford not to. Here we may begin to develop an analogy between control of creativity and control of price. Just as other oligopolists are unwilling to engage in price competition, lest the equilibrium of their profitable market structure be upset, oligopolistic culture producers may attempt to refrain from unnecessary product competition through significant innovation. They may do this because the aesthetic preferences of consumers are in many ways unknowable and major changes in theme, style, or content may meet with commercial resistance or disrupt sales-division routines; and, perhaps more importantly, significant innovation must be carried out by personnel in creative divisions who, because of the difficulty of defining their work, present persistent challenges to management control. Thus any sort of product competition that requires the deroutinization of creative work may be both an economic and an organizational threat to the oligopolistic firm.

With this in mind, let us turn our attention to the creative process itself, to the relationship between the environment of organizations – the conditions under which a firm pursues its goals – and their structures, with particular attention to the nature of uncertainty in the creation of popular culture. Uncertainty is intimately related to the exigencies of product generation. Supplying goods to markets based not on need but on taste, with few standards of creative competence or expertise, the management of culture-producing firms, no matter how powerful, must constantly negotiate and renegotiate the norms and rules governing the creation of new products with writers, artists, and other creative personnel. The need for constant review of new materials, the absence of a priori standards or marketability, and the restiveness of creators, requires that managers employ brokers to link the creative process with the other functions of the firm, to represent the goals of management to popular-culture creators, and sometimes to champion the creators themselves. Such brokers include book and magazine editors, television and record producers, and motion picture directors.

Brokerage Systems of Administration

I shall refer to the negotiated administration of production common to all the cultural-production industries as *brokerage administration*. Brokerage administration is, I believe, a distinct form of administration differing significantly from

bureaucratic and craft administration. If bureaucratic administration of production is based on close supervision, repetition of routine, and compliance with orders, and craft administration based on professional competence, market relations, and separation of employer and employee by contract, brokerage administration is characterized by ambiguity, informality, and negotiation. Unlike bureaucratic and craft forms, brokerage administration is not defined by a legal relationship: it can operate whether the artist is an employee or a contractee of the culture-producing firm. Contractual labor is drawn towards the firm, employed labor is separated from it, and control over production is continuously negotiated among individuals with competing priorities and interests. This conflict must be institutionalized in the broker's role because brokerage systems lack precisely that which makes a craft system practicable – standards for evaluating the acceptability of the final product. Like craft administrators, brokerage administrators lack professional competence to build a finished product and must defer to specialists beneath them on the organizational charts; but unlike craft administrators, they can never be certain exactly what professional competence is or who may be expected to possess it. Artists, and often brokers themselves, can only be evaluated post hoc on the basis of success, or on the basis of reputation and track record.

Virtually all culture-producing organizations include brokers who mediate between the aspirations of artists for creative expression and the desires of management to be able to predict and control. Differences among culture-producers in the amount of control maintained over the product is reflected in differences in the roles these brokers play. Let us consider, briefly, three ideal types of brokerage system – one pure form of brokerage administration and two extreme variants, entrepreneurial and centralized.

In a *pure brokerage system*, the broker serves both management and creators, acting as mediator, double-agent, and advocate for both, with ultimate loyalty to the former. The pure brokerage role is best described by Herbert S. Bailey, Jr. in his volume on book publishing:

> The editor represents the publisher to the author, but he is *not* the publisher. After talking to the author, he must return to his office and represent the author to the publisher – in terms of the interests of the publisher... The editor becomes the author's ally in developing a project that the publisher will approve, just as he is the publisher's ally in seeking authors and developing projects that will further the publisher's goals. He is not exactly in the middle, however; he is part of the publishing house and he is not likely to forget that he is on the publisher's payroll.[8]

The pure broker is subject to regular communication with management and must observe a set of norms and traditions prescribing loosely the attributes of a marketable product; at the same time, the pure broker has considerable discretion in contracting and dealing with creative personnel. M. Lincoln Schuster, who founded the company that bears his name, described the roles of publishers and editors nicely: "an editor selects manuscripts; a publisher selects editors."

In *entrepreneurial brokerage* systems, similar to those described by Peterson and Berger and Hirsch as characteristic of the most turbulent and competitive sectors of popular-culture production, managers abdicate control over acquisitions and

production decisions to the broker, who, depending on his personality and expertise, may or may not abdicate it to creative workers themselves. The attitude of management in entrepreneurial brokerage systems is typified by a comment from the vice president for talent of EMI, a large and conservative British record company that had just signed a "punk-rock" band called The Sex Pistols: "The fact that many of us are now over thirty means we don't have our fingers on the pulse."

Centralized brokerage systems exist in industries dominated by a few producers, often with high unit costs and government regulations. In such a system, management exerts strong pressures upon creators, and innovation and diversity are, in most cases, successfully minimized. Brokers represent management's views to creators; they themselves are subject to vertical communication through multiple hierarchies of control; decisions to fund products are made by committee; and management personnel are involved in the creative process itself. As Muriel Cantor describes the process of creating television dramas:

> The network controls operate in several ways. In the case of new shows a network liason man often sits in on the story conference where ideas for shows are developed. All scripts (whether the show is new or not) must be submitted to the network censor for approval; in some cases the story idea or story presentation must also be submitted. No show goes on the air without final approval from the network.[9]

Perhaps the most extreme example of centralized brokerage administration of culture production is the textbook, which is often produced almost entirely by committee. An idea originates with editors or marketing personnel, who develop budgets and send the idea to a publications committee, which includes top company officials. If an idea is accepted in committee and approved by the company's president, conceptualization and goal-setting are performed in-house by editors in consultation with outside specialists. An outline is developed and an author team, headed by two or three individuals with marketable credentials who frequently lend little but their names, is appointed and tasks assigned to as many as thirty writers. As their material comes in, it is inspected and often rewritten by editors, sent out to the sales division for comments and review, and reworked by production editors. The broker, here an acquisitions editor responsible for the text's subject area, coordinates all these activities, making sure that schedules are met and that the sales force is impressed with the book's market potential. The creative and conceptual role of authors is often insubstantial.

The centralized brokerage system, characteristic of the more economically concentrated, less innovative, popular-culture industries, may be seen as an administrative form well adapted to the production of mass culture. Television producers and textbook editors operate under more constant attention, communicate more with individuals in management and other divisions, and have less autonomy in initiating projects than do their counterparts in trade publishing, special interest magazines, or record companies. Even in the relatively concentrated mass market paperback industry which, in contrast to television or textbook publishing, operates in an unregulated consumer market with low per-project costs, decision-making involves "seemingly endless rounds of meetings and conferences attended by key... personnel."[10] Such extensive communication among individuals from different

divisions and administrative levels ensures that editors are exposed to the positions and subject to the control of their colleagues and superiors.

A number of qualifications should be put forth at this point. First, although I have followed Peterson and Berger,[11] Blair, and others in treating economic concentration as the principle determinant of market control, it should be noted that horizontal concentration is only one element of market structure. A more complete model would have to take into account the effects of regulation, oligopsony (the control of the market by a few large buyers), vertical concentration, and, most important, conglomerate concentration (the prominence of large corporations, such as MCA or Warner Communications, with divisions and subsidiaries competing in a wide range of different culture-producing industries).

In addition, I have said little about the impact of technology, through size of investment per project, on degree of control over creative personnel. It may be argued that high-investment media materials can only be manufactured by highly capitalized and oligopolistic firms who, because the expense of each item is so high, will maintain close control over creators. In the long run, I believe, this argument is simply incorrect. Cultural media are technologically malleable; those that now require large investments do so principally because they are controlled by large firms that can afford it. For example, Williams and Barnouw demonstrate that the current network structure of television was neither historically nor technologically inevitable. What is more, the decentralization (and substantial decrease in cost) of radio programming after the onset of television, and current developments in public television, videocassettes, and cable and satellite transmission, indicate that cost and technical-quality considerations are hardly irreversible. In the short run, however, production cost may well be an element of the market structure that independently affects the organization of creative work.

Moreover, little work exists on the determinants of market segmentation, that is, the division of a consumer market into smaller markets defined by age, social-class, or life-style criteria, for which separate products are manufactured and often marketed through different media and channels. The degree of market segmentation in an industry is intimately related to the amount of diversity in the products it produces. Finally, little is known concretely about what we might call the quality-elasticity (in contrast to price-elasticity) of the market for popular culture. Cross-national studies indicate that consumer demand for television programming is high and relatively inelastic. In contrast, Peterson and Berger's work indicates that the market for popular music has been quality-elastic.

Conclusions

The model developed here is a highly tentative one, in need of considerable testing and elaboration. To consider where a more sophisticated version of this model might lead us, let us reconsider the debate over mass culture and the fate of cultural innovation and diversity in society as a whole. Imagine three ideal types of cultural-production systems, each with its own form of organization and each generating a different form of predominant culture. The first, mass culture, has already been discussed.

	Mass Culture	Class Culture	Pluralistic Culture
Market structure	Strict oligopoly	Multiple oligopolies or multidivisional oligopoly	Competition
Form of organization	Centralized brokerage	Centralized brokerage	Pure or entrepreneurial brokerage
Market segmentation	No market segmentation	Strict market segmentation	Loose market segmentation
Innovation	Low innovation	Low innovation	High innovation
Diversity	Low diversity	High diversity	High diversity

By class culture I refer to a system in which varying materials are produced for strictly segmented markets based on class or status groupings. Since strict segmentation might reduce uncertainty regarding the range of acceptable materials, such markets would probably be dominated by a few firms, or divisions of firms, and staffed by creators who restricted their output to materials for the market addressed. The major principle of such a system would be separation – separation of creators, of materials, and of market outlets.

By pluralistic culture I mean a system in which varying materials are created in a range of organizational settings, distributed through mass-market channels, and consumed by markets segmented loosely by differences in taste or interest. In such a system, individuals would have the greatest degree of cultural choice and producers would face the greatest amount of competition.

Contemporary American culture represents a mix of these three ideal types. Television, textbooks, and, to a lesser extent, mass-market paperback fiction are mass-cultural, presenting similar materials to a wide range of audiences. Ethnic magazines and recording companies, the foreign-language press, pulp magazines, and high-culture producers are class-cultural, providing specialized materials to relatively solidary groups through specialized market channels. Trade publishers, most record companies, and much of the magazine industry are pluralistic in that they supply diverse materials to overlapping and shifting special-interest audiences through common market channels.

Can we expect this mix to continue? Or, translating the mass-culture argument into organizational terms, can we expect cultural-production industries to become increasingly concentrated, to control their markets and their creative employees with increasing efficacy? Barring a radical change in the role of the state in cultural affairs, the answer to this question is probably no. For one thing, economists have noted no major trend toward greater horizontal concentration in manufacturing industries between 1954 and 1966. Bain found that industries starting with low four-firm concentration ratios became somewhat more concentrated, while those with higher concentration ratios became somewhat less so. Similarly, Blair found no major trends between 1947 and 1963. He suggests that the development of decentralizing technologies and the impact of diseconomies of size will, over time, counteract the effects of merger, acquisitions, nonprice competition, and predation.

Within culture-producing industries, no trend towards decreased competition can be observed. Since the late 1940's, radio programming has become less concentrated; film and recording have fluctuated with a probable downward trend; and mass-

market magazines have declined. Magazine publishing as a whole has become less concentrated; book publishing as a whole has remained stable; and general book publishing (including trade) has become less concentrated.

Furthermore, a trend towards diversification within large culture-producing firms may further contribute to an increase in cultural choice. Peterson and Berger[12] note that adoption of the multidivisional form, whereby divisions of the same firm compete against one another, has to some extent counteracted the effects of reconcentration in the recording industry. Similarly, the sales manager of Bantam Books, a leader in the relatively concentrated mass-market paperback industry, has cited a trend towards organization along product lines in that field as well.

Finally, television, the mass medium par excellence, has remained highly concentrated, but new technologies may even fragment that bastion of mass culture. Videocassettes that can be used on regular receivers, the availability of inexpensive transmission by satellite and cable, and the rise of independent syndication and advertiser networks, could result in a significant decline in network contribution to total viewing time and, perhaps, a tendency toward demographic television programing within the next fifteen years.

This is not to say that mass-culture theorists have been completely wrong. Over the past fifty years, folk cultures and class cultures have most probably declined. And it may be argued that certain significant kinds of innovation are blocked throughout popular-culture media by informal norms regarding permissible content. Furthermore, competition does not guarantee diversity. As the case of the oil industry demonstrates, efficiently integrated firms in industries with relatively low concentration ratios can exercise considerable control over their markets.

Nonetheless, the history of American popular culture indicates that the extent of diversity and innovation available to the public – and, conversely, the degree of massification of culture – has more to do with the market structures and organizational environment of specific industries than with strongly felt demands of either the masses or their masters for certain kinds of homogeneous cultural materials. What we know about these industries suggests that, in the short run at least, the nightmares of mass-culture theory show little prospect of becoming real.

Notes

1 R. Clausse, "The Mass Public at Grips with Mass Communications," *International Social Science Journal* 20 (1968), p. 627.
2 Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century*, N.Y.: Monthly Review Press, 1974, p. 278.
3 Louis Wirth, "Consensus and Mass Communications," *American Sociological Review* 13 (1948), p. 10.
4 Richard A. Peterson and David Berger, "Entrepreneurship in Organizations: Evidence From the Popular Music Industry," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 16 (1971), pp. 97–106; "Cycles in Symbol Production: The Case of Popular Music," *American Sociological Review* 40 (1975), pp. 158–73.
5 Peterson and Berger, "Cycles in Symbol Production."

6 Richard Caves, *American Industry: Structure, Conduct, Performance*, 2nd edition, Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1967; Frederick M. Scherer, *Industrial Market Structure and Economic Performance*, Chicago: Rand McNally, 1970; John M. Blair, *Economic Concentration: Structure, Behavior, and Public Policy*, N.Y.: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972.

7 Bob Shanks, *The Cool Fire: How to Make it in Television*, N.Y.: Vintage Books, 1977, pp. 75–6.

8 Herbert S. Bailey, Jr., *The Art and Science of Book Publishing* (N.Y.: Harper & Rowe, 1970), pp. 29–30.

9 Muriel C. Canton, *The Hollywood TV Producer* (N.Y.: Basic Books, 1971), p. 122.

10 Clarence Petersen, *The Bantam Story: Thirty Years of Paperback Publishing*, revised edition, N.Y.: Bantam Books, 1975.

11 Peterson and Berger, "Cycles in Symbol Production."

12 Petersen and Berger, "Cycles in Symbol Production."

Editor's Notes on Further Reading

DiMaggio on Mass Culture Organization

Whereas many observers of modern culture have feared a remorseless trend to homogenization and mass production (see Horkheimer and Adorno excerpt, this volume) Paul DiMaggio argues that such fears are exaggerated, because culture industries take a variety of organizational forms, and the extent to which diversity and innovation are encouraged varies according to organizational form and industry structure. Thus, homogenized mass culture is only one of several possible outcomes of culture industries.

DiMaggio's argument is an early example of increased attention to midrange organizational explanation of cultural outcomes, characteristic of the "production of culture" perspective which developed from the mid-1970s onwards. For more on this development in cultural sociology, see for example Paul Hirsch, "Processing Fads and Fashions: An Organization-Set Analysis of Cultural Industry Systems," *American Journal of Sociology* 77 (1972): 639–59; Richard Peterson, ed., *The Production of Culture* (Beverley Hills: Sage, 1976); Peterson, "Revitalizing the Culture Concept," *Annual Review of Sociology* 5 (1979): 137–66; Diana Crane, "Reward Systems in Art, Science, and Religion," pp. 57–72 in Richard Peterson, *The Production of Culture*; Crane, *The Production of Culture: Media and the Urban Arts* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1992); and Lewis Coser, Issue Editor, The Production of Culture, *Social Research* 45 (2) 1978. For an updated overview with discussion of numerous examples see Richard Peterson, "Cultural Studies Through the Production Perspective: Progress and Prospects," pp. 163–90 in Diana Crane, ed., *The Sociology of Culture: Emerging Theoretical Perspectives* (Cambridge, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).

For more on cultural production of television, music, visual art, and literature, see selections from the work of Hunt, Peterson, Becker, and Griswold and accompanying editors note's this volume. On media institutions see John Ryan and William Wentworth, *Media and Society: The Production of Culture in the Mass Media* (Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 1999); Rodney Benson, "Field Theory in Comparative Context: A New Paradigm for Media Studies," *Theory and Society* 28 (1998): 463–98; Joseph Turow, *Media Systems in Society*, 2nd edn. (New York: Longman, 1997); and Gaye Tuchman, "Mass Media Institutions," pp. 601–26 in Neil Smelser, ed., *Handbook of Sociology* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1988).

For cultural sociologists, the issue of how and why "high" culture comes to be distinguished from "mass" and "popular" culture is closely related to the investigation of "mass" culture itself: does something intrinsic to the product, or something in the social organization of

production, make something "high" culture? Some of the many important discussions of this issue include Diana Crane, "High Culture versus Popular Culture Revisited: A Reconceptualization of Recorded Cultures," pp. 58–74, and Paul DiMaggio, "Cultural Boundaries and Structural Change: The Extension of the High Culture Model to Theater, Opera, and the Dance, 1900–1940," pp. 21–57, both in Michèle Lamont and Marcel Fournier, *Cultivating Differences: Symbolic Boundaries and the Making of Inequality* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Judith Blau, *The Shape of Culture: A Study of Contemporary Cultural Patterns in the United States* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Paul DiMaggio, "Social Structure, Institutions, and Cultural Goods: The Case of the United States," pp. 133–55 in Pierre Bourdieu and James Coleman, eds., *Social Theory for a Changing Society* (Boulder and New York: Westview Press and Russell Sage Foundation, 1991); DiMaggio, "Classification in Art," *American Sociological Review* 52 (1987): 440–55; DiMaggio, "Cultural Entrepreneurship in Late Nineteenth Century Boston," *Media Culture, and Society* 4 (1982): 33–50, 303–21; Lawrence Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988); Herbert Gans, *Popular Culture and High Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 1974), and Leo Lowenthal, "Historic Perspectives on Popular Culture," *American Journal of Sociology* 55 (1950): 323–32 and *Literature, Popular Culture, and Society* (Palo Alto, CA: Pacific Books, 1961).

16 Why 1955? Explaining the Advent of Rock Music

Richard A. Peterson

At the time, 1929, 1939, 1945 and 1968 all seemed important turning points in the track of our civilisation. By contrast, as anyone alive at the time will attest, 1955 seemed like an unexceptional year in the United States at least. Right in the middle of the 'middle-of-the-road' years of the Eisenhower presidency, 1955 hardly seemed like the year for a major aesthetic revolution. Yet it was in the brief span between 1954 and 1956 that the rock[1] aesthetic displaced the jazz-based aesthetic in American popular music. Frank Sinatra, Tommy Dorsey, Patty Page, Perry Como, Nat King Cole, Tony Bennett, Kay Starr, Les Paul, Eddie Fisher, Jo Stafford, Frankie Lane, Johnnie Ray and Doris Day gave way on the popular music charts to Elvis Presley, Chuck Berry, The Platters, Bill Haley, Buddy Holly, Little Richard, Carl Perkins and the growing legion of rockers.[2] . . .

Employing the 'production of culture' perspective (Peterson 1976, 1979), we will show the essential contributions of the culture industry to the emergence of rock music and its associated aesthetic and culture. Before beginning this central task, however, we will briefly explore the roles of creators and audiences in the process.

It is easy to characterise eras in terms of the leaders of the time. The 'Napoleonic' era is an obvious case in point. It is no less tempting to identify an aesthetic revolution with its most celebrated exponents – Vivaldi, Shakespeare, Beethoven, Picasso. In this vein, it is possible to point to specific individuals like Chuck Berry, Little Richard, Elvis Presley and Jerry Lee Lewis and say that rock emerged in the late 1950s because, like other creative circles of artists (Kadushin 1976), they began their creative efforts at this specific moment. In bringing into question this 'supply side' explanation, I do not, for a moment belittle their accomplishments. Rather, I suggest that in any era there is a much larger number of creative individuals than ever reach notoriety, and if some specific periods of time see the emergence of more notables, it is because these are times when the usual routinising inhibitions to innovation do not operate as systematically, allowing opportunities for innovators to emerge. . . .

What of the 'demand-side' explanation of the emergence of rock music? As applied to this instance, it says the remarkably large cohort of newly-affluent young people, the vanguard of the 'baby-boom' could not relate to the jazz-based sensuous slow dance music created for twenty-year-olds approaching the age of first marriage. Characteristically, songs in this vein featured a male who abstractly promises marriage if the female is willing to share her sexual favours.

The baby-boomers demanded music that spoke to their own condition. The appropriate themes included a mix of the excruciating joys of first love, fights with parents, and frustrations with high school and the older generation generally. Although it can be argued that the uniquely large baby-boom cohort has been responsible for a number of changes in the US, it did not cause the emergence of rock in the mid-

1950s. In fact, it could not have done so. After all, in 1954 the oldest of the baby-boomers were only nine years old and half had not even been born yet!

Although the emergence of rock was not caused by the baby-boom, we are not arguing that audience preferences had nothing to do with the rise of rock. Quite to the contrary, the newly affluent teens and pre-teens comprised the heart of the market exploited in the rise of rock music. The point is that this market demand had been growing gradually for over a decade and remained largely unsatiated because the decision-makers in the culture industry simply did not recognise that it was there (Peterson and Berger 1975).

It is, indeed, ironic that the commercial culture industry, which is consecrated to making money by providing the mass of people with the kinds of entertainment that they want, was systematically blind to the unsatiated demand for cultural products that spoke more directly to the condition of young people. In unravelling this irony, we will argue that it was the structure of arrangements, habits, and assumptions of the commercial culture industry itself that caused the blindness. Likewise, we will argue that it was the systematic change in these factors that created the opportunity for rock to emerge. . . .

Law and Regulation

Copyright law, patent law and Federal Government regulation of radio station broadcasting licenses importantly influenced the advent of rock music though in ways completely unintended and unanticipated as well. To begin to understand why rock became a mass success in 1955 we have to go right back to the beginning of the twentieth century.

Copyright

The US Copyright Law of 1909 for the first time gave protection to the owners of musical compositions. Heretofore, American sheet music printer–publishers had subsisted primarily by reprinting standard favourite songs and appropriating contemporary works by European composers who received no royalties for their use. Writer–publishers of new songs had lobbied aggressively for the copyright protection the new law would provide because it clearly made a song into a piece of property that could be bought, sold and developed by its owner. With copyright protection, the aggressive New York sheet-music writer–publishers could afford to spend a great deal of money promoting a new song because other printers could not pirate the valuable properties thus created. Their activity fostered a quick succession of innovations in music and popular dancing, most notably ragtime and jazz.

Unlike the European laws of the time (Ploman and Hamilton 1980; Frith 1981, 1988), the new American law also mandated that song-owners should be compensated for the use of their music in all public places such as concert halls, dance halls, and restaurants. Though wide-sweeping in its coverage, the law provided no mechanism for collecting these royalties from the thousands of places where music was publicly performed. In 1914 a number of the new music writer–publishers banded together and formed ASCAP, a private membership company, to collect the royalties

for public performance. As Ryan (1985) and Sanjek (1988) show in detail, ASCAP was not very successful in its early years, but by the 1930s it effectively controlled access to exposing new music to the public. It did this by, in effect, mandating that only ASCAP licenced music could be played in Broadway musicals, performed on the radio, and incorporated into movies. As late as 1950 an oligopoly of just eighteen publishers determined which songs could reach the public ear (Ryan 1985, p. 104).

These oligopolists shared an aesthetic which accented well-crafted, abstract love themes, strong melodies and muted jazz rhythms and harmonies. 'Tea For Two', 'Stardust' and 'Always' come to mind as exemplars of this aesthetic. But the point for our story is not whether they were good or bad, but that they and the innumerable less memorable songs like them were the only songs that Americans could hear through the dominant media of dissemination. The work of black musicians in the blues, jazz, r&b, and what later came to be called soul genres was systematically excluded, as were the songs in the developing Latin and country music traditions, as Ryan (1985) shows with numerous specific examples. The effect was that these forms could not reach a wide audience.

In 1939 the radio networks, in a dispute with ASCAP over the increased licencing fees ASCAP wanted to charge, formed a rival licencing agency, BMI. BMI offered inducements to ASCAP publishers and songwriters to defect. Few did, and so BMI signed numerous publishers and writers that had been excluded from membership in ASCAP. Many of these worked in the jazz, Latin, r&b and country music traditions. When in 1940 ASCAP failed to come to terms with the networks over the use-fees to be paid for music, all ASCAP-licenced songs were excluded from radio airplay, and BMI songs, and the genres that they represented, for the first time gained widespread public exposure (Ryan 1985). Even after ASCAP came to terms with the radio networks, the latter still welcomed BMI-licenced songs. Now for the first time it became possible to make a living as a songwriter or publisher in these alternative genera[3] that in fusing formed the foundations of the rock aesthetic. But rock did not break out in 1942. ASCAP came to terms with the networks, and all those with a vested interest in the older swing and crooner pop music worked hard to keep that aesthetic ascendant in the marketplace (Ryan 1985; Sanjek 1988). A number of other factors described below needed to change before rock could break out.

Patent Law

The application of patent law is another of those factors that influenced the timing of rock's emergence. From the inception of the industry before the turn of the twentieth century, the major phonograph record companies battled over alternative music recording and reproducing technologies in hopes of garnering the lion's share of the consumer market. By 1930 the 10-inch 78 rpm shellac disc had become the standard, but CBS and RCA laboratories experimented with the size of the disc, the distance between grooves, and the speed of the record in hopes of greatly increasing the amount of music that could be put on a record. While numerous advances were made, and patents registered, the long-playing record was not introduced in the 1930s because, it is said, the record industry was so depressed due to the Great Depression that consumers would not have paid the price for the new players and records (Metz 1975; Sanjek 1988).

Following the Second World War, Columbia records began intensive experimentation to develop a long-playing high-fidelity record. A newly-developed vinyl material was used for the discs because it held the musical fidelity better than the older shellac. In 1948 Columbia was ready to release its 12-inch, 33 1/3 rpm LP. Demonstrating its invention to arch-rival RCA, Columbia offered to share all information so an industry standard could be established. According to Metz (1975), General Sarnoff, long-time head of RCA was appalled that the much smaller firm had bested his research department. He refused the offer and ordered his engineers to quickly bring to market an alternative system for the high fidelity play of classical music. Their response was the 7-inch vinyl record with the large hole in the middle that played at 45 rpm.

The 'battle of the record speeds' went on for several years, by which time there were millions of record players on the market that were capable of playing both speeds, and 78s as well. The battle of the speeds was finally resolved when, through government mediation, the rivals agreed to pool their patents and produce records in both new formats. By 1952, the LP had become the medium for classical music and the 45 the format for popular single records for radio airplay, jukeboxes and retail sales (Sanjek 1988).

The 45 was important to the advent of rock primarily because it was (virtually) unbreakable. One of the great expenses of 78s was the extreme care that had to be taken in handling and shipping them, and each of the major record companies developed a national distribution system that was geared to handling its own delicate 78s. The small record companies could not afford the costs of the national distribution of 78s, and there being no independent distribution companies, it was virtually impossible for a small company in 1948 to have a national hit record. The smaller, lighter, virtually indestructible 45s made it much cheaper to ship records in bulk, making feasible the development of independent national distribution companies. As importantly for the promotion of new songs, it also made it practical for small record companies to use the mail service to send promotional copies to radio stations.

FCC Regulation

A number of local, state and federal government regulatory agencies arguably influenced the advent of rock, but the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) played a vital role. Among other things, the FCC regulates the number and allocation of broadcasting stations throughout the US. During the 1930s, when the interest in radios was growing rapidly and virtually every American home had a set, the FCC restricted the number of stations licenced to each market to three to five. This meant that each of the established networks, NBC (with its Red and Blue Networks), CBS and Mutual had an outlet, and there might be one independent station. A large number of applications for new stations were submitted, but these were denied or deferred 'in the public interest' because the networks lobbied successfully to maintain this small number of stations. When the War came, all requests were deferred. It was reasoned that scarce electronic material could not be spared from the war effort to build transmitters.

All this changed in 1947 when the FCC began to approve most of the backlog of applications, and, in a matter of just four years, the number of radio

stations authorised to most markets doubled in number (Sterling and Haight 1978). Most of the new licences went to poorly capitalised independent stations. What did these stations use as programming? Most relied heavily on phonograph records. What kinds of records did they play? Ah, that gets us ahead of our story. What is the answer to the prior question, why did the networks withdraw their opposition to the granting of new broadcast licenses? To answer this question, it is useful to introduce the second major class of contraints, technology.

Technology

The development of the vinyl 45 rpm record, just discussed, was a major techno-logical innovation important to the advent of rock music. Here we will note the importance of the advent of television and the development of the transistor radio receiver.

Television

Television, more than any other technological development, shaped the advent of rock music even though its influence was primarily indirect. Television began to be popular in the US in 1949. By 1955 65 per cent of all American households had a TV set (Sterling and Haight 1978) and the network programmes that had been the staple of network radio programming were transferred to television. Many experts, reason-ing that no one would listen to a box when they could listen to a box that also showed moving pictures, thought that TV would completely replace radio. For this reason, the networks removed their objection to the licencing of many additional radio stations. For the same reason, radio network affiliates were put on the market in great numbers. A glut on the market, their price was further depressed by the fact that a spate of newly licenced AM radio stations were going on the air just at that time.[4] TV *programming* did have some direct effect on the advent of rock music in the 1954–6 period. . . .

The Transistor

Until the mid-1950s, radio receivers used a set of large, power-consuming, heat-generating, vacuum tubes. Their use dictated that sets would be large, heavy and expensive pieces of furniture. While most American homes had a radio, few had more than two. Auto radios were the exception, and portable radios were not common. These so-called 'portables' were relatively large, fragile and, because of the large batteries required, quite heavy.

American radio manufacturers intended to introduce transistors, a Bell Labora-tories invention, as a prestige item in their top-of-the-line TV and phonograph consoles and put them into cheaper TVs, phonographs and radios only gradually in succeeding years. The Japanese upset this strategy by shipping to the US hundreds of thousands of cheap, lightweight, compact transistor radios that operated on small flashlight batteries. Quickly young Americans learned to take these extremely inex-

pensive sets to school, to the beach, to parties, to work – everywhere they went (Eisenberg 1986).

Industry Structure

To understand industry structure, one must consider both words: industry and structure. Defining the boundaries of the industry under consideration sounds simple but the process often raises issues of inclusion and exclusion that help reveal the structure. Our concern here is the popular music industry in the 1950s, but for present purposes the manufacture of musical instruments is not included. Live performance in bars, dance halls, concert halls and arenas while vital to building careers and promoting new records, is also peripheral to our concern. The empirical focus here is the popular music conveyed via the electronic media and via phono-graph records. This brings into focus two sets of corporations that are convention-ally identified as quite distinct industries, the manufacturers of phonograph records on the one hand and commercial radio stations on the other. The growing symbiotic relationship between phonograph record makers and commercial radio station owners was centrally important in the advent of rock music in the mid-1950s.

Industry structure can vary in several important ways: the degree of oligopoly, vertical integration and horizontal integration. Empirically, these three tend to go together but they can vary independently. Industry structure is oligopolistic when a few firms effectively control the style, amount and price of products produced. Perfect competition is when the actions of no firms significantly influence any of these factors. While an industry may vary from perfect competition to perfect oligopoly (that is monopoly), another structure is possible as well. This is an industry field in which there are a few firms that interact like an oligoply, but in which there is also a large number of small firms that survive and prosper by serving small special segments of the total potential market not served by the oligopolists. Such a dual industry struc-ture became well established in the music industry in the years between 1948 and 1958 (Gillett 1983). Second, industry structure involves vertical integration, the degree to which all production processes from securing raw materials to retail sales are performed by single firms. Third, industry structure has to do with the degree to which firms in an industry produce products only for that industry, or alternatively are conglomerates linked financially and functionally to other industries, that is, the degree of horizontal integration (Hirsch 1972; Peterson 1985).

Radio Broadcasting, 1948

In the discussion that follows, and for much of the rest of the article, we will contrast the state of affairs in 1948, that is the time clearly before the advent of rock, with the state of affairs in 1958 after rock music had become well established. In 1948 the American radio industry consisted of four national networks and their affiliated stations in each of the radio markets around the country. In addition, there was a number of newly licensed independent commercial stations.

The networks competed with each other using what I call a 'slice strategy' which is characteristic in such conditions of oligopolistic competition. In such conditions,

each network tried to increase the size of its slice of the total American radio audience. Programmes which drew large audiences to one of the networks stimulated the other networks to create similar programmes to capture back the lost 'market share'. In just a few seasons this strategy made for a daily and weekly cycle of programmes that was virtually the same from network to network. Thus, the weekly radio schedule of programmes on the air in 1948 looked not unlike the cycle of television broadcasting a decade or two later.

There was, however, more popular music played on radio in 1948 than on network television in 1958. On weekend evenings, each of the radio networks featured the major dance bands of the era broadcast *live* from one of the many large dance halls or elegant hotels around the country. The popular hits of the day were also played on the air by studio orchestras as part of the mix of the comedy and variety shows hosted by the likes of Bob Hope and Jack Benny. There was a programme called 'Your Hit Parade', that featured the top ten selling records of the week. But the *records* were not played! Rather, the studio band and its male or female singer, as appropriate, performed each of the songs in turn. Since the hit songs of 1948 were written, arranged and recorded by professionals to fit widely understood swing era conventions, it was easy for the studio band to faithfully reproduce the sound of the record. The early morning network 'wake-up' shows also had studio bands as did the homemaker shows that played around lunch time.

As far as I have been able to ascertain, there never was a national network programme in the 1940s that played phonograph records on the air. There were, however, several music programmes broadcast locally by network affiliates that *did* use phonograph records. Their form tells a great deal about the radio-programming aesthetic of the time. The most famous and most often copied was Martin Block's 'Make Believe Ballroom' that was first broadcast over New York's WNEW on 3 February 1935 (Sanjek 1988, p. 128). Through his introductions, sequencing of songs and even pseudo-interviews with band leaders, Block gave the programme the semblance of being broadcast live from a hotel ballroom.

The numerous independent radio stations that were being licensed at the time varied widely in their programming. We will focus here only on their music content. The better financed stations aired transcriptions which consisted of studio band concerts recorded on 16-inch metal-backed disks recorded and played back at 33 1/3 rpm. Again, they simulated live music performance. Many country music bands played live on independent radio stations in all parts of the country (Peterson and Gowan 1973, pp. 1–27). No blues or r&b bands, however, received this kind of exposure via live performance on the air. There were in 1948, however, several innovative radio programmes that played records intended for black buyers. At several radio stations in the South and Mid-West, small independent record companies simply bought thirty-minute segments of airtime and used it to play and promote their own records. Innovative record stores also bought airtime to play and promote such records on sale in their stores.[5]

The Record Industry, 1948

In 1948 (and the year following) the record industry was as concentrated as it had ever been and more concentrated than it has been at any time since. Four firms –

RCA, Columbia (CBS), Capitol and American Decca (MCA) – had released 81 per cent of all the records that reached the weekly top-ten hit list any time during the year. The top eight firms together released 95 per cent of all the hits and only three other firms had any hits at all! These figures, and the discussion that follows, are drawn from Peterson and Berger (1975) which presents a detailed analysis of how, in the late 1940s and early 1950s so few firms were able to control the market for recorded music so effectively, even though the basic product, a phonograph record, was cheap to record and manufacture.

Suffice it to say here that the leading firms maintained their predominance through combining both vertical integration in the record industry and horizontal integration with the film, radio, Broadway musical and film industries. The major record companies were able to maintain a dominant position by controlling three key points in the hit-making process. First, they garnered the services of creative people including songwriters and performers under long-term contracts investing a good deal of money promoting their name recognition. Second, they monopolised the channels of record distribution. As we have already noted, this was facilitated by the breakability of the 78 rpm shellac records of the time. Third, the major record companies maintained close ties with the people in network radio who decided what songs would be heard over the air. They were equally successful in controlling the songs that reached the public ear via Broadway musicals and movies.

Radio Broadcasting, 1958

Radio did not die with the advent of TV as the pessimists had predicted. In the years between 1948 and 1958, however, the radio broadcasting industry was totally transformed. In 1948 the radio industry had been a national medium broadcasting a small number of expensively produced nationally distributed programmes over four networks that vied with each other for a larger slice of the total national radio audience. By 1958 there were a large number of locally programmed radio stations in each city across the US. Thus, in effect, what had been one single national market with four contending networks, became upwards of one hundred autonomous local markets each with eight to a dozen or more radio stations competing with each other (Sterling and Haight 1978, p. 45).

Financed by national advertisers, the old radio networks had been able to afford expensive forms of programming: dramatic programmes, comedy shows and live music. Depending primarily on local advertisers in each city, however, radio stations could not afford such expensive programming (Sterling and Haight 1978, p. 124). In the search for an inexpensive yet appealing form of entertainment, and this is crucial for our story, stations in increasing numbers between 1950 and 1956 turned to playing phonograph records on the air.

Thus, in the span of just six years, the relationship between the radio and record industries was transformed. The two industries had been, or at least were thought to be, in direct competition. Ever since the 1920s when the two technologies emerged, it was reasoned that if people heard records played on the air, they would not purchase them for themselves. As he reached the height of his popularity, for example, Bing Crosby required Decca to stamp on each of his records, 'Not licenced for radio air play'. For their part, radio executives had

disdained playing 'canned music'. Now, the two were inexorably bound together. Radio depended on the music industry for programming material, and record-makers, finding that radio airplay increased rather than depressed the demand for a record, quickly came to depend on radio to, in effect, advertise and promote their new releases.

As the numerous local stations competed with each other for listeners, they began to differentiate themselves by playing different kinds of records. Thus, the aesthetic range of records played on the air increased dramatically by the mid-1950s. We will examine this process in greater detail below.

The Record Industry, 1958

The greatly increased play of records on the air profoundly changed the record industry in the 1950s. Statistics show the picture very clearly. Record sales which had been in decline in 1948 and 1949 increased gradually from 1950 through 1954. Then every year for the rest of the decade sales grew rapidly so that the total value of records sold in 1959 was well over double what it had been in 1954.[6]

The major record companies, committed to the swing and crooner aesthetic, were slow to adapt to the changes that were taking place in radio and a large number of recently founded small record companies like Sun Records, Atlantic Records, Stax, King, Chess, Vee Jay, Dot, Coral, and Imperial provided the sorts of music that proved more popular. Thus they were able to successfully compete in the national popular music market (Gillett 1983). Again, the statistical figures show this in stark detail.

The four firms that had 81 per cent of the popular music hits in 1948 gradually lost market share until it reached 74 per cent in 1955. Then things changed rapidly. Their market share was down to 66 per cent in 1956 and sank rapidly over the next few years reaching just 34 per cent by 1959! In 1948 just fifty-seven songs were hits, these were produced by eleven firms, and five of these firms had just one hit. In 1949, there were ninety-two hits that were produced by forty-two record companies, and of these, twenty-nine of these firms had just one hit. In a word, an industry that had been dominated by an oligopoly of four firms rapidly became an industry in which a large number of small firms were able to compete on even terms with the majors. The crucial reason was that, to attract larger numbers of listeners, radio stations sought out attention-catching records irrespective of their source.

The two other factors that had helped ensure the hegemony of the major companies changed as well. The majors no longer had a corner on the creative talent. On the contrary, it was the small companies that developed the rock performers and writers while the majors resisted the changing aesthetic or, as in the case of Elvis Presley, bought the contracts of rock performers only after they had proven successful on one of the new small record labels (Gillett 1983). In addition, the majors no longer controlled the national distribution of records. While only a few of the new companies had their own systems of distribution, several national independent distribution companies were formed who were willing to distribute records for anyone willing to pay the fee.

Organisation Structure

Organisation structure has three dimensions. The first is the number of decision levels in the organisation. The more levels there are, the greater is the bureaucracy, and the lower the ability to adapt to changes coming from the environment. Large organisations tend to have more levels but not necessarily (Peterson and Berger 1971). The second dimension of organisation structure is functional differentiation, the degree to which tasks are performed by specialised departments. A record company, for example, might have separate departments for songwriters, performers, producers, studio technicians and promotion. RCA and Columbia were organised this way in 1948. Alternatively, a firm might have several independent divisions each with its own groups of such specialists working together on related musical projects that are released under a distinctive divisional label. Warner Brothers Records in the 1970s and 1980s exemplified this pattern. The third dimension of organisation structure mirrors vertical integration for industry structure. At the firm level, the question is to what degree all stages in the production, promotion and distribution process are performed 'in-house' by divisions of the company or, alternatively, are performed by a series of firms that specialise in just one aspect or stage of the process. Such specialty firms are called 'job-shops' because they contract with a number of different clients on a job-to-job basis. In the 1950s another form of organisation emerged which I call 'solo production'. Here all the creative stages are performed in-house but they are performed by or under the direct supervision of a single individual. A number of the most innovative producers of the early rock era worked in this way, but perhaps the best contemporary exemplar of solo production is Prince and his Paisley Park production company. In 1948 all of the major record companies had their own recording studios and contractually required their artists to record in-house. By 1980 the majors had sold almost all of their own studios allowing their artists to record in independent job-shop studios or as solo producers.

Radio Stations

In 1948 there were two quite different sorts of network-affiliated stations. There were the three or four stations of each network where the dramatic, comedy, variety, and soap opera programmes were created. Virtually all the network programming was created at these production stations located in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles and Nashville. Each major programme had its own staff of actors, singers, script writers, joke-writers, and other creative personnel. A staff band would play on several different programmes. Technicians were organised by function and jealously protected their job rights from each other. For example, by labour union contract it was illegal for anyone but a union engineer to touch the studio control board or phonograph record turntables. Finance, sales and promotion, as well as transmission engineering, were separate departments. The total staff at each of these production stations numbered well over a hundred and in New York approached a thousand.

The rest of the network-affiliated stations in 1948 were organised quite differently. They acted primarily as the local transmitters of network-fed programming. There was some local news, agricultural reports and sports broadcasting, but to keep

their network status, stations had to air virtually all the programming that was supplied. The staff consisted of several engineers, several announcers and a small advertising staff that worked to get local advertisers for the locally generated programmes and for the local advertising spots built into some of the network programming. Dependent as they were on network programming, there was little scope for creativity by the local affiliate stations.

In 1958 radio station structure was totally different. The network production stations simply did not exist. Most of their creative and technical personnel had not been fired; rather, they were transferred to the network's television affiliate and continued to do their work, much as before. By 1948, radio stations had few levels of authority and many fewer specialised departments and jobs. Typically, the staff consisted of several engineers who kept the equipment running, a small marketing staff that worked to get local merchants to buy advertisements, and a group of djs. The djs (except at the biggest and most traditional stations) cued and played records themselves while keeping up a banter that included comments about community and school events, forthcoming rock concerts, advertisements and brief segments of news and weather. Network affiliates and independent stations were much alike except that at the former the national news was fed from New York as were several Programmes including major sports events, and the New York Metropolitan Opera Programmes on Saturday afternoons (Roult et al. 1978).

Phonograph Record Firms

The oligopolistic record companies of 1948 were bureaucratically organised with both a large number of levels in the hierarchy of authority and numerous function-ally differentiated and vertically integrated departments. This is a form of organisa-tion well suited to efficiently producing a large number of standard products. Given their collective control of entry into the popular music market, the major record firms were able to operate profitably by crafting the kind of music that could be produced by such a bureaucratic machine.

By 1958 a large number of small companies operating on a mix of job-shop and solo-production had successfully entered the market. They survived by using every means, legal and illegal, to get their records played on the air and then get copies of the records distributed to record stores quickly and in sufficient numbers. Most of the independents that survived more than two or three years and moved up in the ranks of record firms did so by crafting a sound that could be identified with the company. Motown, Stax and A&M are good examples of companies that grew in market share rivalling for a time the major companies by creating a distinctive sound.

The established major companies lost three-quarters of the market share, as noted above, but did not disappear. Rather they adapted to the new conditions. By the 1970s the majors had regained much of their prior market share, by, in effect, becoming financing and distribution companies for a series of divisions that were allowed to operate as independent small firms (Peterson and Berger 1971; Denisoff 1973). By 1958, however, this major structural reorganisation had not yet begun. Instead, the majors were attacking rock and its creators in the press, and in the courts, believing that it was an artificially induced fad that would soon fade away if

they could just gain control, once more, of the music played on the radio (Chapple and Garofalo 1977)....

This article has focused on a unique event, the advent of rock at a particular historical moment. Nonetheless, as I have shown elsewhere (Peterson 1967; 1972), the advent of jazz following the First World War was sudden, and like the great change in country music in the 1970s (Peterson and DiMaggio 1975) involved many of the same processes found to be important here. This suggests that an analysis of the role of . . . 'constraints' on the production of culture together with the influence of creators and audiences might be useful in understanding the dynamics of other facets of music and the culture industry more generally.

Notes

1   The word 'rock' or 'rock music' will be used to refer to all forms of the music including its 1950s pre-Beatles forms that are often designated 'rock'n'roll' and 'rockabilly'.
2   There is disagreement among the historians of rock over dating its nascence, but all agree that it emerged as a major force on the commercial popular culture scene in 1954. See Gillett 1983; Denisoff 1973; Chapple and Garofalo 1977; Marcus 1976; Hendler 1983; Curtis 1987; Shaw 1987.
3   For an exquisite case study of how the advent of BMI fostered country music song writing, see Rumble (1980).
4   Large numbers of FM-band radios stations were also being licenced in this period further adding to the confusion over the future of radio broadcasting. FM did not influence the development of rock music, however, until the latter part of the 1960s when FM gave impetus to the development of 'underground rock' (Denisoff 1973; Chapple and Garofalo 1977).
5   Personal interviews with Randy Wood, John R. and R. Murphy Nash.
6   These figures, and all the others cited in this section, unless otherwise noted, are drawn from Peterson and Berger (1975).

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Editor's Notes on Further Reading

Peterson on Musical Change and the Culture Industry

Explanations of changes in popular music styles usually focus on changes in the audience, affecting demand, or on changes among creators and performers themselves. Peterson challenges such explanations of musical change from a "production-of-culture" perspective in his carefully focused analysis of how and why rock music attained its sudden popularity in the 1950s. Important but unrecognized "supply-side" factors like regulations, technology, industry structure, organization structure, and (not included here) types of occupational careers prompted the emergence of rock and roll as the new basis of pop music.

For related work on this topic see for example Simon Frith, "The Industrialization of Popular Music," pp. 49–74 in James Lull, ed., *Popular Music and Communication*, 2nd edn. (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1992); Richard Peterson and David Berger, "Cycles in Symbol Production: The Case of Popular Music," *American Sociological Review* 40 (1975): 158–73; John Ryan and Richard Peterson, "The Product Image: the Fate of Creativity in Country Music Songwriting," *Annual Reviews of Communication Research* 10 (1982): 11–32; John Ryan, *The Production of Culture in the Music Industry: The ASCAP–BMI Controversy* (New York: University Press of America, 1985); Samuel Gilmore, "Coordination and Convention: The Organization of the Concert World," *Symbolic Interaction* 10 (1987): 209–28; Timothy Jon Dowd, "The Musical Structure and Social Context of Number One Songs, 1955 to 1988: An Exploratory Analysis," pp. 130–57 in Robert Wuthnow, ed., *Vocabularies of Public Life: Empirical Essays in Symbolic Structure* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992); Paul Lopes, "Innovation and Diversity in the Popular Music Industry, 1969–1990," *American Sociological Review* 57 (1992): 56–71; and Richard Peterson, *Creating Country Music: Fabricating Authenticity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997). See also the articles collected in *Poetics* 28 (2–3) 2000, "The Production and Consumption of Culture: Essays on Richard A. Peterson's Contributions to Cultural Sociology," John Ryan and Michael Hughes, eds. For a different application of the same framework see Richard Peterson, "Six Constraints on the Production of Literary Works," *Poetics* 14 (1985): 45–67. For more on these factors and other discussions of cultural production see the notes to the preceding selection by Paul DiMaggio and the other editor's notes in Part III. For studies of music and group identity see the editor's note to the excerpt from work by Bryson.

Peterson's article shows that the production-of-culture perspective provides a framework for understanding social change and cultural innovation. For general discussion of larger-scale cultural innovation see Part V, this volume.

17 Art Worlds

Howard S. Becker

It was my practice to be at my table every morning at 5:30 a.m.; and it was also my practice to allow myself no mercy. An old groom, whose business it was to call me, and to whom I paid £5 a year extra for the duty, allowed himself no mercy. During all those years at Waltham Cross he was never once late with the coffee which it was his duty to bring me. I do not know that I ought not to feel that I owe more to him than to any one else for the success I have had. By beginning at that hour I could complete my literary work before I dressed for breakfast.

Anthony Trollope, 1947 [1883], p. 227

The English novelist may have told the story facetiously, but being awakened and given coffee was nevertheless integral to the way he worked. No doubt he could have done without the coffee if he had to; but he didn't have to. No doubt anyone could have performed that service; but, given the way Trollope worked, it had to be performed.

All artistic work, like all human activity, involves the joint activity of a number, often a large number, of people. Through their cooperation, the art work we eventually see or hear comes to be and continues to be. The work always shows signs of that cooperation. The forms of cooperation may be ephemeral, but often become more or less routine, producing patterns of collective activity we can call an art world. The existence of art worlds, as well as the way their existence affects both the production and consumption of art works, suggests a sociological approach to the arts. It is not an approach that produces aesthetic judgments, although that is a task many sociologists of art have set for themselves. It produces, instead, an understanding of the complexity of the cooperative networks through which art happens, of the way the activities of both Trollope and his groom meshed with those of printers, publishers, critics, librarians, and readers in the world of Victorian literature, and of the similar networks and results involved in all the arts....

Cooperative Links

Whatever the artist, defined as the person who performs the core activity without which the work would not be art, does not do must be done by someone else. The artist thus works in the center of a network of cooperating people, all of whose work is essential to the final outcome. Wherever he depends on others, a cooperative link exists. The people with whom he cooperates may share in every particular his idea of how their work is to be done. This consensus is likely when everyone involved can perform any of the necessary activities so that, while a division of labor exists, no specialized functional groups develop. This might occur in simple communally shared art forms like the square dance or in segments of a society whose ordinary members are trained in artistic activities. Well-bred nineteenth-century Americans,

for instance, knew enough music to perform the parlor songs of Stephen Foster, just as their Renaissance counterparts could perform madrigals. In such cases, cooperation occurs simply and readily.

When specialized professional groups take over the performance of the activities necessary to an art work's production, however, their members develop specialized aesthetic, financial, and career interests which differ substantially from the artist's....

Aesthetic conflicts between support personnel and the artist also occur. A sculptor I know was invited to use the services of a group of master lithographic printers. Knowing little of the technique of lithography, he was glad to have these master craftsmen do the actual printing, this division of labor being customary and having generated a highly specialized craft of printing. He drew designs containing large areas of solid colors, thinking to simplify the printer's job. Instead, he made it more difficult. When the printer rolls ink onto the stone, a large area will require more than one rolling to be fully inked and may thus exhibit roller marks. The printers, who prided themselves on their craft, explained that they could print his designs, but the areas of solid color might cause difficulty with roller marks. He had not known about roller marks and talked of using them as part of his design. The printers said no, he could not do that, because roller marks were an obvious sign (to other printers) of poor craftsmanship and they would not allow a print exhibiting roller marks to leave their shop. His artistic curiosity fell victim to the printers' craft standards, a neat example of how specialized support groups develop their own standards and interests (see Kase, 1973).

The artist was at the printers' mercy because he did not know how to print lithographs himself. His experience exemplified the choice that faces the artist at every cooperative link. He can do things as established groups of support personnel are prepared to do them; he can try to make those people do it his way; he can train others to do it his way; or he can do it himself. Any choice but the first requires an additional investment of time and energy to do what could be done less expensively if done the standard way. The artist's involvement with and dependence on cooperative links thus constrains the kind of art he can produce....

Artists often create work which existing production or exhibition facilities cannot accommodate. Try this thought experiment. Imagine that, as curator of sculpture of an art museum, you have invited a distinguished sculptor to exhibit a new work. He arrives driving a flatbed truck, on which rests a giant construction combining several pieces of large, heavy, industrial machinery into an interesting and pleasing shape. You find it moving, exciting. You ask him to take it around to the museum loading dock where the two of you discover that the door on the dock will not admit anything taller than fifteen feet; the sculpture is much larger than that. The sculptor suggests removing the wall, but by now you have realized that, even if you got it into the museum, it would fall through the floor into the basement; it is a museum, not a factory, and the building will not support so much weight. Finally, disgruntled, he takes it away....

How do nonstandard works ever get exhibited, performed, or distributed?... [T]here often exist subsidiary, nonstandard distribution channels and adventurous entrepreneurs and audiences. The former provide methods of distribution, the latter take a chance on the result. Schools often provide such an opportunity. They have

space and more-or-less free personnel in their students, and thus can muster forces more commercial presentations could not afford: real crowds for crowd scenes, outlandish assortments of instrumentalists and vocalists for musical experiments.

More artists adapt to what existing institutions can handle. By accommodating their conceptions to available resources, conventional artists accept the constraints arising from their dependence on the cooperation of members of the existing cooperative network. Wherever artists depend on others for some necessary component, they must either accept the constraints they impose or expend the time and energy necessary to provide it some other way.

Conventions

Producing art works requires elaborate cooperation among specialized personnel. How do they arrive at the terms on which they cooperate? They could, of course, decide everything afresh on each occasion. A group of musicians could discuss and agree on which sounds would be used as tonal resources, what instruments might be constructed to make those sounds, how those sounds would be combined to create a musical language, how the language would be used to create works of a particular length requiring a given number of instruments and playable for audiences of a certain size recruited in a certain way. Something like that sometimes happens, for instance, in the creation of a new theatrical group, although in most cases only a small number of the questions to be decided are actually considered anew.

People who cooperate to produce a work of art usually do not decide things afresh. Instead, they rely on earlier agreements now become customary, agreements that have become part of the conventional way of doing things in that art. Artistic conventions cover all the decisions that must be made with respect to works produced, even though a particular convention may be revised for a given work. Conventions dictate the materials to be used, as when musicians agree to base their music on the notes contained in a set of modes, or on the diatonic, pentatonic, or chromatic scales, with their associated harmonies. Conventions dictate the abstractions to be used to convey particular ideas or experiences, as when painters use the laws of perspective to convey the illusion of three dimensions or photographers use black, white, and shades of gray to convey the interplay of light and mass. Conventions dictate the form in which materials and abstractions will be combined, as in music's sonata form or poetry's sonnet. Conventions suggest the appropriate dimensions of a work, the proper length of a performance, the proper size and shape of a painting or sculpture. Conventions regulate the relations between artists and audience, specifying the rights and obligations of both.

Humanistic scholars – art historians, musicologists, and literary critics – have found the concept of the artistic convention useful in explaining artists' ability to make art works which evoke an emotional response in audiences. By using such a conventional organization of tones as a scale, composers can create and manipulate listeners' expectations as to what sounds will follow. They can then delay and frustrate the satisfaction of those expectations, generating tension and release as the expectation is ultimately satisfied (Meyer, 1956, 1973; Cooper and Meyer, 1960). Only because artist and audience share knowledge of and experience with

the conventions invoked does the art work produce an emotional effect. Barbara H. Smith (1968) has shown how poets manipulate conventional means embodied in poetic forms and diction to bring poems to a clear and satisfying conclusion, in which the expectations produced early in the lyric are simultaneously and satisfactorily resolved. E. H. Gombrich (1960) has analyzed the visual conventions artists use to create for viewers the illusion that they are seeing a realistic depiction of some aspect of the world. In all these cases (and in others like stage design, dance, and film), the possibility of artistic experience arises from the existence of a body of conventions that artists and audiences can refer to in making sense of the work.

Conventions make art possible in another sense. Because decisions can be made quickly, plans made simply by referring to a conventional way of doing things, artists can devote more time to actual work. Conventions make possible the easy and efficient coordination of activity among artists and support personnel. William Ivins (1953), for instance, shows how, by using a conventionalized scheme for rendering shadows, modeling, and other effects, several graphic artists could collaborate to produce a single plate. The same conventions make it possible for viewers to read essentially arbitrary marks as shadows and modeling. Seen this way, the concept of convention provides a point of contact between humanists and sociologists, being interchangeable with such familiar sociological ideas as norm, rule, shared understanding, custom, or folkway, all referring to the ideas and understandings people hold in common and through which they effect cooperative activity. Burlesque comedians could stage elaborate three-man skits without rehearsal because they had only to refer to a conventional body of skits they all knew, pick one, and assign the parts. Dance musicians who are total strangers can play all night with no more prearrangement than to mention a title ("Sunny Side of the Street," in C) and count off four beats to give the tempo; the title indicates a melody, its accompanying harmony, and perhaps even customary background figures. The conventions of character and dramatic structure, in the one case, and of melody, harmony, and tempo, in the other, are familiar enough that audiences have no difficulty responding appropriately.

Though standardized, conventions are seldom rigid and unchanging. They do not specify an inviolate set of rules everyone must refer to in settling questions of what to do. Even where the directions seem quite specific, they leave much to be resolved by reference to customary modes of interpretation on the one hand and by negotiation on the other. A tradition of performance practice, often codified in book form, tells performers how to interpret the musical scores or dramatic scripts they perform. Seventeenth century scores, for instance, contained relatively little information; but contemporary books explained how to deal with questions, unanswered in the score, of instrumentation, note values, extemporization, and the realization of embellishments and ornaments. Performers read their music in the light of all these customary styles of interpretation and could thus coordinate their activities (Dart, 1967). The same thing occurs in the visual arts. Much of the content, symbolism, and coloring of Italian Renaissance religious painting was conventionally given; but a multitude of decisions remained for the artist, so that even within those strict conventions different works could be produced. Adhering to the conventional materials, however, allowed viewers to read much emotion and meaning into the picture. Even where

customary interpretations of conventions exist, having become conventions themselves, artists can agree to do things differently, negotiation making change possible.

Conventions place strong constraints on the artist. They are particularly constraining because they do not exist in isolation, but come in complexly interdependent systems, so that one small change may require a variety of other changes. A system of conventions gets embodied in equipment, materials, training, available facilities and sites, systems of notation, and the like, all of which must be changed if any one component is (cf. Danto, 1980).

Consider what changing from the conventional Western chromatic musical scale of twelve tones to one including forty-two tones between the octaves entails. Such a change characterizes the compositions of Harry Partch (1949). Western musical instruments cannot produce these microtones easily, and some cannot produce them at all, so conventional instruments must be reconstructed or new instruments must be invented and built. Since the instruments are new, no one knows how to play them, and players must train themselves. Conventional Western notation is inadequate to score forty-two-tone music, so a new notation must be devised, and players must learn to read it. (Comparable resources can be taken for granted by anyone who writes for the conventional twelve chromatic tones.) Consequently, while music scored for twelve tones can be performed adequately after relatively few hours of rehearsal, forty-two-tone music requires much more work, time, effort, and resources. Partch's music was often performed in the following way: a university would invite him to spend a year. In the fall, he would recruit a group of interested students, who would build the instruments (which he had already invented) under his direction. In the winter, they would learn to play the instruments and read the notation he had devised. In the spring, they would rehearse several works and finally would give a performance. Seven or eight months of work finally would result in two hours of music, hours which could have been filled with more conventional music after eight or ten hours of rehearsal by trained symphonic musicians playing the standard repertoire. The difference in the resources required measures the strength of the constraint imposed by the conventional system.

Similarly, conventions specifying what a good photograph should look like embody not only an aesthetic more or less accepted among the people involved in the making of art photographs (Rosenblum, 1978), but also the constraints built into the standardized equipment and materials made by major manufacturers. Available lenses, camera bodies, shutter speeds, apertures, films, and printing paper all constitute a tiny fraction of the things that could be made, a selection that can be used together to produce acceptable prints; with ingenuity they can also be used to produce effects their purveyors did not have in mind. The obverse of the constraint is the standardization and dependability of mass-produced materials that photographers prize; a roll of Kodak Tri-X film purchased anywhere in the world has approximately the same characteristics and will produce the same results as any other roll.

The limitations of conventional practice are not total. You can always do things differently if you are prepared to pay the price in increased effort or decreased circulation of your work. The experience of composer Charles Ives exemplifies the latter possibility. He experimented with polytonality and polyrhythms early in the 1900s before they became part of the ordinary performer's competence. The New

York players who tried to play his chamber and orchestral music told him that it was unplayable, that their instruments could not make those sounds, that the scores could not be played in any practical way. Ives finally accepted their judgment, but continued to compose such music. What makes his case interesting is that, though he was also bitter about it, he experienced this as a great liberation (Cowell and Cowell, 1954). If no one could play his music, then he no longer had to write what musicians could play, no longer had to accept the constraints imposed by the conventions that regulated cooperation between contemporary composer and player. Since his music would not be played, he never needed to finish it; he was unwilling to confirm John Kirkpatrick's pioneer reading of the Concord Sonata as a correct one because that would mean he could no longer change it. Nor did he have to accommodate his writing to the practical constraints of what could be financed by conventional means, and so wrote his Fourth Symphony for three orchestras. (That impracticality lessened with time; Leonard Bernstein premiered the work in 1958, and it has been played many times since.)

In general, breaking with existing conventions and their manifestations in social structure and material artifacts increases artists' trouble and decreases the circulation of their work, but at the same time increases their freedom to choose unconventional alternatives and to depart substantially from customary practice. If that is true, we can understand any work as the product of a choice between conventional ease and success and unconventional trouble and lack of recognition.

Art Worlds

Art worlds consist of all the people whose activities are necessary to the production of the characteristic works which that world, and perhaps others as well, define as art. Members of art worlds coordinate the activities by which work is produced by referring to a body of conventional understandings embodied in common practice and in frequently used artifacts. The same people often cooperate repeatedly, even routinely, in similar ways to produce similar works, so that we can think of an art world as an established network of cooperative links among participants. If the same people do not actually act together in every instance, their replacements are also familiar with and proficient in the use of those conventions, so that cooperation can proceed without difficulty. Conventions make collective activity simpler and less costly in time, energy, and other resources; but they do not make unconventional work impossible, only more costly and difficult. Change can and does occur whenever someone devises a way to gather the greater resources required or reconceptualizes the work so it does not require what is not available.

Works of art, from this point of view, are not the products of individual makers, "artists" who possess a rare and special gift. They are, rather, joint products of all the people who cooperate via an art world's characteristic conventions to bring works like that into existence. Artists are some subgroup of the world's participants who, by common agreement, possess a special gift, therefore make a unique and indispensable contribution to the work, and thereby make it art.

Art worlds do not have boundaries around them, so that we can say that these people belong to a particular art world while those people do not. I am not

concerned with drawing a line separating an art world from other parts of a society. Instead, we look for groups of people who cooperate to produce things that they, at least, call art; having found them, we look for other people who are also necessary to that production, gradually building up as complete a picture as we can of the entire cooperating network that radiates out from the work in question. The world exists in the cooperative activity of those people, not as a structure or organization, and we use words like those only as shorthand for the notion of networks of people cooperating. For practical purposes, we usually recognize that many people's cooperation is so peripheral and relatively unimportant that we need not consider it, keeping in mind that such things change and what was unimportant today may be crucial tomorrow when events suddenly have made that kind of cooperation difficult to obtain.

Art worlds do not have clear boundaries in another sense. To the sociologist studying art worlds, it is as clear as, but no clearer than, it is to the participants in them whether particular objects or events are "really art" or whether they are craft or commercial work, or perhaps the expression of folk culture, or maybe just the embodied symptoms of a lunatic. Sociologists, however, can solve this problem more easily than art world participants. One important facet of a sociological analysis of any social world is to see when, where, and how participants draw the lines that distinguish what they want to be taken as characteristic from what is not to be so taken. Art worlds typically devote considerable attention to trying to decide what is and isn't art, what is and isn't their kind of art, and who is and isn't an artist; by observing how an art world makes those distinctions rather than trying to make them ourselves we can understand much of what goes on in that world. (See Christopherson, 1974a and b, for an example of this process in art photography.)

In addition, art worlds typically have intimate and extensive relations with the worlds from which they try to distinguish themselves. They share sources of supply with those other worlds, recruit personnel from them, adopt ideas that originate in them, and compete with them for audiences and financial support. In some sense, art worlds and worlds of commercial, craft, and folk art are parts of a larger social organization. So, even though everyone involved understands and respects the distinctions which keep them separate, a sociological analysis should take account of how they are not so separate after all.

Furthermore, art worlds provoke some of their members to create innovations they then will not accept. Some of these innovations develop small worlds of their own; some remain dormant and then find acceptance from a larger art world years or generations later; some remain magnificent curiosities of little more than antiquarian interest. These fates reflect both the judgments of artistic quality made by contemporary art worlds and the perhaps chance operations of a variety of other factors.

The basic unit of analysis, then, is an art world. Both the "artness" and the "worldness" are problematic, because the work that furnishes the starting point for the investigation may be produced in a variety of cooperating networks and under a variety of definitions. Some networks are large, complicated, and specifically devoted to the production of works of the kind we are investigating as their main activity. Smaller ones may have only a few of the specialized personnel

characteristic of the larger, more elaborate ones. In the limiting case, the world consists only of the person making the work, who relies on materials and other resources provided by others who neither intend to cooperate in the production of that work nor know they are doing so. Typewriter manufacturers participate in the small worlds of many would-be novelists who have no connection with the more conventionally defined literary world.

In the same way, the cooperative activity may be carried on either in the name of art or under some other definition, even though in the latter case the products might seem to us to resemble those made as art. Because "art" is an honorific title and being able to call what you do by that name has some advantages, people often want what they do to be so labeled. Just as often, people do not care whether what they do is art or not (as in the case of many household or folk arts — cake decorating, embroidery, or folk dancing, for instance) and find it neither demeaning nor interesting that their activities are not recognized as art by people who do care about such things. Some members of a society can control the application of the honorific term *art*, so not everyone is in a position to have the advantages associated with it, if he wants them.

For all these reasons, it is not clear what to include in an analysis of art worlds and what to leave out. To limit the analysis to what a society currently defines as art leaves out too much that is interesting: all the marginal cases in which people seek but are denied the name, as well as those in which people do work that outside observers can see might meet the definition but whose makers are not interested in that possibility. That would allow the process of definition by members of the society, which ought properly to be the subject of our study, to set its terms. On the other hand, to study everything that might meet a society's definition of art includes too much. Almost anything might meet such a definition, if we applied it ingeniously enough....

Though art worlds do not have sharp boundaries, they do vary in the degree to which they are independent, operating in relative freedom from interference by other organized groups in their society. Put another way, the people who cooperate in the work being studied may be free to organize their activity in the name of art, as is the case in many contemporary Western societies, whether they make use of that possibility or not. They may, however, find that they must take into account other interests represented by groups organized around other definitions. The state may exercise such control over other areas of society that major participants in the making of art works orient themselves primarily to the concerns of the state apparatus rather than to the concerns of people who define themselves as interested in art. Theocratic societies may organize the making of what we, from the perspective of our society, would recognize as works of art as an adjunct of activity defined in religious terms. In frontier societies subsistence may be so problematic that activities which do not contribute directly to the production of food or other necessities may be seen as unaffordable luxuries, so that work we might define, from a contemporary vantage point, as art gets done in the name of household necessity. What cannot be justified that way is not done. Before people can organize themselves as a world explicitly justified by making objects or events defined as art, they need sufficient political and economic freedom to do that, and not all societies provide it.

This point needs emphasis, because so many writers on what is ordinarily described as the sociology of art treat art as relatively autonomous, free from the kinds of organizational constraints that surround other forms of collective activity. I have not considered those theories here because they deal essentially with philosophical questions quite different from the mundane social organizational problems with which I have concerned myself (see Donow, 1979). Insofar as what I have to say questions the assumption of freedom from economic, political, and organizational constraint, it necessarily implies a criticism of analytic styles based on it.

Art worlds produce works and also give them aesthetic value.... [T]he interaction of all the involved parties produces a shared sense of the worth of what they collectively produce. Their mutual appreciation of the conventions they share, and the support they mutually afford one another, convince them that what they are doing is worth doing. If they act under the definition of "art," their interaction convinces them that what they produce are valid works of art.

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Editor's Notes on Further Reading

Becker on Art Worlds

Howard Becker's simple but illuminating observation that producing art is a collective enterprise depending on an extensive division of labor and on shared conventions challenges the commonsense emphasis on individual artistic creativity and absolute aesthetic criteria (compare Peterson on rock and roll, excerpted this volume). His book elaborates on the many ways art worlds enable and constrain artistic production – mobilizing resources, distributing products, assigning critical assessments, and influencing editing processes and artistic reputations – as well on the ways the state may influence art worlds, how different artistic roles are defined in relation to art worlds, and how art worlds change. Becker demonstrates that the "production of culture" perspective is not limited to understanding the outcomes of culture industries involving mass production for the market but also helps understand other sorts of social organization of artistic production.

For a related overview of studies of the arts see Samuel Gilmore, "Art Worlds: Developing the Interactionist Approach to Social Organization," pp. 148–78 in Howard Becker and Michal McCall, eds., *Symbolic Interaction and Cultural Studies* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1990), and for other approaches to arts institutions see Judith Blau, "Study of the Arts: A Reappraisal," *Annual Review of Sociology* 14 (1988): 269–92; Blau, *The Shape of Culture: A Study of Contemporary Cultural Patterns in the United States* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989); and Pierre-Michel Menger, "Artistic Labor Markets and Careers," *Annual Review of Sociology* 25 (1999): 541–74. For an example of cultural production which combines both market and aesthetic determinants see Larson on architecture, this volume. For development of similar ideas from perspectives which stress more explicitly longer-term historical and broader structural forces than does Becker, see for example Vera Zolberg, *Constructing a Sociology of the Arts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Janet Wolff, *The Social Production of Art* 2nd edn. (New York: New York University Press, 1993); and Raymond Williams, *The Sociology of Culture,* with a new foreword by Bruce Robbins (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995 [1981]).

While Becker's examples are drawn from work in many media, including various musical and literary forms and genre (see notes to excerpts from Peterson and Griswold, this volume), studies of visual art probably provide the richest lode of exemplars, extensions and critiques of the perspective Becker articulates here. On the visual arts see for example Harrison White and Cynthia White, *Canvases and Careers* (New York: John Wiley, 1965); Michael Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985); Diana Crane, *The Transformation of the Avant-Garde: The New York Art World, 1940–1985* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1987); Liah Greenfeld, *Different Worlds: A Sociological Study of Taste, Choice, and Success in Art* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Rosanne Martorella, *Corporate Art* (New Brunswick NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1990); Gladys Engel Lang and Kurt Lang, *Etched in Memory: the Building and Survival of Artistic Reputation* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1990); Albert Bergesen, "A Theory of Pictorial Discourse," pp. 158–68 in Robert Wuthnow, ed., *Vocabularies of Public Life: Empirical Essays in Symbolic Structure* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992); Judith Huggins Balfe, ed., *Paying the Piper: Causes and Consequences of Art Patronage* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1993); Anne Bowler, "Methodological Dilemmas in the

Sociology of Art," in Diana Crane, ed., *The Sociology of Culture* (Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1994) 247–66; Victoria Alexander, "From Philanthropy to Funding: The Effects of Corporate and Public Support on American Art Museums," *Poetics* 24 (1996): 87–129; Alexander, "Pictures at an Exhibition: Conflicting Pressures in Museums and the Display of Art," *American Journal of Sociology* 101 (1996): 797–839; and Vera Zolberg and Joni Maya Cherbo, eds., *Outsider Art: Contesting Boundaries in Contemporary Culture* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997). In "The Culture of Production: Aesthetic Choices and Constraints in Culinary Work," *American Journal of Sociology* 97 (1999): 1268–94, Gary Alan Fine extends the production-of-culture perspective to apply to accounts of aesthetic and expressive dimensions of the work of restaurant cooks.

18 American Character and the American Novel: An Expansion of Reflection Theory in the Sociology of Literature

Wendy Griswold

Is the American novel unique, as it is often said to be? If so, do its peculiar properties reflect some American character or experience? I have examined the relationship between American novels and the society that produced them by analyzing a random sample of 130 novels published in the United States between 1876 and 1910. The analysis shows that seemingly mundane things such as copyright laws have had considerable influence on the content of American novels. My findings demonstrate that the concept of literature as reflection must be expanded to include reflection of production circumstances, author characteristics, and formal problems, as well as the preoccupations of any particular society.

To begin, consider the background of the production and consumption of novels in the late 19th century. Americans during this period were highly literate and interested in reading (Cipolla 1969, table 21). Following the Civil War there had been an unprecedented growth of the reading habit in the United States (Tebbel 1975).... Within 10 years of Appomattox, books, magazines, and newspapers were proliferating, and the publishing industry was expanding rapidly, with some 200 houses operating by the early 1880s.

Fiction led in sheer quantity of titles published. The fiction flood began in the 1870s and continued until 1908, the first year when novels did not lead all other categories of books published.... In view of the vast number of novels being written and read in late 19th-century America, it seems reasonable to examine these novels to see if they reveal anything about the society that produced them. The first question that must be asked is whether there was anything peculiarly American about the American novel.

I

The rise of the novel has been well charted, particularly by Ian Watt ([1957] 1974). Watt shows that the 18th-century novel in England was the product of an age in which the human personality was believed to be essentially knowable, knowledge of it coming from the accumulation of evidence drawn from the detailed observation of behavior. This interest coincided with two other 18th-century developments. One

was the rapid expansion of a new audience for literature, the literate middle class, especially the leisured middle-class women. Lacking the education and inclination to read Latin or serious verse, yet wanting diversion, these women offered a ready market for a not-too-demanding literary form. The second development was the decline of patronage and the appearance of its economic equivalent for writers, the bookseller, who encompassed the activities of publisher and printer as well as merchant. The booksellers knew that their customers wanted hours of entertainment, not moments of exquisite feeling. Therefore, they paid authors by the page. For the author, in consequence, "Speed and copiousness tended to become the supreme economic virtues" (Watt [1957] 1974, p. 56).

This confluence of interest in the human personality, audience, and economic institutions gave rise to a genre that was easy to read, long, written in prose, fictitious, devoted to subjects of interest to middle-class women and to an analysis of character through detailed description of behavior – the genre we know as the novel. Eighteenth-century novelists explored the subjects of particular interest to their readership: love and marriage, economic individualism, the complexities of modern life, the possibility of personal morality in a corrupting world.

It has often been held that although "the novel" looks like what I have just described, "the American novel" does not. One version of this argument is that classic American fiction is about men removing themselves from society, especially from women who seem to represent the constraints of social and domestic life. Often with a dark-skinned male companion, these men, or boys, flee to the ocean, the forest, the unknown lands down river and there test their individual strength (Marx 1964). Leslie Fiedler (1966), basing his case on classic works which fit the man-fleeing-society pattern, has asked,

> Where is our *Madame Bovary*, our *Anna Karenina*, our *Pride and Prejudice* or *Vanity Fair?* Among our classical novels … the best attempt at dealing with love is *The Scarlet Letter*, in which the physical consummation of adultery has occurred and all passion burned away before the novel proper begins. For the rest, there are *Moby Dick* and *Huckleberry Finn*, *The Last of the Mohicans*, *The Red Badge of Courage*, the stories of Edgar Allan Poe – books that turn from society to nature or nightmare out of a desperate need to avoid the facts of wooing, marriage, and child-bearing. (Fiedler 1966, pp. 24–5)

Fiedler attributes this theme of flight from society to an American pathology, a social and sexual immaturity, tinged with racial guilt, that manifests itself in the American novelist's inability to write about adult subjects such as heterosexual love and the reconciliation of individual freedom with social life . . . .

Any attempt to read American character from American novels should begin with a more systematic attempt to determine just what Americans were writing and reading. Then, one must ask whether these American novels were different from European novels, and how they compared with our conception of the "standard novel" as the genre was formulated in the 18th century. To the extent that the peculiar character of American novels is substantiated, one should look for some possible causes for these distinctive American traits other than simply some uniqueness of the national psyche. Reflection theory is not necessarily wrong, but it can be

used to encompass more complex societal/literary relationships than most of its proponents have thus far demonstrated.

II

My search for links between American society and American novels entailed taking a random sample from all novels published in the United States between 1876 and 1910. The source of the sample was the *American Catalogue*, a series begun in 1876 that recorded every book published in this country. A sample of 130 novels was divided into time periods. Period I covered novels published from 1876 to 1884, Period II from 1884 to 1895, Period III from 1895 to 1905, and Period IV from 1905 through 1910. About half of the novels were written by American authors, and the other half were American reprints of foreign works. Analysis focused on a number of variables pertaining to plot, author characteristics, and bibliographic information . . .

The study began with two propositions. First, the overall differences between American and foreign novels might be less impressive than has often been supposed. The search for "the American novel" may in part have been self-fulfilling. For in seeking some quintessentially American literature, scholars must pass by *The House of Mirth* and seize upon *Huckleberry Finn* because of the latter's very uniqueness; novels like *The House of Mirth*, dealing with marriage, money, and the social world, are too indistinguishable from their European counterparts to lay claim to being representative of "the American novel." . . . A comparison of a broad sample of American and foreign novels, keeping in mind the norm set by 18th-century English novelists, should reveal fewer differences of content and treatment than the reflection-of-national-character theories would suggest.

My second proposition was that, to the extent that 19th-century American novels did contain a unique set of themes and subjects, it was neither because American readers were not interested in novels about love and marriage nor because American authors lacked the capacity to write such novels. Instead, American authors had economic incentives to deviate from the standard subjects of the genre. This hypothesis derives from the history of American copyright legislation.

During most of the 19th century, American copyright laws protected citizens or permanent residents of the United States but not foreign authors (Clark 1960). The result was that British and other foreign works could be reprinted and sold in the United States without royalties being paid to their authors, while American authors did receive royalty payments. Many interests in the United States benefited from this literary piracy and lobbied to maintain the status quo. (Actually, piracy is something of a misnomer, for the practice was perfectly legal.) The nascent printing industry was kept busy. Publishers made huge profits from reprinting foreign books. Readers had available the best foreign literature at low prices; for example, in 1843 *A Christmas Carol* sold for 6 ¢ in the United States and the equivalent of $2.50 in England. . . .

After almost a century of ineffective pressure from American authors for legal relief from this competition, in 1891 the Platt-Simmonds Act extended copyright to foreign authors. Ironically, the turnabout in Congress was the consequence of the American publishers themselves being undercut by printers of "cheap books," those

immensely popular, flimsy reprints of classics and best-sellers, which flourished in the 1880s (Shove 1937)....

I contend that the choices American novelists made regarding the subjects and themes of their novels, insofar as these choices differed from those made by their foreign counterparts, were due less to the differences in American character or experience than to different market constraints....

Platt-Simmonds erased the different market positions of the two groups of authors, and the incentive for American authors to select nontraditional subjects disappeared. Therefore, I hypothesized considerable thematic divergence between the American novels and the foreign novels published in the United States prior to 1891, and convergence after that year.

I looked at the differences between the American and foreign novels of the sample during the four time periods, the first two falling largely before Platt-Simmonds, the second two after....

Overall, there should be more consistency than variation between the American and foreign authors' novels, and both groups should resemble the standard novel that deals with love, marriage, and money.... [and some] plot variations between the foreign and American novels in the earlier two periods should decrease or disappear during the later two. This decreased variation represents the hypothesized convergence following 1891....

III

... Love, marriage, and seduction were the subjects of the 18th-century novels. I was interested in seeing whether these original preoccupations had persisted, and what forms they had taken by the time under consideration.

Adult heterosexual love continued to be of overwhelming importance, being the key to the plot in 55% of the sample novels and of considerable importance in an additional 33%. The love complications usually revolved around the question of marriage, important in 64% of the novels. Matters of love and marriage generally worked out in satisfying, unsurprising ways. Most often, the marriage took place as anticipated, though occasionally one or both of the expected partners married someone else.

Other forms of love were given less, though considerable, attention. Love between adult members of the same sex was seldom the center of the novel's action but was of some importance in over 40% of the novels, and a similar proportion of them dealt with the love between an adult and a child. And although love and marriage were nearly omnipresent, seduction, the keystone of Richardson's novels and many to follow, was not a standard feature of the sample novels, figuring in about one-fifth of the plots.

American and foreign authors did not differ in their emphases on love and marriage, and both groups wrote about these subjects in the majority of their novels. Nor was there any evidence of an increase or decrease of stress on these subjects over time ... There were no differences between American and foreign authors about the likelihood of the anticipated marriage occurring, the emphasis on love between adult members of the same sex, or the importance of love between adults and children.

These last two findings cast doubt on Fiedler's stress on the homoeroticism of American novels....

Young adults constituted 60% of the protagonists, somewhat over 10% were middle-aged, and an additional 10% were followed through several stages of their lives. This emphasis on young adulthood, roughly defined as 18–30, held true for both American and foreign novels and did not change over time. The vast majority of our protagonists were single at the beginning of their respective novels. By the end of the novels, most were married or about to marry....

The novel is traditionally regarded as the genre read by, and concerned with, the middle class. Surprisingly, though, the majority of the sample novels did not feature middle-class protagonists. The American authors were significantly more apt to have protagonists begin in and, especially, end up in the middle class; the foreign authors favored upper-class protagonists. Both groups of authors seemed to feel that working-class characters were not likely to be interesting protagonists. The difference between American and foreign authors regarding the protagonist's class at the beginning of the novel was greatest in Period I and diminished thereafter. The difference in outcomes was more persistent, Americans being significantly more apt to have the hero or heroine end up in the middle class during all periods except the third.

Sample protagonists rose in social ranking in about one-quarter of the novels, occasionally descended, but usually (68%) stayed put. Again, a breakdown by period is revealing. In the first period, American authors were significantly more inclined to depict social mobility; 53% of the American novels presented socially mobile protagonists, compared with 19% of the foreign novels. *Eirene* (Ames 1870) is typical: the heroine starts out as the daughter of a poor but loving farm family, goes through hardships as a hand in a New England textile mill, and ends up in a New York mansion, married to the scion of one of the city's old Dutch families. But in the later three periods, the American and foreign authors are nearly identical on this variable, treating social mobility in about one-third of their novels....

Prison conditions, temperance, the treatment of women, the plight of the poor, and cruelty to animals were subject to the reforming zeal of the sample authors. Social reform was an important theme in 39% of the American novels and 29% of the foreign ones. The difference between the two groups of authors was greatest in the first period, when American authors dealt with social reform in 69% of their novels, foreign authors in 40% of theirs. Thereafter, the two groups converged, with about one-quarter of their novels dealing with reform.

About one-third of both American and foreign novels were set in large cities. Americans favored small towns as well, locating 30% of their novels in small towns, a setting less popular with foreign authors (15%). The American preference for small towns was strongest in Period I, in which 53% of their novels had small town settings. Few novels were set in the wilderness and, contrary to the Fiedler argument, Europeans were slightly more likely to utilize wilderness settings (15%) than were Americans (7%)....

The action generally took place in the present or the immediate past. Foreign authors showed somewhat more interest in exploring the remote past, especially in the first two periods, in which about one-quarter of the foreign novels took place before the 19th century. The difference disappeared in the last two periods.

Money, the necessity of having it, its acquisition, and occasionally its loss, was a central element in 57% of the plots. During the first three periods there was a considerable difference between American and foreign authors, with the latter writing about money in three-quarters of their novels, Americans in about half. Period IV shows an unexplained drop in the importance of money in foreign novels (27%), so while convergence may be taking place, the trend is by no means clear.

About one-third of the sample novels dealt with religion, and there seems to have been an uneven decline in its importance over the 35 years. The American and foreign authors were equally likely to write about religion. Supernatural elements, the ghosts and gothic devices that Fiedler argued Americans substituted for the excitements of passionate adult love, played a role in only 15% of the novels. Foreign authors were somewhat more likely to include supernatural elements during the first two periods than were Americans; during the last two periods, the two groups converged.

Humor is often cited as a characteristic of American literature. Although only 11% of the sample novels contained significant humor, the American novels were slightly more apt to be humorous (16%) than the foreign ones (6%). This difference between the two groups of authors was most pronounced in the first two periods, during which no humorous novels by foreign authors appeared in the sample. . . .

IV

A sociological approach to literature assumes that literary works are in some way linked to the society that creates and/or reads them (Escarpit 1971). Reflection has been a popular metaphor in the attempt to explain recalcitrant literary phenomena. This study demonstrates the need for an expanded conception of how literature reflects the social world.

What have the sample novels reflected? The most consistent finding is the mutual resemblance among the novels, both between those by American and by foreign authors and among those of all four periods. And, lest this be regarded as an artifact introduced by American publishers seeking any novels, native or foreign, that catered to some unique American reading tastes, one should remember that the characteristics shared by the sample novels are much the same as the 18th-century archetypal features of the genre. Like their forerunners, the sample novels are about love and marriage, money and social life. Their protagonists start out single and end up married. They operate in a complex social world familiar to their readers, they are basically virtuous, they encounter a sequence of emotional and moral dilemmas, they often improve their lot.

This resistance to changes of subject matter that novels seem to possess is especially striking when one considers the self-imposed limits of the genre, the many things about which novelists do not write. Missing most conspicuously is material related to work, such as career histories or the depiction of on-the-job working relationships. Also missing is an intensive examination of married life, posthoneymoon, especially as it involves the rearing of children; this may be the feminine counterpart to the absence of novelistic treatment of male work . . . Much of this

continuity of subject matter can be explained by considering what I shall call the imperatives of the genre. . . .

[T]he fact that novels are long means that they are normally not consumed in one sitting. Novels require a considerable investment of time, and several decisions to sit down and read rather than do something else. This poses a formal problem for the novelist: he needs not only to attract the initial interest of his reader but also to influence a subsequent series of decisions. Working within such a genre, the novelist cannot orchestrate an emotional tension and release, such as that of tragic catharsis; he cannot set the stage and structure the emotional experience to provide his audience a brief transportation to another world. The novelist's problem is to interest the reader enough so that he keeps deciding to pick up the novel again and to enable the reader to slip easily back into the novel's world at almost any point. . . .

The novelist must write about some aspect of common life that is emotionally engaging, that arouses his reader's feelings and curiosity. And this curiosity must ultimately be satisfied, so the novelist needs a subject that lends itself to dramatic shaping by having a distinct climax and resolution.

Love, especially love associated with the selection and winning of a marriage partner, is the perfect solution. It is familiar to most readers, it is full of intense feeling and emotional conflict, and – unlike working life or child rearing, which share those two features – it reaches a definite resolution. When recounting a love affair or possible marriage, one can always say "how it turned out." Love and marriage solve the novelist's formal problem by offering both connection points and dramatic structure. The imperatives of the genre compel many novelists to give love and marriage an inordinate amount of attention, disproportionate to the amount of time they occupy in most people's actual experience. The sample novels reflect this. Many of the resemblances among novels stem from these formal imperatives.

But although the sample novels share a preoccupation with love and marriage, they also exhibit some differences between the works of American and foreign authors. Most of these differences – social reform themes, the class of the protagonist, the concentration on small towns, the depiction of the remote past, the treatment of money, the presence of humor – follow a common pattern: the difference between the American and the foreign authors is most marked during the first one or two periods, and during the later periods the two groups converge. In many cases of early divergence, it was the American authors who deviated from what we regard as the standard subjects and treatments of the novel, writing more about social reform and less about money, using more humor, and so forth.

If these differences had persisted over all four periods, they might have constituted a reflection of some peculiarities of the American character or experience. But the pattern of differences in the 1870s, which then converge sometime in the 1890s, supports the proposition that what was being reflected in the initial differences were the different market positions occupied by the American and the foreign authors. Both were subject to the imperatives of the genre and the traditions of the novel. But the American authors had greater incentive to deviate from the norm, to write on nontraditional themes that the European authors had not effectively monopolized. After 1891, there was no longer the same incentive for deviation, the novelistic

imperatives took over, and the American authors swung into line with everyone else. So in addition to reflecting imperatives of the genre, the novels reflected differential market positions brought about by the state of American copyright laws. . . .

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Editor's Notes on Further Reading

Griswold on Literature and Society

How is literature related to the society within which it is produced? Griswold undermines overgeneralized claims that literatures reflect societies by showing the surprising impact of a simple change in copyright law on literary themes, and more broadly by drawing attention to the formal demands of novels as a genre, the context of the publishing industry, and the nature of the audience for fiction. Her content analysis of a large sample of late nineteenth-century novels by authors from different countries compares many aspects of their plots, protagonists, settings and themes, finding, against "reflection theory," overwhelming similarities and increasing convergence between novels by American and by non-American authors. (For a more general challenge to reflection theory, see the excerpt by Raymond Williams, this volume; for another example of the impact of the law on cultural products, see excerpt from Peterson, this volume.)

Other studies demonstrating the way specific aspects of art world or production context influence literature and its interpretation include Richard Peterson, "Six Constraints on the Production of Literary Works," *Poetics* 14 (1985): 45–67; Griswold, "The Writing on the Mud Wall: Nigerian Novels and the Imaginary Village," *American Sociological Review* 57 (1992): 709–24; Sarah M. Corse, *Nationalism and Literature: The Politics of Culture in Canada and the United States* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Janice Radway, *A Feeling For Books: The Book-of-the-Month Club, Literary Taste and Middle-Class Desire* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Wendy Griswold and Fredrik Engelstad, "Does the Center Imagine the Periphery? State Support and Literary Regionalism in Norway and the United States," *Comparative Social Research* 17 (1998): 129–75; and Wendy Griswold, *Bearing Witness: Writers, Readers, and the Novel in Nigeria* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000). Some related studies emphasizing literary themes or readers' interpretation include Gaye Tuchman and Nina Fortin, "Fame and Misfortune: Edging Women Out of the Great Literary Tradition," *American Journal of*

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19   Behind the Postmodern Façade: Architectural Change in Late Twentieth-Century America

Magali Sarfatti Larson

From a sociological point of view, discourse includes all that a particular category of agents say (or write) in a specific capacity and in a definable thematic area. Discourse commonly invites dialogue. However, in architecture (as in all professions), discourse is not open to everyone but based on social appropriation and a principle of exclusion. Laypersons are not entitled to participate in the production of the profession as a discipline.[1]

The discourse of architecture is based on a contested premise that it must always seek to prove. Critics, historians, and practitioners of architecture operate on the assumption that only what legitimate architects do deserves to be treated as art and included in architectural discourse. I call this basic exclusionary principle the ideological syllogism of architecture: "Only architects produce architecture. Architecture is an art. Architects are necessary to produce art."

Although the syllogism is necessary to found the discipline's discourse, it is compromised by a contradiction characteristic of this profession. The discourse of architecture is constructed autonomously, by experts who are accountable only to other experts. However, in order to continue "formulating fresh propositions," disciplines need to show how their rules become embodied in a canon, and the canon of architecture consists of beautiful or innovative *built exemplars*. These buildings are not and cannot be exemplars of the architect's autonomous application of knowledge and talent alone. They are also striking manifestations of the architect's dependence on clients and the other specialists of building, be they rival professionals or humbler executants. I call this dependence *heteronomy*, because it contrasts radically with the autonomy that is always considered a defining attribute of professional work.

In sum, because the discourse of architecture is ultimately based on its practice, and because this practice points to a fundamental heteronomy, the basic syllogism is as much an ideological position as a functioning principle of exclusion. The dialectics of discourse and practice (or of autonomy and heteronomy) are salient in architecture. They are particularly significant in the analysis of its discursive shifts.

Twice in our century, Western architecture has gone through significant changes in both discourse and realizations. In the orthodox historiographic accounts, submerged currents of stylistic change seem to have produced both times the architectural conceptions of elite designers. Indeed, despite architecture's characteristic

dependence on patrons or clients for its work, the histories of architecture locate the origins of change within the discursive field itself, in the theories and ideas of architects.

The first and most radical shift in the discourse of architecture culminated in the Modern Movement of the 1920s in Europe. An adapted European modernism became *the* architectural style of international capitalism after World War II. The second shift originated in reaction to the debased architecture that, however unwanted, derived from modernism. Arising against the latter's universalistic claims, the postmodern revision refuses formal and ideological unity (and indeed does not appear to have any)....

On the one hand, postmodernism is undeniably connected to architectural discourse: What became of European modernism in the United States (and spread from here to the whole world) was both the target of postmodern attacks and the antithesis that gave postmodernism much of its substance....

On the other hand, I hold the general hypothesis that changes in ideas and styles correspond to (and attempt to make sense of) structural changes lived through and perceived by strategically located groups of people. In ways that should not be prejudged but always explored empirically, cultural change may also correspond to broad changes in social structure. Given this hypothesis, I take changes in aesthetic preference and taste among architects not as signs of whim or trendiness, nor as indications of idealist reorientation, but as symptoms of changes in architects' conceptions of their professional role and in the conditions of their practice. In postmodern discourse, the model of European modernism is related as much to practical conceptions of the architect's role and to changes in the way architects must make a living as to their formal imagination....

The Relevance of Discursive Battles

Architectural schools and distinctive pedagogies, professional organizations and journals, market-induced specialization and associations, the public interest piqued by the general press, all serve as channels for the circulation and the reproduction of architectural ideas, inducing imitation and promoting stylistic trends. But this is not all. The occupational identity formed and nourished by these means can include a deeper attention to the idea of architecture as art.

Normal architectural practice is oriented to service and commercial interests, inevitably heteronomous, and often subordinate and alienating. To compensate for these disadvantages, it may prompt broad attention among architects to the discourse that exalts the artistic dimension of their trade. It does not have to be conscious attention: it may well be only distracted, or nostalgic, or resentful. Appropriately, a Philadelphia architect with a "normal" practice quips that the annual design awards of the journal *Progressive Architecture* are "*True Confessions* for architects." Awards for "pure" design (and "pure" design itself) are pipe dreams, this architect thinks; nonetheless, these dreams engage deep and unspoken yearnings and thus offer architects a fantasy, one that supports their ideological claim to be artists, not mere crafts-people. Technological advances, after all, are the province of engineers and manufacturers; and being a commercial hack or a good

employee is nothing to fantasize about. Art and celebrity are the stuff of which individual dreams are made in this profession.

Two kinds of struggle in the discursive field of architecture are able to elicit at least the unconscious attention of ordinary professionals. Neither is unique to architecture, but they both appear repeatedly in the modern polities of culture.

The first kind of struggle is framed in specialized terms, even though it may implicate several art media in an aesthetic movement and exceed the boundaries of a delimited "art world." Specialized cultural debates matter most of all to the producers and other specialists of the field rather than to clients. The reason, as Pierre Bourdieu has argued for scientific fields, is not purely intellectual and disinterested. Rather, there are special interests at stake: The outcomes of disputes among experts affect each field's internal hierarchy, rankings, networks of influence, and personal standing – all the strategic positions by means of which symbolic capital is formed and resources of wealth and power claimed.[2]

When "purely" aesthetic challenges reverberate through the medium of discourse in the professional field of architecture, they can evoke support or opposition from heterogeneous sources. Debates that originate among different factions of the design elite can thus become (as in other specialized fields) the occasion for conflicts and alliances of another sort. What is distinctive in architecture is the role that clients' choices can play in the resolution of the debate. Controversy is fierce, but where a project reaches the stage of realization, controversy must normally be tempered at least enough to assuage the clients' fears (if not quite to accommodate their wishes).

The second kind of cultural struggle draws the first into a broader (and hazier) frame, but it is a different phenomenon analytically. The impulse for the first kind of struggle comes from within the field, picking up steam from possible coalitions with insiders or related outsiders as it unfolds. The second kind of struggle has its own specific language and objectives, but the impulse comes from the outside: In specific historical circumstances, the modern politics of culture are played out against the background of larger social conflicts, from which delimited fields borrow intensity and substance. These are the distinctive moments of the Western art avant-gardes. On the one hand, formal aesthetic challenges are infused with the resonance of political and moral struggle. On the other hand, debates that are still couched in esoteric language and concerned with specialized issues may come to move along with larger movements: The dissenters, not content with challenging discourse alone, may attempt to renegotiate the power relationships within and around their special field of practice and may, in fact, attack its established protective boundaries.

The modernist phase of twentieth-century architecture, distinguished by an ideological moment of birth, clearly illustrates the struggle of a political-aesthetic avant-garde. In the 1920s, new visions of architecture inflamed the profession's discourse by seeking to transcend the internal divisions and to forge anew the institutions of practice. My study will show that political fervor was not characteristic of the postmodern transformation yet not entirely absent from its early phases.

Battles in the discursive field of architecture are as narrow and specialized as in any other field. However, the utility, the visibility, and the public character of architecture tend to give to its battles a metaphorical significance greater than in other arts and even other professions. Indeed, I believe that the ideas of architectural innovators have shaped the distinctive public face of our modernity....

In the late 1960s and early 1970s the revision of architectural discourse coincided with challenges waged from inside the profession against the architect's subservience to power. The coincidence came from different groups of architect-activists taking dogmatic modernism (which had made architecture part and parcel of the relentless modernization of cities) as a common enemy.[3]

In the United States, modernism-as-modernization primarily referred to the large-scale urban renewal that started in the 1950s. In the late 1970s, an extraordinary wave of real estate speculation succeeded the momentous economic crisis and spurred on architectural revisionism (at least of one kind). Clients with more credit than capital wanted their buildings to look rich, playful, and different. Developers' much-vaunted discovery of design contributed to the fame of a few "signature architects," but their main criterion in selecting design was and continues to be product differentiation. Postmodernism was bound to become tainted by its alliance with invidious status distinction, "image-making," and mere visual variety.

Architects' commissions and the glamor associated with the profession in the 1980s registered the effects of financial deregulation and the redistribution of income from poor and middle strata to the wealthiest. When architects and critics scoff at traditional postmodernism as an architecture "for the age of Reagan," they refer mainly to *style*. Few architects identify an age by the types of commissions that became prevalent or extinct. Yet the architectural sign of the period was less a style than the overabundance of office and retail space, luxury hotels, rich men's homes, and cultural institutions for the elite.

During the revision of the modern, divergent ideals clustered around the conflict between "image" and the "reality" of architecture. These terms can be read as transpositions of the basic disjunction between conception and execution in architects' work, for architects always design images (plans and working drawings are technical images of the building to be) while others do the building. That image and reality occupied a central place in the postmodern contest suggests that something was perceived to be changing (by will or by chance) in the architect's basic social identity.

The problematic relations of architectural image and reality call into question the place of aesthetic conception in the economy of building. If, indeed, architects are increasingly and primarily hired to embellish buildings and attract customers with images and symbols, their social function has changed. In Scott Lash's words, symbols have "a purchase on meaning but not on reality"; unlike signs, symbols have no referents. Buildings (or cities) do not refer to anything, they are. They can function as symbols, but their reality is overwhelmingly material and utilitarian. They are not circulating goods (cultural or material) but the primary stage of life and commerce on which goods are exchanged and consumed.[4]

If the best architectural work becomes the projection of symbolic and cultural significance, then architects are resigned to abandon to others the material design of the environment. It may, of course, be argued that they have never designed but a very small part of it. At issue, however, is their collective intention to provide the keynote.

Architectural supremacism, a professional ideology that extolled design for design's sake, rose in the mid-1970s on a contested and insecure professional scene. In the beginning, it had attempted a return to the imperious and autonomous

self-definition of modernism, but it was too late. Not only did supremacism abandon earlier efforts to rethink cities gutted by modernism-as-modernization; its proponents did not have the professional power to restore modernism by a "working through" of partially developed aesthetic possibilities. Yet tacitly admitting all building types to the legitimacy of architecture in reality functioned as a reconstructive strategy.

At the same time, an ideal of environmental "nondisturbance" was inspiring a powerful middle-class movement, risen to preserve what was left of the ravaged urban fabric. This movement was also in part too late. The precedent of massive urban displacement and the explosive protest of poor residents cast a different retrospective light on the preservation movement.

Its goals transposed the urgency of urban protest into an aesthetic and nostalgic ideological key, dear to cultivated and politically empowered professionals. In turn, the historicist or populist styles of architectural revisionism transposed the concerns of preservation – care for the old, the meaningful, the picturesque, the layered diversity of the urban fabric – into eclectic allusions to the remote or recent past of architecture. The resulting pastiches often collate fragments that never had a historical existence together, with disturbing effect. Perhaps more disturbing is the dim sense that pastiche harbors a double reversal of collective concerns: First, pastiche reverses the concern with security and a decent life into concern for the old neighborhoods in which these people live; second, it reverses the concern for preservation into a preoccupation with cute historical allusions.

Rejecting traditional postmodernism became *de rigueur* among professionals in the second part of the 1980s, but this should not conceal other facts. First, any style can be impressed in the service of speculative profit. Second, the urban working class and the poor suffered more from renewal than from remodeling and restoration. Third, the emphasis on context, the respect for the labyrinthine streets and motley construction of living cities is one of traditional postmodernism's most positive and significant contributions. Fourth, the proponents of contextualism can help invest even preservation with oppositional force. Last, at the level of the architectural objects themselves, the essence of postmodernism is not one style but the tolerance of multiple languages.

If "a thousand flowers bloomed," it is because the growing numbers of architects found (with difficulty) increasingly diverse clients for a great variety of projects. Either these diverse clients wanted stylistic novelty and excitement, or they could be convinced to accept new and momentarily different architectural idioms. A recession that aggravated the perennial structural problems of the profession pressed all but the most recalcitrant dogmatists to accept, even to encourage, the blooming. When postmodern pluralism is expressed in these terms, the situation after 1980 becomes clearer.

Architecture emerged from its double crisis with a restorative professional ideology – the formalist emphasis on pure design – and a pluralism that applied both to styles and building types. Having reconstructed the traditional identity of the architect-as-artist, formalism helped designers to effect a strategic retreat toward the individualism of one-of-a-kind commissions.

In the United States of the 1980s, social commissions and democratically oriented public architecture had all but vanished. The ideological comfort that formalism tendered to architects was excellence for excellence's sake, in either the playful or the

rigorous delights of an eclectic discourse. The profession of architecture thus entered the speculative boom of the 1980s with new gatekeepers and a varied design elite but neither a common style nor a common vision. No group had enough power or enough influence to propose a direction, much less enforce common standards for the disparate professional enterprise. Yet the adoption of traditional postmodernism as favored style of the real estate boom made it easy to take it for a dominant style and blame it for what was happening to architecture.

Denying legitimacy to the use of architects as scenographers or stylists and of architecture as "packaging" matches the revaluation of craftmanship and service, which architects emphasized when aesthetic standards became uncertain. But despite their importance, constructional and pragmatic standards cannot define what architecture will look like (except multiple in form).

In sum, in our century architectural modernism went from technocratic social engineering to the service of corporate power. With the loss of social impetus, the aesthetic vision became routine. Strains and revisions multiplied at the level of discourse, quickening aesthetic disintegration. When an activist generation ignited political dissent and criticism inside the profession, the primacy of practice forced the symbolic gatekeepers to admit the ineradicable de facto diversity of architects' work.

Viewed from this angle, postmodern pluralism is a legacy of the anti-authoritarian politics of the 1960s, but the transformative impulses were contained within the specialized limits of a still weak and basically untransformed profession. The most substantial change was therefore in architecture's official discourse. The oppositional content of postmodernism (its emphasis on urban community, its advocacy of accessible design and authentic symbolism) struggles on within practices perforce devoted to the places of work, life, and leisure of the new urban middle class.

Architecture and Cultural Transitions

I have shown throughout this study that architecture is special, both as an intellectual discipline and as a professional practice. Despite this overdetermined specificity, its recent evolution suggests that transitions in the production of culture may have some common traits. I submit them as tentative hypotheses.

First of all, the study of architecture indicates that change in specific cultural discourses has local origins. This goes further than the well-established notion that modern cultural practices are "self-legislating."[5] Identifiable impulses toward change start within the specialized practices of identifiable agents and within specific circles of producers. Thus, what I was able to show about postmodern revisionism concerns the specialized discourse of architecture in the United States in a specific period. The postmodern accent on relativism and particularism agrees with the localism of architecture, the practice of which begins in a concrete locality, even if it can go international after that.

Second, discontinuities within specialist discourses do not *necessarily* respond to much more vast external discontinuities. World War II's awesome sequence of stasis, destruction, and reconstruction brought the Modern Movement from a minority

position (already past its prime in the mid-1930s) to a universal and totalizing style. In turn, the global triumph of a banal and impoverished modernism compelled architects to react. The monotony and dreary sameness they call "exhaustion of forms" set in early, crying for aesthetic innovation and theoretical rearticulation. Not the catastrophic discontinuity of war but a later movement of young and educated people meant that a younger generation did both tasks.

Third, youth and education would not have been as significant without large numbers. The pressure of numbers within a delimited field deserves special attention for it is likely to engender competition for finite rewards. Competition, in turn, has been related to cultural innovation in settings as diverse as Islamic religion, nineteenth-century French painting, and twentieth-century American science.[6]

The booming economy probably absorbed most of the fast-growing numbers of architects produced by American schools in the 1950s and 1960s. Nevertheless, pressure for elite standing was bound to increase in the narrow and self-contained circles that make up the "scene" in major art centers, the "circuit" of elite graduate schools, the boards of major journals, and the juries of major contests. Moreover, the strongest push for aesthetic innovation and typological diversity coincided with the mounting pressure of "overproduced" architects on a field beset by the economic crisis of the 1970s. Without prejudging in any way the form or the content of cultural innovation, I expect that a larger number of players makes it more likely to emerge. Architectural postmodernism thus reinforces the rough correlations between numbers, competition, and innovation in the narrow ranks of specialized producers of culture.

Fourth, the partial overlap of personnel creates concrete connections between specialized cultural fields and larger political and social movements. The latter inspire and sustain within the former homologous actions of dissent, the objective of which is to redefine dominant intellectual paradigms and prescriptions about the specialists' roles.

Postmodernism could not have replicated the deliberate and fiery merger of artistic and political avant-gardism of the 1920s, for the revolutionary conditions of 1918 were not present in the 1960s in countries rich enough to afford an architecture. Yet what oppositional content there is in architectural postmodernism derives from the phase when, on both sides of the Atlantic, the New Left was raising its antitechnocratic banner.

Implicit in the above points is a fifth one, the most important corollary of cultural specialization: The interaction between producers of culture and their potential audiences (and even, if one so wishes, the expression of the *Zeitgeist*) is always mediated by conditions of the producers' practices and by the historical circumstances that surround them. From this sociological position, it follows that bypassing the specific and localized analysis of cultural practice is unsound. Rushing to determine what cultural objects "say," one risks ignoring the experience of those by whom culture is "spoken" and of those to whom it "speaks."

Two things stand out in the practice of the American design elite during the postmodern transition. One is the sheer complexity of the architectural task, a good part of which is the economic and organizational difficulty of keeping the business of architecture going. To paraphrase Joseph Esherick, there is no time at all to think of the *Zeitgeist*.

Besides, even if an architect conveys a personal vision of the times, polysemic objects are always open to multiple and conflicting interpretations. Yet in architecture one interpretation clearly prevails upon any designer's message. Although building type is understood through and by means of stylistic conventions, the social function that type denotes is more broadly and immediately accessible than style or aesthetics. The idea that significance can be exhaustively explained by the author's intention is thus conspicuously doubtful in architecture.

The second thing that stands out is the convergence of parts of architectural work with parts of the culture industries. The material base of this convergence is clearer than its moral and social implications, and I will limit myself to sketching the former.[7]

Postmodernism has marked the ascendancy of small- and medium-sized idea firms within the discourse, not the business, of American architecture. Their relations with organizational clients recall those of the creative technical producers with the organizational and managerial core of the culture industries. Like musicians for record companies or independent producers for television, architectural firms have no tenure beyond their project contracts. Because the smaller firms organize production in an almost artisanal way, overhead costs tend to be relatively low. If costs are reliably controlled, the firms enjoy full autonomy: The high level of professional competence (for which architects are presumably hired) makes it too costly for the sponsor to deny them responsibility.

Product selection occurs in architecture, as in the culture industries, at the "input boundary." Architects propose a range of alternatives (much expanded by postmodernism) to clients; like managers in the culture industries, large clients sponsor a selected sample for realization. In the large developers' offices, there is increasing professionalization of both "talent scouts" and marketing personnel, charged with co-opting the "mass media gatekeepers" (although in a minor way, compared to the culture industries). In the culture industries, book, music, film, or TV critics can strategically block or facilitate the "diffusion of particular fads and fashions."[8] In architecture, media critics have probably less power.

Elite designers do their own marketing to find clients, but big commercial clients market the architects, their names, and their personas as part of the commercial packaging of a new project. However, star architects' access to reputedly autonomous critics (and, for some exceptional designers like Robert Stern, access to their own television programs) does not sell more products. It can "sell" a project to users and the architect's ideas to the vast ranks of followers in schools and offices across the land. Therefore, in architecture, the "diffusion of fads and fashions" does not depend as much on the general media as on the organized profession, the specialist press, and especially the system of training institutions. The design process is still too complex and too highly professionalized, and, above all, building is still too expensive for clients and banks to permit momentary fads.

These caveats suggest that elite architects see image-making as a qualitative jump, more than just a further loss of control over the construction process. The decrease in the fiscal life of buildings, the multiplication of images from which clients can choose, and the increase in the media's emphasis on the architect as "culture hero," all conspire to subject stylistic conventions (the most noticeable sign of a building's architectural aspiration) to rapidly exhausted trends. Architects have not only

moved closer to providing images instead of buildings; the life cycles of the images themselves have moved closer to those of the fashion and culture industries. The providers of these images can run after newness or imitation, for the decisive factor is what each can add to rental or resale values.

As an activity, postmodern architecture epitomizes material forces that tend to erase the differences between "high" and "mass" cultural production. Hired for their creativity and granted freedom to innovate, specialized cultural producers constrict their creative autonomy in anticipation of the client's choice. A subtler and more pervasive heteronomy channels cultural practices in the general direction of what sponsors can accept. This is in marked contrast with the autonomy of discourse.

Indeed, in most cultural fields, academic expansion and the continued growth of educated audiences allow increasing theoretical sophistication to develop in discourse. Architecture reveals a dialectic that appears with variations in many cultural fields: The autonomy of discourse encourages technical producers to take risks in cultural practice, while the costs of realization (a good indicator of producers' dependence on markets and funding) hold them back. This general condition helps us understand why theorists and philosophers take architecture as a pivotal allegory of postmodernism. . . .

Notes

1   I adopt Michel Foucault's concept of discipline as a "system of control in the production of discourse" ("The Discourse on Language," trans. Rupert Swyer, appendix to *The Archaeology of Knowledge* [New York: Pantheon, 1972]). . . .

2   The concept of "art world" and the complex networks that permit production, circulation, and social appreciation of art works is elaborated by Howard Becker in *Art Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), Chap. 1. On the concept of "field" see Pierre Bourdieu, "Le Champ scientifique," *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 2–3 (June 1976): 88–104.

3   My empirical study supports Andreas Huyssen's argument: "A crucial question . . . concerns the extent to which modernism and the avant-garde as forms of an adversary culture were nevertheless conceptually and practically bound up with capitalist modernization and/or with communist vanguardism, modernization's twin brother . . . Postmodernism's critical dimension lies precisely in the radical questioning which linked modernism and the avant-garde to the mindset of modernization" ("Mapping the Postmodern," in *After the Great Divide* [Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1986], 183). See also Kenneth Frampton's similar approach in "Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance," in Hal Foster, ed., *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (Port Townsend, Wash.: Bay Press, 1983), 20.

4   Scott Lash's sociological approach to modernism/postmodernism in both architecture and cities admits that it is confusing and ambiguous to take the latter as cultural objects (*Sociology of Postmodernism* [London and New York: Routledge, 1990], 31; see in particular 31–6 and Chap. 8).

5   Lash takes as a criterion of modernity Weber's central concept about the "self-legislation" of each sphere of culture (the attempt by social actors within each sphere to develop their own conventions and mode of valuation; *Sociology of Postmodernism*, 9). See Max Weber, "Religious Rejections of the World and Their Directions," in Hans Gerth and C. W. Mills, eds. *From Max Weber* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958).

6   M. J. Mulkay and B. S. Turner, "Over-production of Personnel and Innovation in Three Social Settings," *Sociology* 5 (1971): 47–61.
7   This sketch is based on Paul M. Hirsch's work "Processing Fads and Fashions: An Organization-Set Analysis of Cultural Industry Systems," *American Journal of Sociology* 77 (1972): 639–59. For a full indictment, see the classic text by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Continum, 1989).
8   Hirsch, "Processing Fads," 649.

Editor's Notes on Further Reading

Sarfatti Larson on Architecture

Magali Sarfatti Larson examines architecture as a professional context for cultural production to account for the change from modernist to postmodernist architecture at the beginning of the last quarter of the twentieth century. Her research interweaves questions of discourse and practice, aesthetics, organization, and economic context, and she shows how the profession combines aspects of both "art world" and "culture industry" (see excerpts from Becker, Peterson, and DiMaggio, this volume). The larger study uses in-depth interviews to analyze how architects think of the practical context of their work (firms, clients, commissions, and careers) and the ways they articulate aesthetic criteria and aesthetic conflicts: this analysis is backed up with an analysis of design awards. While Larson argues for attention to specific production context, she also fills in the background to her study with the larger story of twentieth-century architecture and the political economy of cities.

Other sociological works on architecture include Larson, "Reading Architecture in the Holocaust Memorial Museum: A Method and an Empirical Illustration," pp. 62–91 in Elizabeth Long, ed., *From Sociology to Cultural Studies: New Perspectives* (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 1997); David Brain, "Cultural Production as "Society in the Making": Architecture as an Exemplar of the Social Construction of Cultural Artifacts," pp. 192–220, in Diana Crane, ed., *The Sociology of Culture* (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 1994); Brain, "Practical Knowledge and Occupational Control: The Professionalization of Architecture in the United States," *Sociological Forum* 6 (1991): 239–68; Brain, "Discipline and Style: The Ecole des Beaux-arts and the Social Production of an American Architecture," *Theory and Society* 18 (1989): 807–68, and Judith Blau, *Architects and Firms* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1984).

On the broader topic of material culture, see for example Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton, *The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981); the overview in Chandra Mukerji "Towards a Sociology of Material Culture: Science Studies, Cultural Studies, and the Meanings of Things," pp. 143–62 in Crane, ed., *Sociology of Culture*, and Mukerji, *Territorial Ambitions and the Gardens of Versailles* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997). On professions see for example Magali Sarfatti Larson, *The Rise of Professionalism: A Sociological Analysis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977) and Andrew Abbott, *The System of Professions: An Essay on the Division of Expert Labor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

The analysis is also informed with wider theoretical concerns. For instance, an important strand of postmodern social theory often takes architecture as metonym for broader social changes, but Larson shows the more specific professional context in which postmodern architecture emerged. Compare the excerpt from Jameson, and accompanying editor's note, this volume, and on architecture see especially also for example Andreas Huyssen, "Mapping

the Postmodern," *New German Critique* 33 (1984): 5–52; David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1989), 66–98; Scott Lash, *Sociology of Postmodernism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 201–36; Jürgen Habermas, "Modern and Postmodern Architecture," pp. 317–329 in John Forester, ed., *Critical Theory and Public Life* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1987); and M. Gottdiener *Postmodern Semiotics: Material Culture and the Forms of Postmodern Life* (Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1995) chs. 4–7.

Notably, Sarfatti Larson concludes her book observing that "the most beloved and visited architectural work of the profligate 1980s was not a hotel nor a museum but the Vietnam Veternas Memorial in Washington ... " (253), the subject of the following excerpt by Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz.

20 The Vietnam Veterans Memorial: Commemorating a Difficult Past

Robin Wagner-Pacifici and Barry Schwartz

In this article, we address two problems, one general and one particular, and claim that they are best approached by referring each to the other. The first, general, problem is that of discovering the processes by which culture and cultural meaning are produced. Collective memory, moral and political entrepreneurship, dominant ideologies, and representational genres are all refracted through these processes and must all be sociologically identified and gauged. The second, particular, problem is the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. This unusual monument grew out of a delayed realization that some public symbol was needed to recognize the men and women who died in the Vietnam War. But its makers faced a task for which American history furnished no precedent – the task of commemorating a divisive defeat.

By dealing with the problem of commemoration in this case study of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, we can address general concerns in the sociology of culture. Our concentration on the details of a particular case follows Clifford Geertz's maxim that "the essential task of theory building ... is not to codify abstract regularities but to make thick description possible, not to generalize across cases but to generalize within them" (1973, p. 26). However, we are also concerned to locate commemorative formulas as they are repeated across cases. Thus we will be moving from the case of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial to monuments that have similarly vexed commemorative missions, seeking to bring together the resemblances and differences under a single analytic framework....

Dilemmas of Commemoration

The memory of the Vietnam War and its epoch takes place within a culture of commemoration. Current analytic approaches to culture define commemorative objects, and cultural objects in general, as "shared significance embodied in form" (Griswold 1987a, p. 13). However, our concern is in formulating an approach to those kinds of commemoration for which significance is not shared....

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial provides a good case to use in thinking about these issues. The succession of events that led to the Memorial's creation and public reception was a culture-producing process. In that process, contrasting moral evaluations of the Vietnam War and its participants were affirmed. The process itself consisted of seven stages, each defined by the activity of different individuals and different institutions: (1) the Pentagon's decision to mark the way by an inconspicuous plaque in Arlington Cemetery; (2) congressional activity culminating in a Vietnam Veterans Week and a series of Veterans' support programs; (3) a former Vietnam soldier's conception and promotion of a tangible monument; (4) intense controversy over the nontraditional monument design selected by the United States Commission of Fine Arts; (5) modification of this original design by the incorporation of traditional symbols; (6) the public's extraordinary and unexpected reaction to the Memorial; and (7) the ongoing controversy over its further modification. Our analysis will pass through these stages as we chart the Vietnam Veterans Memorial's development.

From a comparative perspective, the moral evaluations reflected in the Vietnam Memorial derive from a formula common to all societies that seek to commemorate controversial military ventures. When the cause of a lost war is widely held to be immoral or at best needless, then, in James Mayo's (1988, p. 170) words, "defeat ... cannot be forgotten and a nation's people must find ways to redeem those who died for their country to make defeat honorable. This can be done by honoring the individuals who fought rather than the country's lost cause."...

Commemoration as a Genre Problem

Controversies over the merits of a war are expressed at some point in debates over measures taken to commemorate it. The stages in the Vietnam Memorial's construction reveal, on the one hand, the desire for a design that reflects the uniqueness of the Vietnam War and, on the other, the desire for a design that recognizes the sense in which the Vietnam War was similar to previous wars. The Vietnam War differed from other wars because it was controversial, morally questionable, and unsuccessful. It resembled other wars because it called forth in its participants the traditional virtues of self-sacrifice, courage, loyalty, and honor. Tension between alternative commemorative designs centers on the problem of incorporating these contrasting features into a single monument.

Distinctions among war monuments are, like all generic distinctions, produced by "sorting, seeing the similarities in different ... objects, abstracting the common elements from a welter of particular variations" (Grisworld 1987a, p. 17). Genre, in Wendy Griswold's view, is a kind of schema that organizes perception. Griswold asserts, however, that literary and artistic genres are impermanent and express the changing character of their creators, audiences, and contexts. This conception of genre is relevant to our present problem: What kind of monument can be built in the context of changes in traditional beliefs about what war monuments should look like and represent?...

Attitudes and interests are translated into commemorative forms through enterprise. Before any event can be regarded as worth remembering, and before any class of people can be recognized for having participated in that event, some individual, and eventually some group, must deem both event and participants commemorable and must have the influence to get others to agree. Memorial devices are not self-created; they are conceived and built by those who wish to bring to consciousness the events and people that others are more inclined to forget. To understand memorial making in

this way is to understand it as a construction process wherein competing "moral entrepreneurs" seek public arenas and support for their interpretations of the past. These interpretations are embodied in the memorial's symbolic structure. . . .

A Nation's Gratitude: Search for a Genre

The first official recognition of the Vietnam veteran was not bestowed until 1978, three years after the last American was flown out of Saigon. The recognition itself was hesitant and uncertain. A Vietnam War crypt had already been prepared in the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, but the Army determined that neither of its two unidentified bodies (only 30% of the remains in either case) made for a decent corpse. Instead of honoring its Vietnam battle dead by symbolically joining them, through entombment of unknown soldiers' remains, with men fallen in earlier wars, the army recommended that a plaque and display of medals be set apart behind the tomb, along with the following inscription: "Let all know that the United States of America pays tribute to the members of the Armed Forces who answered their country's call." This strange declaration bears no reference at all to the Vietnam War, and it required an act of the Veterans Affairs subcommittee to make it more specific: "Let all people know that the United States pays tribute to those members of the Armed Forces who served honorably in Southeast Asia during the Vietnam era" (*The Nation*, April 8, 1978, p. 389). In even this second, stronger statement, three things are noteworthy: (1) although revised in Congress, the statement was initiated by the military; (2) it received little publicity; and (3) it designated the conflict in Vietnam by the word "era" rather than "war." Thus the recognition came from only a small part of the society for whose interests and values the war was fought; it was communicated to that society without conspicuous ceremony; and it betrayed confusion about the meaning of the war by its failure to find a word to describe it. This last point is the most noteworthy of all. Although a war had not been officially declared, many congressional resolutions during the 1980s referred to the hostilities in Vietnam as "the Vietnam war." Touchiness during the late 1970s about what to call the conflict stemmed from social, not legal, concerns. To name an event is to categorize it morally and to provide an identity for its participants. Anomalous names betray ambiguity about an event's nature and uncertainty about how to react to the men who take part in it.

The first solution to the war's commemorative genre problem was thus halting and uncertain. The fighters were honored but not by an imposing monument. They were honored by a plaque, inconspicuously placed, whose inscription was, itself, indirect and muted. Undeclared wars are usually fought with restraint, however violent they might be. The Vietnam War's first official commemoration mirrored this restraint, marking the cause without really drawing attention to it.

Official ambivalence toward the Vietnam War showed up next in the activities of Congress. It was in Congress, in fall 1978, that the work culminating in the Veterans Memorial began. The plan then discussed, however, was not to commemorate those who had died in the war, but to set aside a special "Vietnam Veterans Week" for its survivors. Thus evolved a second solution to the problem of finding a genre to commemorate the Vietnam War. Time, rather than granite, the dedication of a

week rather than the dedication of a tangible monument, sufficed to honor the Vietnam fighting man. This plan's principal entrepreneurs were the members of the Vietnam-Era Caucus, 19 U.S. representatives and senators who had served in the military during the Vietnam War years. They meant to achieve two goals: to unify a nation divided by war and to induce Congress to recognize that many war veterans were suffering from unmet needs. Before anything could actually be accomplished, however, certain obstacles had to be overcome, obstacles inherent in the object of commemoration itself.

To promote unity by separating the event from its men was Congress's first concern. In Congressman Grisham's words, "We may still have differing opinions about our involvement in the Vietnam War, but we are no longer divided in our attitudes toward those who served in Vietnam" (U.S. House of Representatives 1979, p. 12588). At one time, however, the division was deep. Grisham himself acknowledged that the veterans were stigmatized or, at best, ignored on their return from the battlefront. No ceremony dramatized and ennobled their sacrifices. Most of the other congressmen knew this, and they wanted to upgrade the veterans' status. Transforming the Vietnam soldier from an Ugly American into a patriot who innocently carried out the policy of elected leaders, Congress tried to create a positive image that all Americans could accept.

However, the very attempt to improve the veterans' status raised unsettling questions. Congressmen openly recognized that America's lower-income minorities were disproportionately represented in the armed forces and that the trauma of war bore more heavily on them, economically and psychologically, than it would have on a middle-class army. An uncomplimentary view of the returning soldier accompanied this recognition. The congressmen made no mention of the crimes allegedly committed by American soldiers in Vietnam; however, they did recognize publicly "statistics such as the fact that 25 percent of the persons incarcerated in correctional institutions in America are veterans of the Vietnam War," along with the veterans' need for "an expanded drug and alcohol abuse treatment and rehabilitation program." Family counseling needs were also described: "Of those veterans married before going to Vietnam almost 40 percent were divorced within six months of their return" (U.S. House of Representatives 1979, pp. 12589, 12593, 12584; for details, see Johnson [1976, 1980]; U.S. House Committee on Veterans' Affairs 1981). Congresswoman Mikulski recognized the veterans' social marginality by pleading for the government to "be responsive to the unique problems which they face . . . so that they will be better able to fill their roles in society." Congressman Mikva spoke to the same point. Existing veterans' programs, he explained, are not enough for this group. "We must back up this symbolic recognition of their efforts for our country with . . . educational and rehabilitative programs geared to their special needs" (U.S. House of Representatives 1979, pp. 12583, 12588). Here, as elsewhere, the emphasis is on the veterans' shortcomings, and this emphasis reflects society's desire to reconstitute them morally. . . .

Entrepreneurs and Sponsors

Negative characterizations of the Vietnam veteran might have eventually undermined his positive recognition were it not for a new development, one that was

oriented less to the living than to the dead. During the time that the Vietnam-Era Caucus worked on its legislation, a former army corporal from a working-class family, Jan Scruggs, had independently decided on a plan of his own. As noted above, one of the premises of Vietnam Veterans Week was that the soldier must be separated from the cause. This separation is precisely what Scruggs aimed to celebrate publicly. At first, his idea attracted little notice, but it eventually overshadowed Vietnam Veterans Week in commemorative significance. He would build a memorial to the men who served in Vietnam and would inscribe on it the names of all the war dead. The plan represented a different solution to the commemorative genre problem than those previously proposed. It was different in that it combined the traditional idea of a stone monument to the war dead with the radical idea of excluding from it any prominent symbol of national honor and glory. In place of such a symbol would appear a list of the dead soliders' names – 58,000 of them. On May 28, 1979, Scruggs announced the formation of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund to raise money to build the monument.

The accumulation of money to build the Veterans Memorial did not automatically follow from the desire to build it. What needed to be overcome was not only opposition from the still vocal critics of the war, but more important, a sense of uncertainty in the public at large as to what the monument would look like and what it would represent. These suspicions and uncertainties were relieved when the Memorial's original framing rule – "Honor the soldier, not the cause" – was reiterated in the very selection of its sponsors. Chosen were men and women who differed visibly and widely on many political questions but shared the desire to honor the Vietnam veterans. The sponsoring leaders and celebrities included Vernon Jordan, president of the National Urban League; Ruben Bonilla, national president of the League of United Latin American Citizens; Carol Burnett, the actress who played the mother of a soldier killed in the war in the television drama, *Friendly Fire;* First Lady Rosalynn Carter and former First Lady Betty Ford; Father Theodore Hesburgh, president of the University of Notre Dame; Bob Hope; Rocky Bleir, described as a "wounded Vietnam veteran who came back to star with the Pittsburgh Steelers"; and Admiral James B. Stockdale, formerly a prisoner of war and now president of The Citadel. These individuals represented many sectors of society: blacks, Hispanics, women, religious and academic figures, entertainment and sports celebrities, and military men. With the support of this noncontroversial coalition of sponsors, funds were quickly raised to pay for design and construction costs and, by July 4, 1980, a few days after the proclamation of Vietnam Veterans' Week, President Carter signed a joint resolution that reserved a two-acre site in Constitution Gardens, between the Washington Monument and Lincoln Memorial, for the Veterans Memorial's placement....

It was the redemptive qualities of Scruggs's project – precisely, its embodiment of gratitude, the only currency for paying off a moral debt – that congressional supporters emphasized. As President Carter approved Congress's resolution, he expressed his belief that the formal honoring of the veteran would also promote the healing of a nation divided by war. To this end, the Memorial fund's directors continued to avoid political statements in both fund-raising efforts and in contemplation of the Memorial design. The universal support of the Senate and strong support of the House were based on this same requirement: that the Memorial

make no reference to the war, only to the men who fought it. Political neutrality was the condition for the support of other sponsoring organizations, including the Reserve Officers Association, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Marine Corps League, Retired Officers Association, and American Gold Star Mothers. These organizations had been assured by Scruggs that the Memorial "will stand as a symbol of our unity as a nation and as a focal point of all Americans regardless of their views on Vietnam" (U.S. House of Representatives 1980, p. 4805). Indeed, its very name would be noncontroversial: it would be a "Veterans Memorial" rather than a "War Memorial." The federal agencies responsible for approving the final design and placement of the Memorial, particularly the Commission of Fine Arts and the Department of Interior, were guided by this same principle.

An apolitical monument was thus supported by the apolitical makeup of its sponsoring agencies.... The memorial chosen by the Commission of Fine Arts from the more than 1,400 designs submitted was, indeed, the simplest and least imposing: two unadorned black walls, each about 250 feet in length, composed of 70 granite panels increasing in height from several inches at the end of each wall to 10 feet where they come together at a 125 degree angle. Although this angle aligns the two walls with the Lincoln Memorial and Washington Monument, the walls themselves are placed below ground level, invisible from most vantage points on or near the Mall. The Vietnam War is thus defined as a national event, but in a spatial context that brackets off that event from those commemorated by neighboring monuments. The walls add to this sense of detachment by their internal format, which draws the viewer into a separate warp of time and space. As one moves from the edge of one wall to the point where it joins the other, one experiences a descending movement in space and a circular movement in time, for the 57,939 soldiers' names appear in the chronological order of the dates of their deaths, such that the war's first and last fatalities are joined at the walls' conjunction.

The commission's preference for this design was unanimous. However, for every layman who approved that choice, another seemed to be enraged by it. Those who shared the designer's goals were inclined to believe she had achieved them. Maya Ying Lin declared that her design was not meant to convey a particular political message but to evoke "feelings, thoughts, and emotions" of a variant and private nature: "What people see or don't see is their own projection." Jan Scruggs concurred: "The Memorial says exactly what we wanted to say about Vietnam – absolutely nothing." Indeed, on the original design the word, Vietnam, did not even appear (a statement indicating that the names on the wall belong to dead soldiers, and identifying the war in which they fought, was added later)....

Opposition to the memorial wall was expressed by attacks on details like color, shape, and location, but underlying all specific objections was a disdain for the style itself. Many believed that that style violated the limits of the war-memorial genre. Designed to be apolitical, this memorial struck critics as nonpatriotic and nonheroic. It conveyed a conception of the war and a conception of the soldier that ran counter to those of many Americans. These Americans, responded Jan Scruggs, "wanted the Memorial to make Vietnam what it had never been in reality: a good, clean glorious war seen as necessary and supported by the united country." One leading opponent of the design conceded that the nation had not looked back favorably on the Vietnam War; however, he believed that "history can be re-evaluated" and "a piece

of art remains, as a testimony to a particular moment in history, and we are under a solemn obligation to get that moment down as correctly as possible" (quoted in Scruggs and Swerdlow 1985, p. 94).

Most critics believed that only a "real" memorial could correctly represent the Vietnam War, but since that was politically impossible, they sought an addition to the present design in order to offset the "national humiliation" it perpetuated. At length, a compromise was conceived. An American flag, and next to that, a realistic statue of three soldiers, identifiable as white, black, and Hispanic, portrayed returning from patrol and gazing toward the names on the wall, would bring the original design closer to the traditional genre – would make it look more like a real war memorial....

Considering the memorial complex as a whole, we find an even broader pattern of assertion and qualification. The wall embodied a controversial assertion: that individuals should be remembered and their cause ignored; the qualifications came with the flag and statue. These, in turn, were beset by their own internal tensions. The statue was conceived as a reactive assertion of pride, heroism, and masculinity, but, through the particular form it took, it emerged as a tempering of all these things. The flag seems to be unconditionally assertive because it is the only part of the memorial site that draws our eyes upward, but we notice in the peculiar dedication inscribed on its base a kind of backing off: "This flag affirms the principles of freedom for which [the Vietnam veterans] fought and their pride in having served under difficult circumstances." The euphemism is transparent enough. By "difficult circumstances" we are to understand not the power of our enemy but the feebleness of our cause. In this light, the similarities among the three parts of the Memorial become more salient than their differences, despite the realism of the statue's figures and the vertical prominence of the flag. Whether we look down, across, or up, we find ambivalence about the meaning of this war and its protagonists refracted throughout....

Uses of Genre: The Enshrinement Process

The meaning of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial is defined by the way people behave in reference to it. Some monuments are rarely talked about or visited and never put to ceremonial use. Other monuments, like the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, are used often as formal ceremonial sites and visited year after year by large numbers of people. Between the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and its visitors, a very different relationship obtains. Not only is the Memorial an object of frequent ceremony and frequent visitation (more than 2.5 million visitors and 1,100–1,500 reunions per year), it is also an object with which visitors enter into active and affective relationships. These relationships have thwarted all original intentions as to what the Memorial should be and represent.

Conceived as something to be passively looked at and contemplated, the Vietnam Memorial has become an object of emotion. This is not the case for the Memorial site as a whole, just the wall and its names. The names on the wall are touched, their letters traced by the moving finger. The names are caressed. The names are reproduced on paper by pencil rubbing and taken home. And something is left from home

itself – a material object bearing special significance to the deceased or a written statement by the visitor or mourner.

The dedications of the aggrieved are a spectacle that to many is more moving than the Memorial wall itself. More goes into spectators' reactions, however, than morbid curiosity, for the scenes of mourning are not altogether private affairs. These scenes make palpable a collective loss known to all. Not only, therefore, do friends and family bring their personal grief to the Memorial wall, but society exercises a moral pressure over those not directly affected by loss to add their presence to the situation and to align their sentiments with it....

When profusely decorated with patriotic emblems, the wall alone may enhance our idea of the traditional war monument, but it cannot embody that idea. This is because patriotism is not the only response that the wall excites. The Memorial wall has in fact become a kind of debating forum – a repository of diverse opinions about the very war that occasioned its construction. Traditional war monuments serve no such reflexive function....

[L]etters and poems, no less than the other items brought to the wall, reveal that many people are unable to look back on the war in a politically neutral way. Notwithstanding the claims of its official sponsors, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial elicits the same tensions as those that divided the nation during the war itself. As time passes, this capacity to evoke affirmative and critical sentiments endures. The volume of objects deposited at the Memorial is as great or greater today as when the Memorial was dedicated, and the range, if not the exact proportion of the different objects, is the same. Flags, although no longer stored and inventoried, continue to appear in profusion. Military objects are still deposited by Vietnam veterans, and these are supplemented by military objects deposited by post-Vietnam soldiers. Personal items and letters, too, appear as frequently as ever. And many of the recent letters bear criticism of American policy in different parts of the world, particularly Central America, comparing it to the policy that led to war in Vietnam.

In the Veterans Memorial, then, we see none of the hegemonic influence that forms the basis for Gusfield and Michalowicz's "manipulative theories" of secular symbolism (1984, pp. 424–7). If the Memorial were in fact a tool of state power, if it were adopted by the state in order to maintain allegiance to an elite and to promote authoritative ways of seeing society (as Haines [1986] suggests), then that tool has not been used very effectively....

[T]he least prestigious war in American history, the war fought and remembered with the most controversy, is precisely the one whose monument is most revered and most often visited. This essential fact must be incorporated into any effort to theorize our understanding of the Vietnam Memorial. As we outlined it in our introduction, the development of a thick description of the Vietnam Memorial involved the disclosure of relevant social, political, and cultural processes. These processes were, in their substance, interactive: moral enterpreneurs interacting with their constituencies and with political and cultural authorities; politicians interacting with their colleagues and within a conservative social climate, veterans interacting with their memories and their current situations; artists interacting with politically forged competition guidelines, with denizens of the art world and with lay audi-

ences; visitors interacting with the wall. The key to the Memorial's multifold meaning lies in this interaction web. The Memorial's ability to bring off commemoration of a dark and controversial part of the past comes to rest on the surrounding society's interaction with the Memorial itself. Whatever processes brought this cultural object into being in the first place, it is the use made of it that brings it into the life of the society. Wendy Griswold, in her outline of a model for analyzing cultural objects, notes that meaning is produced by the interaction between "the symbolic capacities of the object itself and the perceptual apparatus of those who experience the object" (1987b, p. 1079). We have come to understand the complex evolution of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in the same way: as a succession of interacting producers, sponsors, and audiences.

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Editor's Notes on Further Reading

Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz on Commemoration

As Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz demonstrate in their account of the Vietnam Veteran's Memorial in Washington, DC, looking closely at processes of production can help explain

national public culture. Examining the memorial's creation, revision, and reception, they show how conflict and ambivalence about the events to be commemorated ultimately influenced the very form of the memorial itself, a combination of an innovative design with more traditional commemorative elements.

For more on war memorials, see for instance Barry Schwartz and Todd Bayma, "Commemoration and the Politics of Recognition: The Korean War Veterans Memorial," *American Behavioral Scientist* 42 (1999): 946–77; K. S. Inglis assisted by Jan Brazier, *Sacred Places: War Memorials in the Australian Landscape* (Melbourne: The Miegunyah Press at Melbourne University Press, 1998); Martin Evans and Ken Lunn, eds., *War and Memory in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 1997); Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995); George Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990); and James Mayo, *War Memorials as Political Landscape: The American Experience and Beyond* (New York: Praeger, 1988). For a nuanced account of conflict over a city seen as sacred symbol, see Roger Friedland and Richard Hecht, *To Rule Jerusalem* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

Some classic works on collective memory include Maurice Halbwachs, "The Social Frameworks of Memory," in Lewis Coser, ed., *On Collective Memory* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Eric Hobsbawm, and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984); and Edward Shils, *Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981). For introductions to the rapidly growing contemporary literature on collective memory see Howard Schuman and Amy D. Corning, "Collective Knowledge of Public Events: The Soviet Era from the Great Purge to Glasnost," *American Journal of Sociology* 105 (2000): 913–56; Jeffrey Olick, "Collective Memory: The Two Cultures," *Sociological Theory* 17 (1999): 333–48; Olick, "Genre Memories and Memory Genres: A Dialogical Analysis of May 8, 1945 Commemorations in the F. D. R.," *American Sociological Review* 64 (1999): 381–402; Barry Schwartz, "Postmodernity and Historical Reputation: Abraham Lincoln in Late Twentieth-Century American Memory," *Social Forces* 77 (1998): 63–103; Jeffrey Olick and Joyce Robbins, "Social Memory Studies: From 'Collective Memory' to the Historical Sociology of Mnemonic Practices," *Annual Review of Sociology* 24 (1998): 105–40; Jeffrey Olick and Daniel Levy, "Collective Memory and Cultural Constraint: Holocaust Myth and Rationality in German Politics," *American Sociological Review* 62 (1997): 921–36; the articles collected in *Qualitative Sociology* 19 (3), Fall 1996, Special Issue on Collective Memory, guest ed. Barry Schwartz; and in *Social Science History* 22 (4) 1998, special issue on collective memory, ed. Jeffrey Olick.

For more by cultural sociologists on national symbol and ritual in the United States, see the excerpt from work by Alexander and Smith, this volume, and accompanying editor's notes as, well as Barry Schwartz, *Abraham Lincoln and the Forge of National Memory* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Sarah Corse, *Nationalism and Literature: The Politics of Culture in Canada and the United States* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Lyn Spillman, *Nation and Commemoration: Creating National Identities in the United States and Australia* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Karen Cerulo, *Identity Designs: The Sights and Sounds of a Nation*, ASA Rose Book Series (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995); and Schwartz, *George Washington: The Making of an American Symbol* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1987). Good portals to the large body of work by historians of American collective memory and national identity can be found in John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), and Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Knopf, 1991).

In addition to influences from public debate surrounding the making of the memorial, Wagner-Pacific and Schwartz note that norms associated with memorial genres also influenced debate and design in this case. On conventions or normative expectations associated with genre, see also excerpts from studies by Becker, Berezin, Jacobs and Griswold, this volume.

Part IV

Cultural Frameworks: Categories, Genre, and Narrative