

Willis, P.

From

Common

Culture

Symbolic creativity

The institutions and practices, genres and terms of high art are currently categories of exclusion more than of inclusion. They have no real connection with most young people or their lives. They may encourage some artistic specializations but they certainly discourage much wider and more general symbolic creativity. The official existence of the 'arts' in institutions seems to exhaust everything else of its artistic contents. If some things count as 'art', they must be 'non-art'. Because 'art' is in the 'art gallery', it can't therefore be anywhere else. It is that which is special and heightened, not ordinary and everyday.

The arts establishment, by and large, has done little to dispel these assumptions. It prefers instead to utilize or even promote fears of cultural decline and debasement in order to strengthen its own claims for subsidy, institutional protection and privilege. In general the arts establishment connives to keep alive the myth of the special, creative individual artist holding out against passive mass consumerism, so helping to maintain a self-interested view of elite creativity.

Against this we insist that there is a vibrant symbolic life and symbolic creativity in everyday life, everyday activity and expression — even if it is sometimes invisible, looked down on or spurned. We don't want to invent it or propose it. We want to recognize it — literally re-cognize it. Most young people's lives are not involved with the arts and yet are actually full of expressions, signs and symbols through which individuals and groups seek creatively to establish their presence, identity and meaning. Young people are all the time expressing or attempting to express something about their actual or potential *cultural significance*. This is the realm of living common culture. Vulgar sometimes, perhaps. But also 'common' in being everywhere, resistant, hardy. Also

These different aspects of the institutionalization of art produce the physical organizational and cultural separation of 'art', but also the possibility of an *internal* 'hyperinstitutionalization' of 'art' – the complete dissociation of art from living contexts. This is

The conventional list of 'high art' includes classical music, ballet, opera, drama, poetry, literature, the visual and plastic arts. Within these branches of art are institutionalized canons which attempt to place the 'works' into finite hierarchies differentiating greater and lesser value. Of course these hierarchies are not fixed. In contradiction to the sense of the universal which is supposed to characterize 'great art', new works [by no means always newly created] are admitted over time, just as established ones slip down or out. But at all times there are a limited number only of 'great works'.

The existence, reproduction and appreciation of the high arts or 'official arts' depends on institutions, from individual art galleries, museums, theatres, ballet companies to the Arts Council itself. But institutions include not only buildings and organizations, but also systematic and specific social values and practices. The appreciation of official art (its consumption) further depends on the acquisition of certain kinds of knowledge and therefore on a prior educational process lodged within its own kinds of institutions. That is, the taste for art is learned.

The arts institution

As Raymond Williams always insisted, culture is ordinary. It is the extraordinary in the ordinary, which is extraordinary, which makes both into culture, common culture. We are thinking of the extraordinary symbolic creativity of the multitude of ways in which young people use, humanize, decorate and invest with meanings their common and immediate life spaces and social practices – personal styles and choice of clothes; selective and active use of music, TV, magazines; decoration of bedrooms; the rituals of romance and subcultural styles; the style, banter and drama of friendship groups, music-making and dance. Nor are these pursuits and activities trivial or inconsequential. In conditions of late modernization and the widespread crisis of cultural values they can be crucial to the creation and sustenance of individual and group identities, even to cultural survival of identity itself. There is work, even desperate work, in their play.

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'common' in being shared, having things 'in common'. Where 'arts' exclude, 'culture' includes. 'Art' has been cut short of meanings, where 'culture' has not.

where the merely formal features of art can become the guarantee of its 'aesthetic', rather than its relevance and relation to real-life processes and concerns: religious art installed in the antiseptic stillness of the museum. In the 'hyperinstitutionalization' of 'art', aesthetic appreciation can become so atrophied as to make culturedness only the knowledge of form. Expressions and artefacts become inert things. Seated in the opera stalls, knowing what to expect again, seeing themselves reflected all around, the elite may actually be bored through and through with only the shell of that which used to contain a passion of meaning.

When aesthetic communication and critique become rhetorical assemblies of clever allusions and of wholly self-contained and therefore usually vacuous artistic 'cross references', 'art' can end up in a floating and sometimes charlatan aesthetic without its own associated human practices and transformations. But this floating aesthetic conceals the social process by which it is appreciated, a process relying largely on the prior institutions of liberal-arts education to supply the knowledge of the purely formal and internal history of 'art'. And here lies the rub, for in the hyperinstitutionalization of 'art' the 'others', the 'uncultured', merely lack the code, but they're seen and may sometimes see themselves as ignorant, insensitive and without the finer sensibilities of those who really 'appreciate'. Absolutely certainly they're not the 'talented' or 'gifted', the elite minority held to be capable of performing or creating 'art'.

The traditional function of the artist is seen to be in the production of a refined aesthetic in things, texts and artefacts. Cultural practices involve, to be sure, symbolic representations, and part of their creativity is in the critical and creative transformation of these representations. But representational work cannot claim the distinction of being involved in a creative aesthetic unless it is in some real productive relationship to what is represented, unless it is embedded in a process of consciousness and meaning-making – categories which are not 'internally coded' but are a result of symbolic creativity. The notion of the full-time artist – separate from the market and requiring subsidy – is, if anything, at the periphery of the field of symbolic creativity in common culture, not at its centre. But it can seem to be its centre, thus disorienting the whole field with respect to its own real cultural practices and functions. Furthermore it may be that certain kinds of symbolic creativity in the expressive and communicative activity of 'dis-advantaged' groups exercise their uses and economies in precisely eluding and evading formal recognition, publicity and the possible control by others of their own visceral meanings. In this case the

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decontextualized search for aesthetics is, by definition, doomed to endless labour, for the aesthetic will be wherever it isn't. Hyperinstitutionalization excludes but can also repel.

It seemed for a time that things might be different. In the phase of social reconstruction after the war, part of the welfare-capitalist pact was to widen out the appreciation and practice of the high arts from their traditional base in the leisured upper-middle class. The arts were part of those good things of life which were to be shared out more equally. As in other areas, the state was to be responsible for this sharing out. The formation of the Arts Council in 1945 and the BBC Third Programme in 1946 was to spearhead this democratization of the arts. But the 'raise and spread' motto didn't last very long or spread very far. The Arts Council withdrew very promptly from the sites of popular consumption, cutting back promotions in Butlin's holiday camps, exhibitions in schools, canteens, factories and shops. Local arts clubs, regional initiatives, subsidized symphonies – many of these too were soon abandoned.

In fact the state became the vehicle for the continuance and reinforcement of the traditional conceptions and institutions of high culture rather than a vehicle for cultural democratization and experimentation with new, altogether wider institutions. The 'spreading' of art became highly specific and essentially conservative: the leisure-class idea of 'good culture' maintained its dominance (if not the class itself) but with now a wider well-subsidized audience of the rising middle class of managers and professionals.²

The current attempts by the Conservative government to abrogate the 1945 welfare pact, specifically in the cultural field, by forcing the arts to reconstitute themselves in market terms does not really attack the continuing minority basis, elite and exclusive definition of the high arts. It merely seeks to lessen or to remove their state subsidies – or even bring back patronage in the form of high-class corporate-image enhancement. If the post-1945 welfare-state arts policy had really been about democratic cultural development, if it had not given up so early on imaginative alternatives, if it had not so easily taken over the leisure-class view of art, then the current opposition to the government's cultural pre-Keynesianism might, itself, be much more broadly based.

Though subordinated and often marginalized, the many strands of the community arts movement continue to carry the torch. They share the continuing concern to democratize the arts and make them more a part of common experience. Their search for new or expanded publics can, however, suffer from the implicit assumption that such groups are, in some sense, 'non-publics', that they have no forms of their own, no culture, no common culture, except

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perhaps a very much debased version of elite culture or of mass culture passively consumed. There can be a final unwillingness and limit even in subversive or alternative movements towards an arts democracy. They may have escaped the physical institutions and academies, but not always their conventions – the forms must be kept more or less intact. If they must go, then so too does any notion of a specifically artistic practice. What is left is indistinguishable from other activities such as community action or politics itself. Some activists are, indeed, led by this logic to pure community action. But an approach which won't discard the conventions makes assumptions which presuppose effects which must be free. If it is to be free, creative activity must be allowed to be what it is, and to lead where it will.

There seem to be hidden questions behind even those arts initiatives and policies which genuinely seek cultural democratization – not 'What are their cultures?' but 'Why are their cultures not like ours?', 'Why are their cultures not as we think they should be?'

Our starting points

Though we deal with symbolic activity and creativity in this book, we have not, therefore, found it useful to start from and write within an 'arts' perspective. The original interest at Gulbenkian (see Preface) was precisely in approaching someone from 'outside', from outside the institutions, from outside the arts world, to cast a fresh eye on the 'artistic' activities of young people. In this book we've revelled in writing from a profane, robust and independent position about issues which have become so refined and rarefied in their own temples and shrines that they sometimes cannot be identified or spoken of at all. Often they cannot be handled at all, never mind usefully or for useful purposes. But nor are we, by intention at least, anti-art or philistine in our outlook. It is simply that, in trying to argue for and present the centrality of forms of symbolic creativity in everyday 'ordinary' culture, we don't want to start from where 'art' thinks is 'here', from within its perspectives, definitions and institutions. The search for new or expanded publics has started from the wrong end of the social process – from objects and artefacts, not people.

Our 'independence', however, does not consist in simply inventing élitism. We do not pursue a cultural populism grading 'art equivalents' in popular texts – an exercise which leaves many of the definitions and forms intact whilst simply replacing the object of scrutiny, still concentrating on 'things' and finding ever more

bright and clever and allusive ways of celebrating or criticizing them. Most popular cultural approaches to the 'lived' merely extend this language, this 'discourse', out from texts in a gloss and appearance of social connectedness without adding anything real to our knowledge of how symbols and forms are actually used in living cultures. In this sense popular cultural criticism and armchair semiotics have become secondhand vehicles – even when they go like Rolls-Royces – for understanding the lived. Viewing life through the glass of symbolic panels. Slumming in safety! The point for us is to try to understand the dynamic, precarious, virtual uses of symbols in common culture, not understanding the everyday through popular representation but understanding the everyday representation through and in the everyday. The fundamental project is to present and understand the creative symbolic elements of ordinary life, an important part of which is certainly the role and uses of popular representations, but understood through their use in – not reflection of – the everyday. The distinctiveness of this book is, then, that by ambition at least, when focusing on recognized popular cultural forms – music, fashion, the cultural media – we do so from the point of view of their use and meaning for and by young people. Our penultimate chapter focuses on everyday situations themselves, rather than on specific textual and cultural uses, and tries to show the symbolic creativity there. That is the 'centre of gravity' from which the whole book should be weighed and read, even when we are dealing with 'internal' textual or formal questions.

If you like, this is a more sociological or anthropological rather than artistic or cultural (in the sense of 'culture' as produced by or seen through texts and artefacts) starting-point, a starting-point not in clever responses to things, but in stupid responses to people. These responses are necessarily raw, open and faulted – 'stupid' – because the job is so messy and hard to do, which is why, of course, it is so rarely attempted and the 'cultural experts' stop in their chairs. Nevertheless our shared terrain with an arts or culture approach is in our central interest in symbolic creativity – though for us a sensuous and dynamic process rather than a formal feature of artistic 'things'. We argue for symbolic creativity as an integral ('ordinary') part of the human condition, not as the inanimate peaks (popular or remote) rising above its mists.

Our interest connects to a concern with a properly adequate theory of social action, of the formation and reproduction of collective and individual identities, as much as it connects to artistic or cultural concerns. To repeat, this is not to exclude 'art' from daily life, or to seek to add further social or theoretical barriers to its

the stage where people begin to construct themselves through nuance and complexity, through difference as well as similarity.

Our main ethnographic materials are drawn from working-class experience. We have not systematically explored class differences. However, we would claim that many of the processes which we discuss hold true as tendencies in middle-class experience too, though in different and more contradictory relation to and producing different effects from school, work, the family and inherited 'cultural capital', and are major cross-class cultural levelling forces.

There are, therefore, many commonalities in youth experience and it is these we try to highlight. It is clear, however, that symbolic work and creativity can also differ in form, style and content according to age and 'life style' (living with parents or not, whether or not married, with or without children). We have not attempted to delineate this.

We have decided not to try to present a separate cultural picture of ethnic-minority youth. It is beyond our scope to do this in a properly responsible way and our focus is in any case not to provide authoritative accounts of whole cultures but to highlight the symbolic work and creativity of young people, wherever we find them. We draw many such examples from ethnic-minority experience.

Some general points, however, should be made. It is clear from our fieldwork that Caribbean and Asian traditions are very important to young black people. They use their cultural backgrounds as frameworks for living and as repertoires of symbolic resources for interpreting all aspects of their lives. This is a source of much pride to most of them and one of the fundamental means through which they explore what distinguishes them from white youth. This is necessary, not only for the development of their own identities, but also necessary as an affirmation and assertion against an omnipresent racism which tells young blacks that being 'English' means being white as well as native born, and that those who are not white can never completely fit into British culture.

But young black people can never look wholly to the prior generation for clues about how to develop their own identities. The experiences of the two generations differ, and some cultural commonalities with white youth must arise from their shared conditions of life – common experiences in the same streets and schools mediated by many of the same cultural media. Often young black people are engaged in a doubly creative task. They are trying to negotiate what it means to be a black person in a white culture at the same time as they are engaged in the same creative activities as their white peers, through which they also explore aspects of their black identities. The balance which young people strike between

wider 'appreciation'. Indeed we hope to help build an altogether more satisfactory basis for thinking about the ordinary involvement of all symbolic creativity which entirely transcends tired 'appreciation' and which may lead to many innovations and new or renewed 'artistic beginnings'.

All arts, dead or living, in or out of their times, can live and do live in our scheme, but they have to earn their keep. We don't wish to be in at the end of 'art' but to direct attention back to, if you like, the wellsprings of art. Our project is to establish, or re-establish, some essential, critical, uncluttered and old-fashioned truths. Creative activity, reflection and expression are in all young people's lives all of the time – only they have different names. We aim to spell out some of them.

The basic method we've used to get inside the words and to spell them out has been a loose and general form of ethnography utilizing, in particular, the recorded group discussion. We provide statistical profiles, histories and descriptive contexts where appropriate, but our main aim is to allow young people's words and experiences to come through directly into the written text. Our ethnographic research and presentation have not aspired to a full methodological rigour, and we've ranged widely, sometimes at the cost of depth, for examples of symbolic creativity without really providing accounts of whole ways of life. But we have presented cultural items through the contexts of young people's own practices, meanings and usages of them, as gathered through our direct fieldwork methods. Discussions were taped with a variety of different groups of young people in Wolverhampton (see beginning of chapter 5 for details). These provided evidence and data which we've drawn on throughout the book; where not otherwise indicated quoted material comes usually from this source. The book also draws on a range of ethnographic fieldwork materials written up for the original Gulbenkian project (see Preface) and conducted in a variety of places including Sunderland, Leicester, South Birmingham, London and Kidderminster.

We've focused on young people, not because they are 'different', locked into some biological stage that enforces its own social condition, but simply because they provide the best and most crucial examples of our argument. The teenage and early adult years are important from a cultural perspective and in special need of a close 'qualitative' attention because it is here, at least in the first-world western cultures, where people are formed most self-consciously through their own symbolic and other activities. It is where they form symbolic moulds through which they understand themselves and their possibilities for the rest of their lives. It is also

these things differs from culture to culture and from individual to individual.

Necessary work and symbolic creativity

Our project is to uncover, explore and present symbolic creativity in everyday life. Apart from merely asserting its importance and, we hope, demonstrating its existence, why do we insist on the visceral connection of symbolic creativity to the everyday? At bottom, what anchors it?

We argue that symbolic creativity is not only part of everyday human activity, but also a necessary part. This is because it is an integral part of *necessary work* – that which has to be done every day, that which is not extra but essential to ensure the daily production and reproduction of human existence. It is this which actually guarantees and locks in the relevance of symbolic creativity. It is this which underlies claims that the real roots of art lie in the everyday. But of what kind of necessary work do we speak? What is the basis for including symbolic creativity in it?

Necessary work is taken usually to designate the application of human capacities through the action of tools on raw materials to produce goods and services, usually through wage labour, to satisfy physical human needs. Certainly the role of symbolic creativity in this should not be underestimated. The English radical tradition³ has stressed the dignity of labour and has sought in different ways to unify a certain view of living art with skill in work. William Morris, of course, proposed the famous general equation art = work/pleasure. Working and writing in the 1920s and 30s of this century Eric Gill⁴ is perhaps the clearest, most trenchant and most recent exponent of this tradition.

For him art was the principle of skill in the making of useful things was holy. For him work was holy. The daily reproduction of our lives was holy. It was the play of symbolic creativity in these things which made them holy.

Unfortunately, it was evident in Gill's time, now overwhelming, that, despite the continuing human need for creativity in useful activity, modern industry has all but destroyed the possibility of 'art' in paid work. Machine production took the craft tool out of the craft hand. This more or less destroyed the possibilities of creativity at work. Automatic production takes hand, tool and body altogether out of the workplace! It is simply an idealism now to speak of 'holy' work. Nor will anyone pay the price of 'holy poverty' necessary to reintroduce 'holy work'.

But there is another kind of humanly necessary work – often

unrecognized but equally necessary – *symbolic work*. This is the application of human capacities to and through, on and with symbolic resources and raw materials (collections of signs and symbols – for instance, the language as we inherit it as well as texts, songs, films, images and artefacts of all kinds) to produce meanings. This is broader than, logically prior to and a condition of material production, but its 'necessariness' has been forgotten.

Necessary symbolic work is necessary simply because humans are communicating as well as producing beings. Perhaps they are communicative before they are productive. Whilst all may not be productive, all are communicative. *All*. This is our species distinction. Nor is this a merely formal or physiological property that might lie unused in some. Only through its exercise does communication exist and all of us communicate. This is how we manifest and produce the social and dynamic nature of our humanity.

We argue that necessary symbolic work is spread across the whole of life. It is a condition of it, and of our daily humanity. Those who stress the separateness, the sublime and quintessential in 'art' have actually assumed and encouraged a mindlessly vulgar, materialist view of everyday life. They counterpose this to their view of 'the imaginative'. They thereby view daily life as a cultural desert. The imagined symbolic deficit of everyday life is then, in its turn, to be repaired by recourse to a free-floating 'imaginative realm', to 'useless things', to 'art for art's sake', to the 'socially redundant'. But this is not only circular, it's incoherent. It's like trying to make time go faster by speeding up clocks. 'Art' is taken as the *only* field of qualitative symbolic activity, the one-per-cent transcendental value that preserves humanity. As daily life is drained of its symbolic work, 'art' is grotesquely bloated till its pores leak pure imagination. And only from 'art' can come a cultural mission into the humdrum, a doomed attempt to save the masses. Again 'art' produces culture. Symbolic work starts, not ends, in separate artefacts. The imaginative is self-validating!

We insist, against this, that imagination is not extra to daily life, something to be supplied from disembodied 'art'. It is part of the necessariness of everyday symbolic and communicative work. If declared redundant here, it will certainly not be welcomed back in the finer robes of 'art'.

This point cannot be overstated: where we can't now realistically acknowledge and promote the prospect of symbolic creativity in the sinews of necessary work as material production, we can and must recognize symbolic creativity in the sinews of necessary work as symbolic production.

These may be diffuse, contradictory or decentred but they are produced through symbolic work including struggles to make meaning. Sensuous human communicative activities are also intersubjective. It is through knowing 'the other', including recognizing the self as an other for some others, that a self or selves can be known at all.

Second, symbolic work and creativity place identities in larger wholes. Identities do not stand alone above history, beyond history. They are related in time, place and things. It is symbolic work and creativity which realize the structured collectivity of individuals as well as their differences, which realize the materiality of context as well as the symbolism of self. This reminds us that locations and situations are not only *determinations* – they're also relations and resources to be discovered, explored and experienced. Memberships of race, class, gender, age and region are not only learned, they're lived and experimented with. This is so even if only by pushing up against the oppressive limits of established order and power.

Third and finally, symbolic work and especially creativity develop and affirm our active senses of our own vital capacities, the powers of the self and how they might be applied to the cultural world. This is what makes activity and identity *transitive* and specifically human. It is the dynamic and, therefore, clinching part of identity. It is the expectation of being able to apply power to the world to change it – however minutely. It is how, in the future, there is some human confidence that unities may be formed out of confusion, patterns out of irregularity. This is to be able to make judgements on who's a friend, who's an enemy, when to talk, when to hold silence, when to go, when to stop. But it's also associated with, and helps to form, overall styles of thinking which promise to make most sense of the world for you. It's also a cultural sense of what symbolic forms – languages, images, musics, haircuts, styles, clothes – 'work' most economically and creatively for the self. A culturally learned sense of the powers of the self is what makes the self in connecting it to others and to the world.

In many ways this is directly a question of cultural survival for many young people. Processes of symbolic work and symbolic creativity are very open, contested and unstable under conditions of late modernization. All young people experience one aspect or another of the contemporary 'social condition' of youth: unwilling economic dependence on parents and parental homes, uncertainty regarding future planning, powerlessness and lack of control over immediate circumstances of life; feelings of symbolic as well as material marginality to the main society; imposed institutional and ideological constructions of 'youth' which privilege certain

What are some of the basic elements of necessary symbolic work? First, language as a practice and symbolic resource. Language is the primary instrument that we use to communicate. It is the highest ordering of our sensuous impressions of the world, and the ultimate basis of our hope and capacity to control it. It enables interaction and solidarity with others and allows us to assess our impact on others and theirs on us. It therefore allows us to see ourselves as others.

Second, the active body as a practice and symbolic resource. The body is a site of somatic knowledge as well as a set of signs and symbols. It is the source of productive and communicative activity – signing, symbolizing, feeling.

Third, drama as a practice and symbolic resource. Communicative interaction with others is not automatic. We do not communicate from head to head through wires drilled into our skulls. Communication is achieved through roles, rituals and performances that we produce with others. Dramaturgical components of the symbolic include a variety of non-verbal communications, as well as sensuous cultural practices and communal solidarities. These include dancing, singing, joke-making, story-telling in dynamic settings and through performance.

Fourth and most importantly, symbolic creativity. Language, the body, dramatic forms are, in a way, both raw material and tools. Symbolic creativity is more fully the practice, the making – or their essence, what all practices have in common, what drives them. This is the production of *new* (however small the shift) meanings intrinsically attached to feeling, to energy, to excitement and psychic movement. This is the basis of confidence in dynamic human capacities as realities rather than as potentials – to be made conscious, through some concrete practice or active mediation, of the quality of human consciousness and how it can further be developed through the exercise and application of vital powers. Symbolic creativity can be seen as roughly equivalent to what an all-embracing and inclusive notion of the living arts might include (counterposed, of course, to the current exclusions of 'art'). Symbolic creativity may be individual and/or collective. It transforms what is provided and helps to produce specific forms of human identity and capacity. Being human – human being-ness – means to be creative in the sense of remaking the world for ourselves as we make and find our own place and identity.

What exactly is produced by symbolic work and symbolic creativity?

First, and perhaps most important, they produce and reproduce individual identities – who and what 'I am' and could become.

readings and definitions of what young people should do, feel or be.⁵

Many of the traditional resources of, and inherited bases for, social meaning, membership, security and psychic certainty have lost their legitimacy for a good proportion of young people. There is no longer a sense of a 'whole culture' with allocated places and a shared, universal value system. Organized religion, the monarchy, trade unions, schools, public broadcasting, high culture and its intertwinings with public culture no longer supply ready values and models of duty and meaning to help structure the passage into settled adulthood. This is certainly partly a result of much commented-upon wider processes related to late modernization: secularization; consumerism; individualization; decollectivization; weakening respect for authority; new technologies of production and distribution. But it is also the case that these inherited traditions owe their still continuing and considerable power to the stakes they offer and seem to offer to the individual: some graspable identity within a set of relationships to other identities; some notion of citizenship within a larger whole which offers rights, satisfactions and loyalties as well as duty and submission. However, for many young people, made to feel marginal to this society, and without their own material stake in it, these merely symbolic stakes can seem very remote. These public traditions and meanings cannot make good what they offer, because they are undercut at another more basic level by unfulfilled expectations. These things are for parents and adults, for those who have an interest in and make up the civil body. For the young black British they're even more remote – they are for other people's parents. No longer can we be blind to the 'whiteness' of our major traditional public sources of identity.

Young working-class women may experience this youth condition in a special way. On the one hand they are a target consumption group for many home commodities as well as for feminine-style-and-identity products. On the other hand, and with no money recompense and no real power in the consumer market, they may be making partial, early and exploited 'transitions' (often in an imperceptible extension of childhood domestic chores 'naturally' expected of girls but not of boys) into domestic roles of care and maintenance. This may seem to be a destination of sorts and a meaningful, useful activity when labour-market opportunities are scarce or difficult, but it can often be a specific unofficial training and subjective preparation for a lifetime's future of domestic drudgery coupled with job 'opportunities' only in part-time, low-paid, insecure, usually dead-end 'female' service work.

In general the arrival of a new and extended youth stage announces itself through the arrival of new institutional forms, and the adaption of old ones, aimed at its regulation. The Youth Training Scheme, Employment Training, recent developments in youth work practice and drop-in centres for the unemployed, 'civil disorder' and community policing, changes in benefit rules for the under-25s, are all aimed in some way at controlling and filling the time of youth or at maintaining some promise (and discipline) for future transitions or at preventing and pre-empting alternative uses of time and capacity not devoted to preparation for future transitions.

There is a set of meanings and identities on offer here, highly restricted, applied and focused. They are unlikely to replace the collapsing traditional ones. Indeed the tasks of symbolic work and creativity may include not only the attempt to retain identity in the face of the erosion of traditional value systems but also to forge new resistant, resilient and independent ones to survive in and find alternatives to the impoverished roles proffered by modern state bureaucracies and rationalized industry.

Work and play

We've argued that necessary symbolic work and symbolic creativity are spread through the whole of life, through work and play. Increasingly, however, it is play that matters to this work. The informal realm of 'leisure'⁶ is of vital and increasing importance for the operation of symbolic work as identity-making. There is simply decreasing room for creativity in the necessary symbolic work of most paid work,⁷ so its impetus is thrown increasingly on to, or develops more in, leisure activities. A well-known sociological study of the late 1970s found that 87 per cent of a 1,000-strong sample of non-apprenticed male manual workers in Peterborough exercised more skill in driving to work than they did in work.⁸ Occupational therapists seeking better opportunities for the educationally sub-normal tell us that most manual work needs only a mental age of 12 or less.⁹ Perhaps that is why so many young people of more normal mental age move on restlessly, job hopping for better chances; 40 per cent of 16-24-year-olds leave their jobs every year (*General Household Survey*, 1987).

Of course, there is a whole debate concerning the changing nature of modern work with some arguing that new technology has created new and exciting opportunities for many young people. There appears to be a dominant consensus emerging,¹⁰ however, that the workforce generally is shaping into a core/periphery pat-

tern with a relatively large minority (the core) enjoying high pay and good security with the majority (the periphery) suffering from low pay, insecurity and high job turnover. Women, black workers and young workers constitute the main supply of peripheral labour.

Whatever the detailed arguments, the fundamental point is that most of the jobs which young people occupy simply cannot offer the intrinsic satisfaction of skill in the making of useful things well to which Eric Gill refers. There is usually no control over the task or over the use of tools and materials necessary to complete it. There is certainly no sense of the completeness of the whole work process commencing, crucially, with the human imagination of, and plans for, a desired outcome followed by the organization and use of all necessary human capacities to achieve it. The scope for symbolic work and creativity is greatly attenuated, if not destroyed. The cry for a better 'qualified' and 'skilled' workforce may well be 'new-speak', actually, for a demand for better reliability and job discipline amongst young workers in the face of likely (rational) responses to the mounting intrinsic meaningfulness of much modern work.

Necessary symbolic work is often now exercised not so much through labour, as on it and about it – using vital powers to make sense of it, comprehend its human deficits and injuries, to make and find informal alternatives and compensations.¹¹

Whilst society dehumanizes work, it sentimentalizes 'Art'. So the 'arts' ignore work but are quick to condemn its 'reliefs'. But the reality is that many, if not most, young people feel more themselves in leisure than they do at work. Though only 'fun' and apparently inconsequential, it's actually where their creative symbolic abilities are most at play. Necessary symbolic work can operate under conditions of much greater freedom and self-energization in leisure than at work. Crucially it is the realm of the informal – specifically in the sense of freedom of symbolic activity and choice – rather than the formal. In many ways 'leisure' is now a wholly inadequate term to encompass these meanings. It simply cannot contain or invoke the sense of the massive symbolic investment now placed in free time and the ways in which it is used to explore transitional stages in growing older and to make and internalize new identities.

Informal relations certainly exist in work as a whole subterranean network and with their own 'unofficial' meanings. But the indirect and sometimes direct logic of capitalist production, especially in the 'new competitive climate', is to press in on and try to eliminate them. Meanwhile, in an unconscious and conscious bid for cultural survival on their own terms, young people seem to turn deliberately to the informal and to resist administered symbols. It is

in informal relations and informal 'free' time where they find a greater possibility of authentic and direct communication in trusting contexts. In the world of work, the managerial and public world of formal relations, people are treated like objects. Informally, it seems, people can be treated like humans, as free and equal expressive subjects. At work, sincerity, truthfulness, openness are weaknesses – things to be exploited – whereas in informal leisure these are things which seem to be valued.

In a way the spectacular sub-cultures of the 1950s and 60s prefigured some of the general shifts we are claiming for the contemporary situation. They defined themselves very early and gained their very spectacle from seeking visible identities and styles outside or against work and working respectabilities. Now the idea of a spectacular sub-culture is strictly impossible because all style and taste cultures, to some degree or another, express something of a general trend to find and make identity outside the realm of work.¹²

One way of understanding the possibilities we are arguing for in leisure is to adapt William Morris' famous equation, art = work/pleasure, by moving the terms around to produce the different formula, pleasure = art/work.¹³ The realm of leisure/pleasure is not inconsequential, or 'necessary' only for the re-creation of the capacity to work in waged labour. It contains its own work, its own 'art-work', symbolic work which is about the formation and expression of identity – this work in play is more crucial in many ways than the material productions of formal worktime.

Eric Gill opens his essay 'Of slavery and freedom' with:

That state is a state of Slavery in which a man does what he likes to do in his spare time and in his working time that which is required of him. . . . That state is a state of Freedom in which a man does what he likes to do in his working time and in his spare time that which is required of him.¹⁴

He would, of course, have flatly rejected this notion, but it could be proposed that elements of his formulations with regard to 'leisure' have indeed come to pass. There is now a necessity in leisure, the necessary symbolic work of modern cultural survival, of developing identity and connecting its powers actively to the cultural world.

The informal and leisure agenda is much bigger now, the field for realizable emancipation much wider. The possibilities for symbolic creativity have been greatly, if contradictorily expanded. Expectations and hopes have broken free from the old suppressions to demand human significance, satisfaction, expression and develop-

ment now. In many ways most people's lives are just being awakened after being deadened at work, boxed in, bored or worn out at home. Young people are in the vanguard of seeking pleasure, fun, autonomy and self-direction – and this quest is increasingly focused in and on leisure, in and on the hidden continent of the informal. They seek possibilities there, in their own way, which have formerly been open only in the more glamorous public worlds of artists, writers and the truly 'leisured' classes.

This is not to say that the old collective social categories have broken down under the weight of individualism and an emphasis on informal life – certainly not in an objective way. Social and cultural activities continue to be patterned and limited by class, gender and race. Often new collectivities and solidarities illuminate or are continuous with some of the aspects of the old ones. It's more that people in all groups and classes, but especially now the 'less privileged', want more and more their own 'bit of the action'. They want significance and satisfaction now necessarily partly as individuals and not as part of the army of other people's power. The subversion and destruction – verbally, stylistically, expressively – of stereotypical views of homogeneous class cultures is to be welcomed. For the working class this is a victory. Certain freedoms, and especially cultural ones, are felt and produce change individually. This does not signify the end of classes and groups. It is in and from these positions and mutualities, and in different ways, that individuality grows and returns to in surprising ways.

Commodities and consumerism

The main cultural materials and resources used in the symbolic work of leisure are cultural commodities. They are supplied to the market overwhelmingly by the commercial cultural industries and media for profit. Indeed it was the market discovery, exploitation and development in the 1950s and 60s of a newly defined affluent and expanding consumer group of young people which produced the popular conception of 'the teenager'.¹⁵ We're currently experiencing a renewed and it seems even less caring emphasis on market forces in cultural matters. The rise of leisure we've referred to is really the rise of commercialized leisure. Does this matter? Does their production in a commercial nexus devalue cultural commodities and the contents of the cultural media?

There is a strange unanimity – and ghostly embrace of their opposites – between left and right when it comes to a condemnation of consumerism and especially of the penetration of the market into cultural matters. It is the profane in the Temple for the

artistic establishment. For some left cultural analysts it constitutes a widened field of exploitation which is in and for itself unwelcome, now workers are exploited in their leisure as well as in their work. The circuit of domination is complete with no escape from market relations.

We disagree with both assessments, especially with their shared underlying pessimism. They both ignore the dynamic and living qualities of everyday culture and especially their necessary work and symbolic creativity. These things have always been in existence, though usually ignored or marginalized. They continue to be ignored even when an extraordinary development and transformation of them are in progress. For symbolic work and creativity uses, meanings and 'effects' of cultural commodities. Cultural commodities are catalyst, not product; a stage in, not the destination of, cultural affairs. Consumerism now has to be understood as an active, not a passive, process. Its play includes work.

If it ever existed at all, the old 'mass' has been culturally emancipated into popularly differentiated cultural citizens through exposure to a widened circle of commodity relations. These things have supplied a much widened range of usable symbolic resources for the development and emancipation of everyday culture. Certainly this emancipation has been partial and contradictory because the consumer industries have sought to provide some of the contents and certainly the forms as well as the possibilities for cultural activity. Consumerism continuously reproduces an image of, and therefore helps to encourage, selfishness and narcissism in individualized consumption and hedonism. But those tendencies are now given features of our cultural existence. It is the so far undervalued balance of development and emancipation which has to be grasped. As we shall see, the images and offers of consumerism are not always taken at face value, nor are 'individualized' forms of consciousness as socially isolated and self-regarding as the pessimists suppose. Meanwhile a whole continent of informal, everyday culture has been recognized, opened up and developed.

Capitalism and its images speak directly to desire for its own profit. But in that very process it breaks down or short-circuits limiting customs and taboos. It will do anything and supply any profane material in order to keep the cash tills ringing. But, in this, commerce discovered, *by exploiting*, the realm of necessary symbolic production within the undiscovered continent of the informal. No other agency has recognized this realm or supplied it with usable symbolic materials. And commercial entrepreneurship of the cultural field has discovered something real. For whatever

self-serving reasons it was accomplished, we believe that this is an historical *recognition*. It counts and is irreversible. Commercial cultural forms have helped to produce an historical present from which we cannot now escape and in which there are many more materials – no matter what we think of them – available for necessary symbolic work than ever there were in the past.¹⁶ Out of these come forms not dreamt of in the commercial imagination and certainly not in the official one – forms which make up common culture.

The hitherto hidden continent of the informal (including re-sources and practices drawn from traditional folk and working-class culture) produces, therefore, from cultural commodities much expounded, unprefigured and exciting effects – and this is why, of course, commerce keeps returning to the streets and common culture to find its next commodities. There is a fundamental and unstable contradictoriness in commercial rationality and instrumentality when it comes to consumer cultural goods. Blanket condemnations of market capitalism will never find room for it or understand it.

For our argument perhaps the basic complexity to be unravelled is this. Whereas it may be said that work relations and the drive for efficiency now hinge upon the *suppression* of informal symbolic work in most workers, the logic of the cultural and leisure industries hinges on the opposite tendency: a form of *their enablement and release*. Whereas the ideal model for the worker is the good time kept, the disciplined and empty head, the model for the good consumer is the converse – a head full of unbounded appetites for symbolic things.

Oddly and ironically, it is from capitalism's own order of priorities, roles, rules and instrumentalities *in production* (ironically, of leisure goods and services too) that informal cultures seek escape and alternatives in capitalist leisure *consumption*. Commerce appears twice in the cultural argument, as that which is to be escaped from and that which provides the means and materials for alternatives. Modern capitalism is now not only parasitic upon the puritan ethic, but also upon its instability and even its subversion.

There is a widespread view that these means and materials, the cultural media and cultural commodities, must appeal to the lowest common denominators of taste. Not only do they have no intrinsic value but, more disturbingly, they may have coded-in negative values which manipulate, cheapen, degrade and even brutalize the sensibilities of 'the masses'.

In contradiction we argue that there is no such thing as an autonomous artefact capable of printing its own intrinsic values,

one way, on human sensibility. This is to put a ludicrous (actually crude Marxist) emphasis on *production* and what is held to be initially coded into artefacts.

What has been forgotten is that circumstances change cases, contexts change texts. The received view of aesthetics suggests that the aesthetic effect is internal to the text, and a universal property of its form. This places the creative impulse squarely on the material productions of the 'creative' artist, with the reception or consumption of art wholly determined by its aesthetic form, palely reflecting what is timelessly coded within the text. Against this we want to rehabilitate consumption, creative consumption, to see creative potentials in it for itself, rather than see it as the dying fall of the usual triplet: production, reproduction, reception. We are interested to explore how far 'meanings' and 'effects' can change quite decisively according to the social contexts of 'consumption', to different kinds of 'de-coding' and worked on by different forms of symbolic work and creativity. We want to explore how far *grounded* aesthetics are part, not of things, but of processes involving consumption, processes which make consumption pleasurable and vital. Viewers, listeners and readers do their own symbolic work on a text and create their own relationships to technical means of reproduction and transfer. There is a kind of cultural production all within consumption.

Young TV viewers, for instance, have become highly critical and literate in visual forms, plot conventions and cutting techniques. They listen, often highly selectively, to pop music now within a whole shared history of pop styles and genres. These knowledges clearly mediate the meanings of texts. The fact that many texts may be classified as intrinsically banal, contrived and formalistic must be put against the possibility that their living reception is the opposite of these things.

The 'productive' reception of and work on texts and artefacts can also be the start of a social process which results in its own more concrete productions, either of new forms or of recombined existing ones. Perhaps we should see the 'raw materials' of cultural life, of communications and expressions, as always intermediate. They are the products of one process as well as the raw materials for another, whose results can be, in turn, raw materials for successive groups. Why shouldn't bedroom decoration and personal styles, combinations of others' 'productions', be viewed along with creative writing or song and music composition as fields of aesthetic realization? Furthermore the grounded appropriation of new technology and new hardware may open new possibilities for expression, or recombinations of old ones, which the dominant

culture misses because it does not share the same conditions and contradictory pressures of that which is to be explained or come to terms with.

Our basic point is that human consumption does not simply repeat the relations of production – and whatever cynical motives lie behind them. Interpretation, symbolic action and creativity are part of consumption. They're involved in the whole realm of necessary symbolic work. This work is at least as important as whatever might originally be encoded in commodities and can often produce their opposites. Indeed some aspects of 'profanity' in commercial artefacts may be liberating and progressive, introducing the possibility of the new and the socially dynamic.

It is pointless and limiting to judge artefacts *alone*, outside their social relations of consumption, with only the tutored critic's opinion of an internal aesthetic allowed to count. This is what limits the 'Official Arts' in their institutions. People bring living identities to commerce and the consumption of cultural commodities as well as being formed there. They bring experiences, feelings, social position and social memberships to their encounter with commerce. Hence they bring a necessary creative symbolic pressure, not only to make sense of cultural commodities, but partly through them also to make sense of contradiction and structure as they experience them in school, college, production, neighbourhood, and as members of certain genders, races, classes and ages. The results of this necessary symbolic work may be quite different from anything initially coded into cultural commodities.

Grounded aesthetics

As we have used the term so far, 'symbolic creativity' is an abstract concept designating a human capacity almost in general. It only exists, however, in contexts and, in particular, sensuous living processes. To identify the particular dynamic of symbolic activity and transformation in concrete named situations we propose the term 'grounded aesthetic'. This is the creative element in a process whereby meanings are attributed to symbols and practices and where symbols and practices are selected, reselected, highlighted and recomposed to resonate further appropriated and particularized meanings. Such dynamics are emotional as well as cognitive. There are as many aesthetics as there are grounds for them to operate in. Grounded aesthetics are the yeast of common culture.

We have deliberately used the term 'aesthetic' to show both the differences and the continuities of what we are trying to say with respect to the culture and arts debate. We are certainly concerned

with what might be called principles of beauty, but as qualities of living symbolic activities rather than as qualities of things; as ordinary aspects of common culture, rather than as extraordinary aspects of uncommon culture. This is the sense of our clumsy but strictly accurate use of 'grounded'.

Our 'groundedness' for some will seem simply no more than the reckless destruction of flight, potting birds of paradise with sociological lead. For others the strange search for archaic aesthetics in grounded, everyday social relations will seem perverse, un-material and even mystical. We're happy to work on the assumption that 'the truth' lies somewhere, always provisionally, in between, that human being-ness needs both air and earth and, in turn, makes possible our very idea of both.

Within the process of creating meanings from and within the use of symbols there may be a privileged role for texts and artefacts, but a grounded aesthetic can also be an element and a quality of everyday social relations. For instance, there is a dramaturgy and poetics of everyday life, of social presence, encounter and event. It may have become invisible in the routinized roles of adult life, but the young have much more time and they face each other with fewer or more fragile masks. They are the practical existentialists. They sometimes have no choice but to be, often too, absorbed in the moment and to ransack immediate experience for grounded aesthetics. For them some features of social life may not be about the regulation and containment of tension, but about its creation and increase. The 'aimless' life of groups and gangs may be about producing something from nothing, from 'doing nothing'. It may be about building tensions, shaping grounded aesthetics, orchestrating and shaping their release and further build-ups, so that a final 'catharsis' takes with it or changes other tensions and stresses inherent in the difficulties of their condition. Making a pattern in an induced swirl of events can produce strangely still centres of heightened awareness where time is held and unusual control and insight are possible. Grounded aesthetics are what lift and mark such moments.

Grounded aesthetics are the specifically creative and dynamic moments of a whole process of cultural life, of cultural birth and rebirth. To know the cultural world, our relationship to it, and ultimately to know ourselves, it is necessary not merely to be in it but to change – however minutely – that cultural world. This is a making specific – in relation to the social group or individual and its conditions of life – of the ways in which the received natural and social world is made human *to them* and made, to however small a degree (even if finally symbolic), controllable by them.

sensual heightening, through joy, pleasure and desire, through 'fun' and the 'festive'.

Concrete skills, concretely acquired rather than given through natural distinction or gift, are involved in the exercise of grounded aesthetics. 'Economy', and 'skill', for instance, enter into the grounded aesthetics of how the body is used as a medium of expression. A bodily grounded aesthetic enters into personal style and presence, dance and large areas of music and performance.

Although they are not things, grounded aesthetics certainly have uses. Such uses concern the energizing, developing and focusing of vital human powers on to the world in concrete and practical ways, but also in lived connected cognitive ways. This is in producing meanings, explanations and pay-offs in relation to concrete conditions and situations which seem more efficient or adequate than other proffered official or conventional meanings. Such 'useful' meanings may well have moral dimensions in providing collective and personal principles of action, co-operation, solidarity, distinction or resistance.

But 'useful' meanings can also be very private. There are perhaps especially private, symbolic and expressive therapies for the injuries of life. They 'work', not through their direct musical, literary or philosophical forms, but through the ways in which a grounded aesthetic produces meanings and understandings which were not there before. This may involve internal, imaginative and spiritual life. It may be in the realm of dream and fantasy, in the realm of heightened awareness of the constructedness and constructiveness of the self: alienation from obvious givens and values; the sense of a future made in the present changing the present; the fear of and fascination for the 'terra incognita' of the self. The usefulness of grounded aesthetics here may be in the holding and repairing, through some meaning creation and human control even in desperate seas, of the precariousness and fragmentedness of identity whose source of disturbance is outside, structural and beyond the practical scope of individuals to influence.

The crucial failure and danger of most cultural analysis are that dynamic, living grounded aesthetics are transformed and transferred into ontological properties of things, objects and artefacts which may represent and sustain aesthetics but which are, in fact, separate. The aesthetic effect is not *in* the text or artefact. It is part of the sensuous/emotive/cognitive creativities of human receivers, especially as they produce a stronger sense of emotional and cognitive identity as expanded capacity and power – even if only in the possibility of *future* recognitions of a similar kind. These creativities are not dependent on texts, but might be enabled by them.¹⁷

The possibility of such control is, of course, a collective principle for the possibility of political action on the largest scale. But it also has importance in the individual and collective awareness of the ability to control symbols and their cultural work. Grounded aesthetics produce an edge of meaning which not only reflects or repeats what exists, but transforms what exists – received expressions and appropriated symbols as well as what they represent or are made to represent in some identifiable way.

In so called 'primitive art' and culture, for instance, a central theme is the naming of fundamental forces as gods and demons, thereby to reveal them, make them somehow knowable and thereby subject to human persuasion or placation. Of course, the urban industrial world is much more complex in its organization than are 'primitive' societies, and our apparent technical control over the threatening forces of nature seems greater and different in kind from theirs. What we seek to control, persuade or humanize through grounded aesthetics may be, in part, the force and expression of other human beings rather than forces emanating directly from nature – if you like the work of culture on culture.

A sense of or desire for timelessness and universality may be part of the impulse of a grounded aesthetic. The natural, obvious and immutable become particular historical constructions capable of variation. Subjectivity, taken to some degree out of the particular, is the force which can change it. But we may equally focus on the particular extracted from its context to make sense of the universal (Blake's grain of sand). Such psychic separation may be part of and/or a condition for some grounded aesthetics.

This is not to say that 'universals' really exist, certainly not internally in 'art-objects'. It is extraordinary how many universals – and contradictory ones – are claimed. Nevertheless, experienced universalism, as a movement out of or reperception of the particular, may well be a universal feature of heightened human awareness. This universalism is also a kind of awareness of the future in terms of what it is possible to become. This is part of heightened aspiration and the quest for wider significance and expanded identity. Universalism also gives some vision of the kind of socialness and human mutuality which might locate better and more expanded identities. Grounded aesthetics provide a motivation towards realizing different futures, and for being in touch with the self as a dynamic and creative force for bringing them about.

The received sense of the 'aesthetic' emphasizes the cerebral, abstract or sublimated quality of beauty. At times it seems to verge on the 'an-aesthetic' – the suppression of all senses. By contrast we see grounded aesthetics as working through the senses, through

Surprising meanings and creativities can be generated from unpromising materials through grounded aesthetics. But texts and artefacts can also fail to mediate symbolic meanings for many reasons. Many supply only a narrow or inappropriate (for particular audiences) range of symbolic resources. Others encourage *reficcation* (literally, making into a thing) rather than the *mediation* and enablement of the possibility of grounded aesthetics. They move too quickly to supply a putative aesthetic. The receivers are simply sent a 'message', the meaning of which is pre-formed and pre-given. Signs are pinned succinctly and securely to their meanings. Human receivers are allowed no creative life of their own. The attempt to encapsulate directly an aesthetic militates against the possibility of its realization through a grounded aesthetic because the space for symbolic work of reception has been written out.

There are many ways in which the 'official arts' are removed from the possibility of a living symbolic *mediation*, even despite their possible symbolic richness and range. Most of them are out of their time and, even though this should enforce no veto on current *mediation*, the possibilities of a relevant structuring of symbolic interest are obviously limited. The institutions and practices which support 'art', however, seem designed to break any living links or possibilities of inducing a grounded aesthetic appropriation. 'Official' art equates aesthetics with artefacts. In literature, for instance, all of our current social sense is read *into* the text as its 'close reading' – the legacy of deadness left by I. A. Richards and F. R. Leavis. Art objects are put into the quietness and stillness of separate institutions – which might preserve them, but not their relation to the exigencies of current necessary symbolic work. The past as museum, Art as objects! The reverence and distance encouraged by formality, by institutions, and by the rites of liberal-humanist education as 'learning the code', kill dead, for the vast majority, what the internal life of signs might offer through grounded aesthetics to current sensibility and social practice. It is as hard for the 'official arts' to offer themselves to grounded aesthetics, as it is for grounded aesthetics to find recognition in the formal canons.

Commercial cultural commodities, conversely, offer no such impediments. At least cultural commodities – for their own bad reasons – are aimed at exchange and therefore at the possibility of use. In responding to, and attempting to exploit, current desires and needs, they are virtually guaranteed to offer some relevance to the tasks of current socially necessary symbolic work. In crucial senses, too, the modern media precisely 'mediate' in passing back to audiences, at least in the first instance, symbolic wholes they've

taken from the streets, dance-halls and everyday life. Along with this they may also take, however imperfectly and crudely, a field of aesthetic tensions from daily life and from the play of grounded aesthetics there.

Of course, part of the same restless process is that cultural commodities, especially style and fashion 'top end down', may become subject overwhelmingly to reification, symbolic rationalization and the drastic reduction of the symbolic resources on offer. But consumers move too. When cultural commodities no longer offer symbolic mediation to grounded aesthetics, they fall 'out of fashion'. And in the cumulative symbolic landscape of consumer capitalism, dead packaged, reified grounded aesthetics are turned back into primary raw material for other processes of inevitable necessary symbolic work, with only the cultural theorists periodically labouring back along their 'meta-symbolic' routes to 'golden age' symbolic homologies. This commercial process may, to say the least, be flawed, but it offers much more to grounded aesthetics than do the dead 'official arts'.

There may well be a better way, a better way to cultural emancipation than through this continuous instability and trust in the hidden – selfish, blind, grabbing – hand of the market. But 'official art' has not shown it yet. Commercial cultural commodities are all most people have. History may be progressing through its bad side. But it progresses. For all its manifest absurdities, the cultural market may open up the way to a better way. We have to make our conditions of life before we can dominate and use them. Cultural pessimism offers us only road-blocks.

Against post-modernist pessimism

The much commented upon incandescence – instability, changeability, luminosity – of cultural commodities ('all that is solid melts into air'¹⁸) is not some form of spontaneous combustion in commodities or another 'wonder' of capitalist production. It is not without or against meaning. This very incandescence passes through necessary symbolic work, changes and enables it. The incandescence is not simply a surface market quality. It produces, is driven by, and reproduces further forms and varieties for everyday symbolic work and creativity, some of which remain in the everyday and in common culture far longer than they do on the market.

The market is the source of a permanent and contradictory revolution in everyday culture which sweeps away old limits and dependencies. The markets' restless search to find and make new appetites raises, wholesale, the popular currency of symbolic

aspiration. The currency may be debased and inflationary, but aspirations now circulate, just as do commodities. That circulation irrevocably makes or finds its own new worlds.

The style and media theorists – and terrorists – of the left and right see only market incandescence. They warn us of an immanent semiotic implosion of all that is real. They call us to a strange rejection of all that glitters and shimmers over the dark landscape, as if it were the landscape. But this usually metropolitan neurosis is nothing more than a bad case of idealist theorists' becoming the victims of their own nightmares. Mistaking their own metaphors for reality, they are hoist by their own semiotic petards. They are caught by – defined in professionally charting – the symbolic life on the surface of things without seeing, because not implicated in, the necessary everyday role of symbolic work, of how sense is made of structure and contradiction. They then coolly announce that modern culture is all surface in danger of collapse.

We must catch up with the movement of the real world. We must not be satisfied with a phantom history and demonology of its surface movement. Above all, self-deluding and complacent beliefs in aesthetic self-sufficiency and separateness, as sanctuaries in and against an imaginary history, must be firmly rejected.

Commerce and consumerism have helped to release a profane explosion of everyday symbolic life and activity. The genie of common culture is out of the bottle – let out by commercial carelessness. Not stuffing it back in, but seeing what wishes may be granted, should be the stuff of our imagination.

Notes

- 1 Raymond Williams, 'Culture is ordinary' (1958), reprinted in his *Resources of Hope*, Verso, 1988.
- 2 The previous two paragraphs draw on points made in Alan Tomlinson's original Gulbenkian submission (see Appendix).
- 3 We are thinking of the line that runs through from Cobbett, Blake, Ruskin and William Morris.
- 4 See, for instance, *A Holy Tradition of Working*, Golgonooza Press, 1983.
- 5 For a full account of the 'new social condition of youth' in relation to youth unemployment, see P. Willis *et al.*, *The Youth Review*, Avebury, 1988.
- 6 'Leisure' is a difficult term which only roughly indicates our intended meaning. We use it only because of the lack of well-known or meaningful alternatives. Problems with the term include

the way it can be extended to cover the oppressions of unemployment by calling it 'free time'; the inadequacy of framing women's informal creativity as 'leisure' when the home more even than paid labour is a site of repetitive and boring work for them and when their freedom to move out of doors is curtailed by violence and the fear of violence; most importantly, the inconsequential and optional nature of what is usually meant by 'leisure'.

7 The following discussion of the symbolic components of work is necessarily rather truncated. It refers only to symbolic activity in relation to the *intrinsic* or *official* elements of deskilled modern work. Though it is not our direct focus here, we would certainly not deny that work continues to be an important *general* and inter-linked site of cultural experience. Cultures of work are varied, contradictory, inner and outer related, and have to be carefully dissected. There continues to be an unofficial richness in work relations which is directed against the coercion or bankruptcy of its official requirements. This links outwards to effect forms of free-time informality and intimacy, but unofficial work cultures also fully utilize and attempt to make space for many of the forms, interests and communications of 'leisure' and 'free time'. Work continues to be where many people spend most of their time, where they find their main social contacts and where their and their dependents' living and leisuring are earned. These are all crucial relationships to be made sense of at a cultural level (both in and out of work), even if leisure and informal rather than 'shop floor' resources are increasingly used for this sense-making. The study of this needs, and must await, another book.

- 8 R. Blackburn and M. Mann, *The Working Class in the Labour Market*, Macmillan, 1979.
- 9 P. Willis, *Learning to Labour*, Gower, 1977.
- 10 See, for instance, a recent summary reviewed in the *Financial Times* (24 August 1989), A. Lindbeck and D. J. Snomer, *The Insider-Outsider Theory of Employment and Unemployment*, MIT, 1989.
- 11 None of this amounts to welcoming or justifying mass unemployment. All studies show that the vast majority of young people find almost any kind of work preferable to unemployment. However, this tells us more about the extreme negative qualities of worklessness – poverty, total boredom, exclusion from 'leisure' and consumption, isolation, depression – than it does about any positive quality in work.
- 12 A point first made and developed in a working summary paper by Geoff Hurd.
- 13 This was suggested by Stephen Yeo in conversation.
- 14 *A Holy Tradition of Work*, op. cit., page 97.

15 See the first major study of youth culture in Britain, Mark Abrams, *The Teenage Consumer*, London Press Exchange, 1959.

16 We're bending the stick of argument here to emphasize how cultural products are creatively *used*, rather than passively *consumed*. We should not, of course, ignore the continuing ubiquity of forms of direct cultural production such as writing, photography and 'storying' (c.f. D. Morley and K. Worpole, *The Republic of Letters*, Comedia, 1981; S. Beszceret and P. Corrigan, *Towards a Different Image*, Comedia/Methuen, 1986; S. Yeo, *Whose Story?*, Blackwell, 1990). Equally, against élitism, we should recall activities like knitting and gardening as combining both production and use. Our general argument here should not obscure that varieties of such 'home produce' are important fields for symbolic work and creativity.

17 It is possible to get into a fine and tautological argument about the distinctions and relationships between 'invisible' internal subjective meanings and external 'visible' signs, symbols and practices. Though we insist that grounded aesthetics are a quality of living processes of meaning-making, not of things, this is not necessarily a wholly invisible internal process, though it can be. Words, signs, symbols and practices as 'things' in the world can certainly be part of the operation of particular grounded aesthetics for particular people. They are also taken in by and made sense of in the meaning-making of others. Also we recognize and, in what follows, give many examples of the possibility of grounded aesthetics becoming properly externalized: formalized, made concrete and public in some way. We argue for this as a process which decisively blurs and questions the conventional distinctions between consumption and production. What's crucial here, though, is not the 'thing-like' qualities of such externalizations, but their capacity both to reflect and *promote* the grounded aesthetics of their producers and of others, individuals and collectivities.

Our internal subjective meanings will never transcend or make redundant the 'given-ness' of textuality, of things, of forms, of symbols. Indeed these latter are intrinsic to the possibility and creativity of human meanings, but they should always be seen transitively for their role in the mediation of human meaning. They're humble, malleable things, not the kings and queens of expression and experience. In particular, we should understand that processes of human meaning-making and creativity are stopped dead when aesthetics are attached to things instead of to human activities.

18 The title of a book by Marshall Berman (Simon and Schuster, New York, 1982) which helped to launch the many faceted and pervasive post-modern debate.

Angela McRobbie

SECOND-HAND DRESSES AND THE
ROLE OF THE RAGMARKET [1989]

Introduction

SEVERAL ATTEMPTS HAVE been made recently to understand 'retro-style'. These have all taken as their starting point that accelerating tendency in the 1980s to ransack history for key items of dress, in a seemingly eclectic and haphazard manner. Some have seen this as part of the current vogue for nostalgia while others have interpreted it as a way of bringing history into an otherwise ahistorical present. This [chapter] will suggest that second-hand style or 'vintage dress' must be seen within the broader context of post-war subcultural history. It will pay particular attention to the existence of an entrepreneurial infrastructure within these youth cultures and to the opportunities which second-hand style has offered young people, at a time of recession, for participating in the fashion 'scene'.

Most of the youth subcultures of the post-war period have relied on second-hand clothes found in jumble sales and ragmarkets as the raw material for the creation of style. Although a great deal has been written about the meaning of these styles little has been said about where they have come from. In the early 1980s the magazine *iD* developed a kind of *vox pop* of street style which involved stopping young people and asking them to itemise what they were wearing, where they had got it and for how much. Since then many of the weekly and monthly fashion publications have followed suit, with the result that this has now become a familiar feature of the magazine format. However, the act of buying and the processes of looking and choosing still remain relatively unexamined in the field of cultural analysis.

One reason for this is that shopping has been considered a feminine activity. Youth sociologists have looked mainly at the activities of adolescent boys and young men and their attention has been directed to those areas of experience which have a strongly masculine image. Leisure spheres which involve the wearing and displaying of clothes have been thoroughly documented, yet the hours spent seeking them

out on Saturday afternoons continue to be overlooked. Given the emphasis on street culture or on public peer-group activities, this is perhaps not surprising, but it is worth remembering that although shopping is usually regarded as a private activity, it is also simultaneously a public one and in the case of the markets and second-hand stalls it takes place in the street. This is particularly important for girls and young women because in other contexts their street activities are still curtailed in contrast to those of their male peers. This fact has been commented upon by many feminist writers but the various pleasures of shopping have not been similarly engaged with. Indeed, shopping has tended to be subsumed under the category of domestic labour with the attendant connotations of drudgery and exhaustion. Otherwise it has been absorbed into consumerism where women and girls are seen as having a particular role to play. Contemporary feminism has been slow to challenge the early 1970s orthodoxy which saw women as slaves to consumerism. Only Erica Carter's work [1979] has gone some way towards dislodging the view that to enjoy shopping is to be passively feminine and incorporated into a system of false needs.

Looking back at the literature of the late 1970s on punk, it seems strange that so little attention was paid to the selling of punk, and the extent to which shops like the *Sex* shop run by Malcolm McLaren and Vivienne Westwood functioned also as meeting places where the customers and those behind the counter got to know each other and met up later in the pubs and clubs. In fact, ragmarkets and second-hand shops have played the same role up and down the country, indicating that there is more to buying and selling subcultural style than the simple exchange of cash for goods. Sociologists of the time perhaps ignored this social dimension because to them the very idea that style could be purchased over the counter went against the grain of those analyses which saw the adoption of punk style as an act of creative defiance far removed from the mundane act of buying. The role of McLaren and Westwood was also downgraded for the similar reason that punk was seen as a kind of collective creative impulse. To focus on a designer and an art-school entrepreneur would have been to undermine the 'purity' or 'authenticity' of the subculture. The same point can be made in relation to the absence of emphasis on buying subcultural products. What is found instead is an interest in those moments where the bought goods and items are transformed to subvert their original or intended meanings. In these accounts the act of buying disappears into that process of transformation. Ranked below these magnificent gestures, the more modest practices of buying and selling have remained women's work and have been of little interest to those concerned with youth cultural resistance. . . .

The role of the ragmarket

Second-hand style owes its existence to those features of consumerism which are characteristic of contemporary society. It depends, for example, on the creation of a surplus of goods whose use value is not expended when their first owners no longer want them. They are then revived, even in their senility, and enter into another cycle of consumption. House clearances also contribute to the mountain of bric-à-brac, jewellery, clothing and furniture which are the staple of junk and second-hand shops and stalls. But not all junk is used a second time around. Patterns

of taste and discrimination shape the desires of second-hand shoppers as much as they do those who prefer the high street or the fashion showroom. And those who work behind the stalls and counters are skilled in choosing their stock with a fine eye for what will sell. Thus although there seems to be an evasion of the mainstream, with its mass-produced goods and marked-up prices, the 'subversive consumerism' of the ragmarket is in practice highly selective in what is offered and what, in turn, is purchased. There is in this milieu an even more refined economy of taste at work. For every single piece rescued and restored, a thousand are consigned to oblivion. Indeed, it might also be claimed that in the midst of this there is a thinly-veiled cultural élitism in operation. The sources which are raided for 'new' second-hand ideas are frequently old films, old art photographs, 'great' novels, documentary footage and textual material. The apparent democracy of the market, from which nobody is excluded on the grounds of cost, is tempered by the very precise tastes and desires of the second-hand searchers. Second-hand style continually emphasizes its distance from second-hand clothing.

The London markets and those in other towns and cities up and down the country cater now for a much wider cross-section of the population. It is no longer a question of the *jeunesse dorée* rubbing shoulders with the poor and the down-and-outs. Unemployment has played a role in diversifying this clientele, so also have a number of other less immediately visible shifts and changes. Young single mothers, for example, who fall between the teen dreams of punk fashion and the reality of pushing a buggy through town on a wet afternoon, fit exactly with this new constituency. Markets have indeed become more socially diverse sites in the urban landscape. The Brick Lane area in London, for example, home to part of the Bangladeshi population settled in this country, attracts on a Sunday morning, young and old, black and white, middle-class and working-class shoppers as well as tourists and the merely curious browsers. It's not surprising that tourists include a market such as Brick Lane in their itinerary. In popular currency, street markets are taken to be reflective of the old and unspoilt; they are 'steeped in history' and are thus particularly expressive of the town or region.

The popularity of these urban markets also resides in their celebration of what seem to be pre-modern modes of exchange. They offer an oasis of cheapness, where every market day is a 'sale'. They point back in time to an economy unaffected by cheque cards, credit cards and even set prices. Despite the lingering connotations of wartime austerity, the market today promotes itself in the language of natural freshness (for food and dairy produce) or else in the language of curiosity, discovery and heritage (for clothes, trinkets and household goods). There is, of course, a great deal of variety in the types of market found in different parts of the country. In London there is a distinction between those markets modelled on the genuine flea-markets, which tend to attract the kind of young crowd who flock each weekend to Camden Lock, and those which are more integrated into a neighbourhood providing it with fruit, vegetables and household items. The history of these more traditional street markets is already well documented. They grew up within the confines of a rapidly expanding urban economy and played a vital role in dressing (in mostly second-hand clothes), and feeding the urban working classes, who did not have access to the department stores, grocers or other retail outlets which catered for the upper and middle classes. As Phil Cohen [1979] has shown, such

markets came under the continual surveillance of the urban administrators and authorities who were concerned with 'policing the working class city'. The street-markets were perceived by them as interrupting not only the flow of traffic and therefore the speed of urban development, but also as hindering the growth of those sorts of shops which would bring in valuable revenue from rates. These were seen as dangerous places, bringing together unruly elements who were already predisposed towards crime and delinquency; a predominantly youthful population of costermongers had to be brought into line with the labour discipline which already existed on the factory floor.

The street market functioned, therefore, as much as a daytime social meeting place as it did a place for transactions of money and goods. It lacked the impersonality of the department stores and thrived instead on the values of familiarity, community and personal exchange. This remains the case today. Wherever immigrant groups have arrived and set about trying to earn a living in a largely hostile environment a local service economy in the form of a market has grown up. These offer some opportunities for those excluded from employment, and they also offer some escape from the monotony of the factory floor. A drift, in the 1970s and 1980s, into the micro-economy of the street market is one sign of the dwindling opportunities in the world of real work. There are now more of these stalls carrying a wider range of goods than before in most of the market places in the urban centres. There has also been a diversification into the world of new technology, with stalls offering cut-price digital alarms, watches, personal hi-fis, videotapes, cassettes, 'ghetto-blasters' and cameras. The hidden economy of work is also supplemented here by the provision of goods obtained illegally and sold rapidly at rock-bottom prices.

This general expansion coincides, however, with changing patterns in urban consumerism and with attempts on the part of mainstream retailers to participate in an unexpected boom. In the inner cities the bustling markets frequently breathe life and colour into otherwise desolate blighted areas. This, in turn, produces an incentive for the chain stores to reinvest, and in places such as Dalston Junction in Hackney, and Chapel Market in Islington, the redevelopment of shopping has taken place along these lines, with Sainsbury's, Boots the Chemist and others, updating and expanding their services. The stores flank the markets, which in turn line the pavements, and the consumer is drawn into both kinds of shopping simultaneously. In the last few years many major department stores have redesigned the way in which their stock is displayed in order to create the feel of a market place. In the 'Top Shop' basement in Oxford Street, for example, there is a year-round sale. The clothes are set out in chaotic abundance. The rails are crushed up against each other and packed with stock, which causes the customers to push and shove their way through. This intentionally hectic atmosphere is heightened by the disc jockey who cajoles the shoppers between records to buy at an even more frenzied pace.

Otherwise, in those regions where the mainstream department stores are still safely located on the other side of town, the traditional street market continues to seduce its customers with its own unique atmosphere. Many of these nowadays carry only a small stock of second-hand clothes. Instead, there are rails of 'seconds' or cheap copies of high street fashions made from starched fabric which, after a couple of washes, are ready for the dustbin. Bales of sari material lie stretched out on counters next to those displaying make-up and shampoo for black women. Reggae and

funk music blare across the heads of shoppers from the record stands, and hot food smells drift far up the road. In the Ridley Road market in Hackney the hot bagel shop remains as much a sign of the originally Jewish population as the eel pie stall reflects traditional working-class taste. Unfamiliar fruits create an image of colour and profusion on stalls sagging under their weight. By midday on Fridays and at weekends the atmosphere is almost festive. Markets like these retain something of the pre-industrial gathering. For the crowd of shoppers and strollers the tempo symbolises time rescued from that of labour, and the market seems to celebrate its own pleasures. Differences of age, sex, class and ethnic background take on a more positive quality of social diversity. The mode of buying is leisurely and unharassed, in sharp contrast to the Friday afternoon tensions around the checkout till in the supermarket.

Similar features can be seen at play in markets such as Camden Lock on Saturday and Sunday afternoons. Thousands of young people block Camden's streets so that only a trickle of traffic can get through. The same groups and the streams of punk tourists can be seen each week, joined by older shoppers and those who feel like a stroll in the sun, ending with an ice cream further along Chalk Farm road. Young people go there to see and be seen if for any other reason than that fashion and style invariably look better worn than they do on the rails or in the shop windows. Here it is possible to see how items are combined with each other to create a total look. Hairstyles, shoes, skirts and 'hold-up' stockings; all of these can be taken in at a glance. In this context shopping is like being on holiday. The whole point is to amble and look, to pick up goods and examine them before putting them back. Public-school girls mingle with doped-out punks, ex-hippies hang about behind their Persian rug stalls as though they have been there since 1967, while more youthful entrepreneurs trip over themselves to make a quick sale.

Subcultural entrepreneurs

The entrepreneurial element, crucial to an understanding of street markets and second-hand shops, has been quite missing from most subcultural analysis. The vitality of street markets today owes much to the hippy counter-culture of the late 1960s. It was this which put fleamarkets firmly back on the map. Many of those which had remained dormant for years in London, Amsterdam or Berlin, were suddenly given a new lease of life. In the years following the end of World War Two the thriving black markets gradually gave way to the fleamarkets which soon signalled only the bleakness of goods discarded. For the generation whose memories had not been blunted altogether by the dizzy rise of post-war consumerism, markets for old clothes and jumble sales in the 1960s remained a terrifying reminder of the stigma of poverty, the shame of ill-fitting clothing, and the fear of disease through infestation, rather like buying a second-hand bed.

Hippy preferences for old fur coats, crêpe dresses and army great-coats, shocked the older generation for precisely this reason. But they were not acquired merely for their shock value. Those items favoured by the hippies reflected an interest in pure, natural and authentic fabrics and a repudiation of the man-made synthetic materials found in high street fashion. The pieces of clothing sought out by hippy

girls tended to be antique lace petticoats, pure silk blouses, crêpe dresses, velvet skirts and pure wool 1940s-styled coats. In each case these conjured up a time when the old craft values still prevailed and when one person saw through his or her production from start to finish. In fact, the same items had also won the attention of the hippies' predecessors, in the 'beat culture' of the early 1950s. They too looked for ways of by-passing the world of ready-made clothing. In the rummage sales of New York, for example, 'beat' girls and women bought up the fur coats, satin dresses and silk blouses of the 1930s and 1940s middle classes. Worn in the mid 1950s, these issued a strong sexual challenge to the spick and span gingham-clad domesticity of the moment.

By the late 1960s, the hippy culture was a lot larger and much better off than the beats who had gone before them. It was also politically informed in the sense of being determined to create an alternative society. This subculture was therefore able to develop an extensive semi-entrepreneurial network which came to be known as the counter-culture. This was by no means a monolithic enterprise. It stretched in Britain from hippy businesses such as Richard Branson's Virgin Records and Harvey Goldsmith's Promotions to all the ventures which sprang up in most cities and towns, selling books, vegetarian food, incense, Indian smocks, sandals and so on. It even included the small art galleries, independent cinemas and the London listings magazine *Time Out*.

From the late 1960s onwards, and accompanying this explosion of 'alternative' shops and restaurants, were the small second-hand shops whose history is less familiar. These had names like 'Serendipity', 'Cobwebs' or 'Past Caring' and they brought together, under one roof, all those items which had to be discovered separately in the jumble sales or fleamarkets. These included flying jackets, safari jackets, velvet curtains (from which were made the first 'loon' pants) and 1920s flapper dresses. These second-hand goods provided students and others drawn to the subculture, with a cheaper and much more expansive wardrobe. (The two looks for girls which came to characterise this moment were the peasant 'ethnic' look and the 'crêpey' bohemian Bloomsbury look. The former later became inextricably linked with Laura Ashley and the latter with Biba, both mainstream fashion newcomers.) Gradually hippie couples moved into this second-hand market, just as they also moved into antiques. They rapidly picked up the skills of mending and restoring items and soon learnt where the best sources for their stock were to be found. This meant scouring the country for out-of-town markets, making trips to Amsterdam to pick up the long leather coats favoured by rich hippy types, and making thrice-weekly trips to the dry cleaners. The result was loyal customers, and if the young entrepreneurs were able to anticipate new demands from an even younger clientele, there were subsequent generations of punks, art students and others.

The presence of this entrepreneurial dynamic has rarely been acknowledged in most subcultural analysis. Those points at which subcultures offered the prospect of a career through the magical exchange of the commodity have warranted as little attention as the network of small-scale entrepreneurial activities which financed the counter-culture. This was an element, of course, vociferously disavowed within the hippy culture itself. Great efforts were made to disguise the role which money played in a whole number of exchanges, including those involving drugs. Selling

goods and commodities came too close to 'selling out' for those at the heart of the subculture to feel comfortable about it. This was a stance reinforced by the sociologists who also saw consumerism within the counter-culture as a fall from grace, a lack of purity. They either ignored it, or else, employing the Marcusean notion of recuperation, attributed it to the intervention of external market forces. It was the unwelcome presence of media and other commercial interests which, they claimed, laundered out the politics and reduced the alternative society to an endless rail of cheesecloth shirts.

There was some dissatisfaction, however, with this dualistic model of creative action followed by commercial reaction. Dick Hebdige [1979] and others have drawn attention to the problems of positing a raw and undiluted (and usually working-class) energy, in opposition to the predatory youth industries. Such an argument discounted the local, promotional activities needed to produce a subculture in the first place. Clothes have to be purchased, bands have to find places to play, posters publicising these concerts have to be put up . . . and so on. This all entails business and managerial skills even when these are displayed in a self-effacing manner. The fact that a spontaneous sexual division of labour seems to spring into being is only a reflection of those gender inequalities which are prevalent at a more general level in society. It is still much easier for girls to develop skills in those fields which are less contested by men than it is in those already occupied by them. Selling clothes, stage-managing at concerts, handing out publicity leaflets, or simply looking the part, are spheres in which a female presence somehow seems natural.

While hippy style had run out of steam by the mid-1970s the alternative society merely jolted itself and rose to the challenge of punk. Many of those involved in selling records, clothes and even books, cropped their hair, had their ears pierced and took to wearing tight black trousers and Doctor Marten boots. However, the conditions into which punk erupted and of which it was symptomatic for its younger participants were quite different from those which had cushioned the hippy explosion of the 1960s. Girls were certainly more visible and more vocal than they had been in the earlier subculture, although it is difficult to assess exactly how active they were in the do-it-yourself entrepreneurial practices which accompanied, and were part of, the punk phenomenon. Certainly the small independent record companies remained largely male, as did the journalists and even the musicians (though much was made of the angry femininity of Poly Styrene, The Slits, The Raincoats and others). What is less ambiguous is the connection with youth unemployment, and more concretely, within punk, with the disavowal of some of the employment which was on offer for those who were not destined for university, the professions or the conventional career structures of the middle classes.

Punk was, first and foremost, cultural. Its self-expressions existed at the level of music, graphic design, visual images, style and the written word. It was therefore engaging with and making itself heard within the terrain of the arts and the mass media. Its point of entry into this field existed within the range of small-scale youth industries which were able to put the whole thing in motion. Fan magazines (fanzines) provided a training for new wave journalists, just as designing record sleeves for unknown punk bands offered an opportunity for keen young graphic designers. In the realm of style the same do-it-yourself ethic prevailed and the obvious place to start was the jumble sale or the local fleamarket. Although punk

also marked a point at which boys and young men began to participate in fashion unashamedly, girls played a central role, not just in looking for the right clothes but also in providing their peers with a cheap and easily available supply of second-hand items. These included 1960s cotton print 'shifts' like those worn by the girls in The Human League in the early 1980s (and in the summer of 1988 'high fashion' as defined by MaxMara and others), suedette sheepskin-styled jackets like that worn by Bob Dylan on his debut album sleeve (marking a moment in the early 1960s when he too aspired to a kind of 'lonesome traveller' hobo look), and many other similarly significant pieces.

This provision of services in the form of dress and clothing for would-be punks, art students and others on the fringe, was mostly participated in by lower middle-class art and fashion graduates who rejected the job opportunities available to them designing for British Home Stores or Marks and Spencer. It was a myth then, and it is still a myth now, that fashion houses were waiting to snap up the talent which emerges from the end-of-term shows each year. Apart from going abroad, most fashion students are, and were in the mid-1970s, faced with either going it alone with the help of the Enterprise Allowance Schemes (EAS), or else with joining some major manufacturing company specialising in down-market mass-produced fashion. It is no surprise, then, that many, particularly those who wanted to retain some artistic autonomy, should choose the former. Setting up a stall and getting a licence to sell second-hand clothes, finding them and restoring them, and then using a stall as a base for displaying and selling newly-designed work, is by no means unusual. Many graduates have done this and some, like Darlajane Gilroy and Pam Hogg, have gone on to become well-known names through their appearance in the style glossies like *The Face*, *Blitz* and *iD*, where the emphasis is on creativity and on fashion-as-art.

Many others continue to work the markets for years, often in couples and sometimes moving into bigger stalls or permanent premises. Some give up, re-train or look round for other creative outlets in the media. The expansion of media goods and services which has come into being in the last ten years, producing more fashion magazines, more television from independent production companies, more reviews about other media events, more media personalities, more media items about other media phenomena, and so on, depends both on the successful and sustained manifestation of 'hype' and also on the labour power of young graduates and school leavers for whom the allure of London and metropolitan life is irresistible. For every aspiring young journalist or designer there are many thousands, however, for whom the media remains tangible only at the point of consumption. Despite the lingering do-it-yourself ethos of punk, and despite 'enterprise culture' in the 1980s, this bohemian world is as distant a phenomenon for many media-struck school-leavers as it has always been for their parents. 'Enterprise subcultures' remain small and relatively privileged metropolitan spaces.

7
THE NEIGHBORHOOD IN
CULTURAL PRODUCTION

I have no money, no resources, no hopes.
I am the happiest man alive. A year ago, six months ago,
I thought that I was an artist. I no longer think about it,
I am.

—Henry Miller, *The Tropic of Cancer*, 1934

The aspiring artist must be resourceful. As a film student at Chicago's School of the Art Institute, Delia financed her project in part with loft parties. Local deejays entertained gratis at these affairs, and completed scenes from the film-in-progress were projected against a brick wall. For the filming itself, locals in the café crowd were recruited to serve in various capacities—as set designers, camera operators, script consultants, or actors. Those lacking the requisite talents for one of the technically demanding tasks contributed as extras. Artists in Wicker Park participated in this sort of thing readily—after all, they expected the others to show up at the opening of their art exhibits, or the premier of their new play, or the read-through of their script in progress, or the finals of their poetry slam. A critical mass is necessary to support

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From
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the production of culture for which there is as yet little popular demand or monetary support. It amounts to a bohemian bargain, and it helps us to understand why artistic sorts across genres continue to value urban propinquity.

In January 2000, I was an extra in Delia's film. The scene was filmed in a vacant storefront, made up to be an art gallery. The day before, at the Hardware Café where Delia worked, I received directions to the location, as well as instructions on the persona that I was expected to inhabit. In the film, a space alien arrives on Earth and, wandering through the streets of Manhattan, encounters various subcultures. In this scene, the alien is confronted by the spectacle of Lower East Side art mavens in action. I was to be one of those, and the chief characteristic I was instructed to perform was unbearable pretension. Since I went to gallery openings routinely and was a Ph.D. candidate, I felt up to the task, practiced at both art-show attendance and pretension.

Being an extra in a student film may sound like fun, and it is fun. However, on this occasion it was also very cold. The space that Delia procured had only a portable heater plugged into the corner. Nonetheless, some two dozen locals, mostly artists, gathered to shiver together for several hours. What was interesting is that my fellow extras, many of whom I had encountered at genuine openings, nonetheless felt obligated to play something other than themselves. They had shaven heads or exotic tattoos that were simply part of their everyday aesthetic, but on top of that they layered parodic costumes, over-the-top ensembles nonetheless culled from the reaches of their own closets.

One man was completely naked and covered in silver body paint. I thought that he must be very cold. I also thought that he must be playing the alien. He was not. It turned out that he was just meant to be an example of a New York artist trying to stand out from the crowd.

I said to Dan, who was standing next to me, that I had never actually seen a naked silver guy at any of the art events that I attended. Dan assured me that in New York, this would be the sort of thing I would see routinely. I find that claim implausible, but that is beside the point.

In American popular culture, artists are routinely denigrated as effete elitists, naked emperors claiming superior style and intellect who are,

in reality, simply pretentious and asinine (or silly). Apparently, these

experiment and generating a more nurturing atmosphere. And yet, many participants itch to eventually make their way into the big leagues, even if it means having to brush up against poseurs in silver body paint. Chicago, New York, Los Angeles, and a host of other cities are not so much in competition as they are differentiated nodes in a networked geography of cultural production, enmeshed in webs of exchange of both cultural products and human capital. Within large cities, particular districts emerge as privileged sites in this cultural economy, and Wicker Park is an exemplary case (Figure 7.1).

The Culture Industries

As is well known, culture is big business, with billions of dollars derived from film, television, and popular music. Though a great deal of ink has been spilled belying the banality (or worse) of culture industry products, in fact disseminating a steady stream of even mediocre cultural commodities demands harnessing a great deal of creative talent. Indeed, one thing that has never ceased to amaze me as I've gotten up close to pop-culture producers is just how much effort and individual virtuosity goes into the production of even formulaic crap.

The advent of television and the Internet, and the globalization of the film and music industries, have dramatically increased the demand for marketable cultural content. In the fine arts, which lack a mass market, strategies of profit valorization look more and more like the risk-intensive financial markets, and collectors speak of their collections as though they were investment portfolios (diversified living artists, some old masters, etc.), while dealers adopt the language of brokers. Still, as the art historian Thomas Crow indicates:

In our image saturated present, the culture industry has demonstrated the ability to package and sell nearly every variety of desire imaginable, but because its ultimate logic is the strictly rational and utilitarian one of profit maximization, it is not able to invent the desires and sensibilities it exploits. In fact the emphasis on continual novelty basic to that industry runs counter to the need of every large enterprise for product standardization and economies of scale.²

Chicago artists were both well aware of this caricature and happy to perpetuate it, while at the same time feeling personally exempt. Yes, artists are like that, they concede—other artists, such as those in New York. It is Chicago's revenge for its relative marginality in the world of popular and high cultural production, which is dominated by the coasts. Here Chicago's "second city" status is a source of comparative virtue—lacking glamour, Chicago compensates with unassuming authenticity. The stance echoes Nelson Algren's famous claim for the city: "Like loving a woman with a broken nose, you may well find lovelier lovelies. But never a lovely so real."¹

On the other hand, one can be fairly certain that any gathering of moderate size in the Wicker Park scene will include some participants who will move to New York or Los Angeles within the year. Chicago turns out to be an especially congenial place for young artists just starting out, with ample opportunities to participate in off-Loop theater or the making of student films. Less culture industry concentration in Chicago also means the stakes are lower, allowing people room to

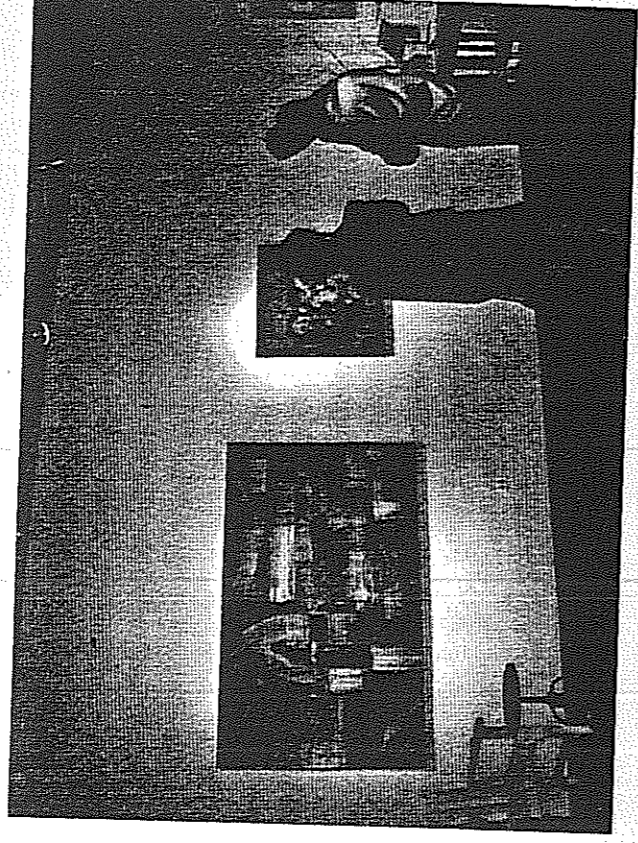


Figure 7.1. Wicker Park, Chicago. Photo by ©

At midcentury, Horkheimer and Adorno advanced the argument that the production of culture was managed like any other Fordist enterprise, within vertically integrated organizations following standardized routines.³ But these industries have not merely grown larger in recent decades. They have substantially reorganized as well, providing excellent examples of the general economic trend away from Fordist mass production and toward "flexible specialization."⁴ Fordist-style vertical integration now gives way to webs of flexible production.⁵ In contrast to the old image of the culture industry worker as a studio-owned and -operated commodity,⁶ the new trend is toward project-based labor markets⁷ and chaotic careers for quasi-independent talent.⁸ But while flexible production "liberates" labor from conventional organizational boundaries, this does not mean it democratizes the rewards. Media oligopolies and a select stratum of privileged cultural producers continue to dominate profits under new arrangements, while less formal relations of exchange with cultural producers in general absolve large but vertically disintegrated corporate concerns from bearing many associated market risks.

Under these circumstances, the commitment of contemporary bohemians to the romanticized images of starving artists and the primacy of the aesthetic does not confound the instrumental interests of the culture industries. Instead, the ideological features of bohemia work to the benefit of these industries, sustaining a pool of potential labor that largely bears its own costs of reproduction. Neo-bohemian neighborhoods help make this possible by clustering employment opportunities in areas like entertainment provision that help aspiring artists to subsidize their creative pursuits. The local ecology of neo-bohemia combines these opportunities with appropriate residential, work, and display spaces, creating a platform for artistic efforts that may then be mined by extra-local corporate interests, which recruit talent and co-opt cultural products from these settings at their discretion. This indeed did occur in Wicker Park during the 1990s; music industry scouts, for example, routinely scoured the neighborhood, signing many local acts to recording contracts. Likewise, the works of selected fine artists were exhibited in prestigious and profitable galleries on both sides of the Atlantic. In this case, it is useful to examine artists

in somewhat unusual and counterintuitive terms, as workers in a cultural production process (rather than as, say, tortured geniuses or the heroes of modern life).

The Economic Profile of Bohemian Artists

Though current observers like Florida and Brooks prefer to stress the hedonistic dimensions of bohemia, in fact a durable feature of the artists' lifestyle has been the willingness to endure high levels of insecurity and material scarcity. Murger's tales of the Parisian bohemia depicted artists at the edge of destitution, often in failing health, conditions that by all accounts Murger himself knew intimately.⁹ Since then, a poverty-stricken life has become part of bohemia's durable mythology.

This image bears scrutiny. Arguably, in the last half-century the opportunities for artists to make a living have improved. In assessing what it means to live like an artist in the early twenty-first century, it is important that we take a look at artists' economic profiles in the United States and, more specifically, in Chicago. To an unprecedented degree, the opportunity exists to earn large fortunes in both the mass media and the fine arts. This phenomenon has been enhanced by twentieth-century developments, as the economist Richard Caves notes, "One might suspect that superstars' careers were less starry in the past, if only due to inferior technologies of travel, communication, and the reproduction of creative works. In the 19th century neither the performer nor the performer's reputation traveled at today's speeds."¹⁰

Thus, though the artists of nineteenth-century bohemia no doubt harbored their own dreams of status and economic rewards beneath the "art for art's sake" veil, contemporary participants can have their efforts nurtured by fantasies of even more extravagant compensation. Such an outcome is not, however, a common occurrence, and few aspirants in the arts will ever realize it. Reviewing the research literature on artist as an occupational category, Pierre-Michel Menger concludes, "From a distributional perspective, artists show a high variance in income. Poverty rates among US artists are higher than for all other professional and technical workers."¹¹ The distribution of rewards is a classic example of a winner-takes-all market,¹² with a relatively small

In Wicker Park, most of the more visible and active scene participants are in their twenties, many of them still students at local arts institutions, but a significant minority pursue *la vie bohème* into their thirties and beyond. Despite their age, these individuals continue to evince the styles and strategies typically associated with youth culture; they are more extreme examples of the American trend in which once standard markers of "adult" life, such as marriage and children, are increasingly deferred.¹⁵

In any event, the overall youthfulness of the scene means that local incomes are likely to be even lower in a neo-bohemia than the average for artists overall. Filer notes, "Although artists earn an average of 6 percent less than the general work force, the differential varies substantially over the life cycle. . . . Income differentials shift in favor of artists as workers grow older, so that above the age of 40 artists typically earn more than the control group."¹⁶

This "convergence," coupled with the fact that, overall, artists tend to be young,¹⁷ suggests that many "failed" bohemians follow Mizruchi's advice and drop out.

The decline in public funding for the arts elevates income pressure for young artists. Federal funding sources such as the National Endowment of the Arts have been the object of significant controversy, decried by conservatives both for funding what they consider to be morally repugnant work, and for exemplifying wasteful government spending.¹⁸ Federal funding for the arts peaked in 1981 and has declined since, although funding at the state and local levels has intermittently made up some of this shortfall.¹⁹ Meanwhile, private funding for the arts via corporations tends to reward already established artists rather than aspirants.²⁰

We can see, then, that at least in the early stages of their careers, contemporary artists do indeed earn meager incomes, especially when their high levels of education are taken into account. Still, the "poverty" of artists is of a distinctive flavor. Wicker Park artists like Delia are resourceful, after all. Even where direct economic compensation is scarce, cultural competence purchases local rewards, as young artists are routinely included in upscale events or staked to a drink or a dinner by more fortunate patrons.²¹ Thus, starving artists do not

number of participants reaping the lion's share of monetary gains. Even for those fortunate few, the receipt of fame and fortune is often preceded by a de facto apprenticeship, perhaps lasting many years, during which remuneration for artistic efforts is intermittent and paltry.¹³ Despite their relatively high levels of cultural and formal education capital, most artists find their creative pursuits significantly unrewarded by formal art markets of any kind.

Results of the 2000 Chicago Artists Survey, conducted by the Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs with more than 900 respondents, further illustrate this point. First, we must note the strikingly high rates of artists who have college educations; in total, 87 percent of respondents reported a college degree or higher. Still, in keeping with bohemian mythology of the starving artist, the return on this education in terms of household income is relatively low. Indeed, more than a third of these respondents reported household incomes of less than \$25,000 a year. Seventy-three percent of them report making less than half of their income directly from art, and 61 percent report less than a quarter (Table 7.1). Thus, most artists must support their art some other way.

Traditionally, bohemia is occupied by younger artists and fellow travelers, and Wicker Park is no exception. For Ephraim Mizruchi, bohemia is a "space of abeyance," in which participants forestall adult commitments; he suggests that the age of 30 is the tipping point beyond which such a slack existence ceases to be socially acceptable.¹⁴

Table 7.1 General Demographics for Chicago Artists by Percentage Income from Art, 2000 (Number and Percent).

Income from Art (%)	No. of Respondents	With College Degree or Higher	Household Income (Annual)	
			Under 25K	25-40K
0 to 25%	562	85	26	29
26 to 50%	107	85	38	29
51 to 75%	28	91	39	36
76 to 100%	217	85	22	30

Source: Chicago Artists Survey, 2000. Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs.

really starve, and they often manage social lives far more lively than their earnings would indicate.

The bohemian relationship to material scarcity is complicated, not least by the personal insistence that this life was "chosen." Says Tom, a painter living on Chicago's West Side in the late 1990s, "I have something I do that is very important to me—making art—and I'm prepared to forgo other comforts for that. It's going to be a long time, if ever, before I own a new car—I never have. But that doesn't really enter into my consciousness." Such noble claims serve to distinguish artists from the great unwashed; as one Wicker Park entrepreneur put it, "There's a big difference in being 'poor by choice.' A bohemian who is poor by choice is socially acceptable. Someone who is poor because they can't earn any money is still *déclassé*." The neo-bohemian thus makes a claim on status privileges typically denied to the urban poor. While poverty as it is normally experienced inhibits self-determination, the "voluntary" adoption of relative poverty by bohemians claims to increase autonomy.

Bohemians may self-select into poor and working-class neighborhoods, but their dispositions are decidedly cosmopolitan, and they are not plagued by the social isolation that characterizes groups that occupy these spaces under conditions of considerably greater constraint.²² Applying their creative talents to the construction of their own lives, they are practiced *bricoleurs*,²³ turning secondhand clothes into chic, trendsetting ensembles, and converting cultural capital into a myriad of social opportunities, from gallery openings to exclusive parties. Moreover, they are quite creative in reimagining the home and neighborhood that they occupy. Beyond low rents, these aspirants also require access to display venues in order to enhance their visibility in nascent careers; because their profiles are typically low during the bohemian phase, such venues must have relatively low barriers to entry, welcoming new and experimental work. Finally, the artists must be able to find work to subsidize pursuit of their art; ideally, they seek work that is consistent with their lifestyles. Wicker Park during the 1990s satisfied these requirements; though these various attributes of the milieu also often conflicted with one another, generating a precarious environment.

The Creative Milieu

In *The Informational City*, Manuel Castells advances the concept of the "milieu of innovation" to address new strategic sites in what he calls "the informational mode of production."²⁴ Writes Castells, "By a milieu of innovation we understand a specific set of relationships of production . . . based on a social organization that by and large shares a work culture and instrumental goals aimed at generating new knowledge, new processes and new products."²⁵ Though Castells focused on enclaves of high-tech innovation, his concept is applicable to the production of culture as well, even if it challenges standard interpretations to consider the bohemian ethic a "work culture." When applied to neo-bohemia, Castells' emphasis on social interaction challenges the image of personal virtuosity that attends most representations of creative accomplishment. The cults that form around the most successful practitioners in the field obscure the complex social systems in place that actually generate cultural innovation.

Howard Becker argues that art is a cooperative venture: "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 that we eventually see or hear comes to be and continues to be."²⁶ The social world of cultural production privileges particular locales. Such places encourage the collective process of cultural production, fostering collaboration, linking artists to audiences, and sustaining a "work culture" through which participants come to frame their efforts. These locales are not self-contained, bounded entities, but rather operate in multiple networks of exchange—of products, ideas, and human capital—with other key sites, preceding the eventual dissemination of selected cultural commodities into the global marketplace. These spaces attract relevant types of creative workers, such as artists, performers, and musicians, and they provide social conditions needed for the nurturing of talent and the ongoing creation of cultural products.

The Wicker Park bars and coffee shops that local artists, musicians, and hipsters claimed as their own, including Urbus Orbis, the Rainbo, Earwax, and the Borderline, are important for understanding more than just the recreational ethos of Wicker Park. In fact, such venues helped to organize a local scene that was home to substantial amounts of

easier. Communities like Wicker Park are like farm leagues, from which an unknown number of products and producers will ascend to the big leagues of marketable cultural production.

Particularly in the early 1990s, when its reputation achieved national proportions but gentrification had not yet dramatically raised local rents, the neighborhood contributed to the flourishing of young artists and musicians in the early stages of their careers, as well as a number of hip, funky hangouts where these artists could work and play. The media play an important role in this process. When *Billboard* magazine creates a "buzz" about the Wicker Park music scene, it increases the future likelihood that music scouts, journalists, and art buyers will enter the neighborhood, which in turn makes it more advantageous for artistic aspirants who are hoping to be seen. The media thus simultaneously reflect and drive the development of neo-bohemia.²⁷ Despite the pretentious bandying of the word "underground," Wicker Park's postmodern bohemia is highly visible to a variety of relevant publics, from culture industry scouts to local consumers, and that is also part of what keeps the local artists coming back to the neighborhood.

Table 7.2 gives a brief catalogue of significant moments over thirteen years of Wicker Park as a cultural production site, revealing how local culture intersects with broader markets in music, film, and the fine arts. But this retrospective provides a necessarily fraudulent picture insofar as it renders static and discrete outcomes that are in fact embedded in a dynamic field of creativity and collaboration. The possibility for these events relies on a host of more obscure efforts, a sea of cultural production that falls below the radar. Very little of this cultural production is valorized, or, more to the point, it is valorized indirectly, with large numbers of participants failing to find a market or reap the benefits of their contributions. Even after signing a band, the music industry seeks to limit its own exposure; as the Chicago-based independent record producer Steve Albini indicates, even moderately successful acts struggle to earn back their advances (which are eaten up by recording and touring) or to sustain career longevity.²⁸ But in Wicker Park and similar neighborhoods, there is no shortage of musicians willing to take their chances, ignoring the fact that the

cultural creation, most notably in music, but also in the fine arts, theater, and design. Apparently a space of leisure, Urbus Orbis contributed to the real work of artists by promoting interactions and nurturing collaborations. It also created a general culture amenable to the arts, one in which an excess of definitions coalesced that supported bohemian values of self-sacrifice and the primacy of the aesthetic (in opposition to crass yuppie materialism).

Within the neighborhood, culture for profit may mean that an object of cultural production is sold on the market, like a painting, or it may mean that cultural objects or activities are used to sell something else, as in advertising. These dimensions may be simultaneously present—a local art fair may be designed to sell an artist's work, but at the same time, the fair may also be selling the idea of the neighborhood as a desirable place to live. Even activities like poetry readings that seem to have very limited economic potential still contribute to the creative ambiance of the neighborhood, and in so doing they increase its attractiveness for both cosmopolitan residents and aesthetically oriented enterprises in design and new technology. In either case, the practical activity of local artists generates value, even if someone else often ends up pocketing the profits.

In both the fine arts and more popular media like music and film, the cultural products that make their way into the cultural marketplace—what we actually see, what gets written about in the *New York Times* or even the *Chicago Reader*—represent success stories, and are only the tip of the iceberg in the process of cultural production. The existence of a vast cultural marketplace reflects an extensive selection process. For every cultural object that enters such rare air, an unknown number of actual or potential objects do not. But when we view the production of culture as a social process, rather than as a case of genius revealing itself, we can come to understand that these failures are a key part of the social condition that allows some to succeed. A dense community of young artists will necessarily contain only a handful who are destined for real success (measured by the standard indicators of media recognition and big dollars). When a large amount of cultural work becomes concentrated in a particular place, the job of gatekeepers responsible for discerning potentially marketable products is made

Table 7.2 Wicker Park and the Production of Culture, 1989–2002: Selected Events.

9/9/1989	The first ever "Around the Coyote" (ATC) Art Festival in Wicker Park is held to increase the exposure of West Side artists; local businesses and artists' lofts serve as gallery spaces.
11/4/1991	New Crime Productions, founded by John Cusack and Steve Pink, opens Wicker Park's Chopin Theater on Division Street with <i>Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas</i> ; features Jeremy Piven, future star of the ABC television series <i>Cupid</i> .
6/8/1993	After seven years on the rock margins, Wicker Park band Urge Overkill makes its major label debut with <i>Saturation</i> , released by Geffen Records.
6/24/1993	Liz Parr's debut album, <i>Exile in Guyville</i> , is released on Matador; goes on to be named "Album of the Year" by numerous media sources, including <i>The Village Voice</i> and <i>Spin</i> .
1/22/1994	Filmmaker Rose Troche's debut, <i>Go Fish</i> , a 16 mm romantic comedy set in the lesbian community of Wicker Park, premieres at the Sundance Film Festival and becomes the first of the features there to gain a distributor. Made for \$15,000, it grosses \$2.5 million, while also winning the 1994 Berlin International Film Festival Award for Best Feature Film.
9/16/1994	Liz Phair appears on the cover of <i>Rolling Stone</i> , as part of its "Women in Rock" issue.
10/25/1994	The band Veruca Salt, a veteran of early performances at Phyllis' Musical Inn and other neighborhood venues, releases its debut album, <i>American Thighs</i> , on Geffen, spawning the radio and MTV hit single "Seether."
2/20/1995	Top-selling Chicago rock band The Smashing Pumpkins play the first of "four shows of the intimate kind" (announcement) at Wicker Park's Double Door, trying out material from their upcoming album <i>Mellon Collie and the Infinite Sadness</i> .
9/18/1997	Legendary rock idols The Rolling Stones play a top-secret show at Wicker Park's intimate performance venue the Double Door.
9/26/1997	The feature film <i>Soul Food</i> , directed by Wicker Park resident George Tillman Jr. is released to critical acclaim and financial success, inspiring a series on the cable network Showtime. Tillman goes on to direct the major studio release <i>Men of Honor</i> (2000) and to produce the smash hit <i>Barbershop</i> (2002).
3/31/2000	Under the rubric of New Crime Productions (now based in LA), the feature film <i>High Fidelity</i> is released. Pink takes co-writing and producing credits, and Cusack stars. Several scenes are shot in Wicker Park locations, including the Double Door. Domestic gross exceeds \$27 million.
7/15/2001	MTV begins shooting its reality TV series <i>The Real World</i> , using the Wicker Park loft at 1534 W. North Avenue as its principal location.
9/7/2002	The Dzine Wall Project opens at the Chicago Museum of Contemporary Art, showcasing the work of longtime Wicker Park graffiti and performance artist Dzine.

risks they take are largely on behalf of corporate profitability. Other creative fields are similar in this regard.

Moreover, within the local milieu, compensations abound beyond the intrinsic satisfaction of the work. The starving artist, if successful

at negotiating the status games of the neo-bohemian milieu, is compensated by an active social life and various perks of prestige that we can presume elude ordinary poor people. As Mizruchi indicates, bohemia constitutes a tolerated lifestyle in which parents, friends, and potential lovers may forgive light pockets and shabby apartments since they come in the service of a higher calling that, as an added bonus, has the potential to suddenly generate extravagant wealth.

Wicker Park as a Training Ground

Becker acknowledges the existence of naive artists, not exposed to mainstream conventions of art production, and folk artists who use conventions that are of a different and mostly unvalorized sort.²⁹ These more "organic" forms of cultural expression can influence commodified culture, but most of the culture that produces capitalist profit does not emanate from these sources. Some of the work of naive and folk artists may make its way into the cultural conversation informing the more mainstream artistic media, although as it does it will surely be transformed by the transaction.³⁰ Most commodified culture is the product of people who think of themselves as serious culture workers in an established medium, and many of these people have formal training. Neo-bohemia concentrates these individuals. But it does not only contain creative human capital. The social experiences of the neo-bohemia, the "conversation" in which individuals have ongoing exposure to processes of cultural production by fellow practitioners, refines and enhances creative capital.

Most Chicago artists are well educated, often with formal training in their chosen field. Many participants in the local scene throughout the past decade are or were students at Chicago's School of the Art Institute or Columbia College,³¹ which in 2000 combined to enroll more than 11,000 students in the South Loop area alone, with high rates of projected growth.³² Formal arts education exposes apprentices to both technical training and an intensive regimen of art history and appreciation.³³ Other aspirants gain this knowledge through autodidactic efforts and informal dialogue. The neighborhood allows easy exposure to and discussion of a wide range of arts, contemporary and historical. Even creative aspirants who direct their efforts toward

The stoking of creative impulses within the neighborhood also flows from less explicit sources. Diversity and concomitant vitality are factors of production in their own right that help us to understand the ongoing association of urban districts with artistic activity. Benjamin provocatively examined the relationship between the observations of the urban stroller and creative dispositions, resolved in the figure of the *flâneur*.³⁷ Central to the *flâneur* is the diversity of the city street; the *flâneur* encountered not only the dandy on his walks, but also the raggicker.³⁸ In the city, social heterogeneity contributes to what Georg Simmel calls "a mental predominance through the intensification of consciousness,"³⁹ and this intensification of mental life underlies modernist innovation.

The pedestrian on the sidewalk remains a key figure in understanding the magical nature of urban life, juxtaposed to "the virgin sidewalks" of suburbia; it is pedestrian life that both Jane Jacobs⁴⁰ and Richard Sennett⁴¹ write about so compellingly in their respective meditations on Greenwich Village. In Wicker Park, artists continue to speak to the importance of diverse sidewalk life. One describes it as "the difference between having a culture and not having a culture. Culture is you're walking down the street and you see a poster, and you read it, it looks interesting to you, and you go to see it." Adds another, "I like the beat of the city. The pace. There are so many things happening in the city on any given thirty seconds that you can add to a story, and you can either use those—they could be some kind of symbol, or hey, maybe they'll just be there. . . . I believe you can paint a scene just with these little glimpses that a person might see as they're standing on a corner waiting for a cab."

Such sentiments are direct descendants of the impressionist street scene, or Baudelaire's urban pastoral.

Exposure

Wicker Park artists with whom I spoke often indicated that although career upside is more limited in Chicago compared to New York or Los Angeles, it is much easier to get started there. Shappy graduated with a degree in theater from Eastern Michigan University in 1991 and came immediately to Chicago and Wicker Park. He recalls:

producing for low-caliber mass-culture outlets are likely to be well versed in the more canonical arts.

Sid Feldman speaks of the high levels of commitment that locals exhibited *vis-à-vis* their medium as the community took shape: "You had people who were very serious about what they were doing. . . . At the time, all the artists could talk at length about their medium, about its history." Populated by many such individuals, the bohemian milieu is thus a site for ongoing informal and eclectic training in artistic conventions. Alan Gugel, who received a fine arts degree at a major midwestern university, indicates that for him Chicago was a logical next step in his art education: "I came to Chicago to be involved in discussion and debate about art and society and what all this stuff is. So I came to the city because that's where it's at. That's where the discussion is, that's where it's going on." Cafés and bars like Urbus Orbis and the Rainbo Club provided the staging grounds for this sort of ongoing intellectual collaboration.

Harvey Molotch points out that "culture workers are typically each interdisciplinary and spark one another's energies across genres. The great majority of artists are active in more than one art."³⁴ Leaving aside normative judgments of cultural value, we can note that in fact new bohemia is characterized by the intersection of participants oriented to cultural forms that are obscure and unlikely to be valorized by the market under any circumstances (e.g. performance poetry) and to those that are intended to find a mass audience (e.g. popular music or film). Bernard Gendron has extensively documented the intersections between popular music and the avant-garde, from Montmartre cabarets like the Chat Noir to East Village dance halls like the Mudd Club.³⁵ One colorful example involves famous denizens of New York's 1980s bohemian scene; Madonna was a stalwart of the East Village club scene and temporary paramour of bohemian icon Jean-Michel Basquiat before becoming one of the best-selling pop musicians of all time.³⁶ In Wicker Park, Feldman devoured the works of Camus and Genet even as he was strategizing to sell screenplays for lowbrow caper comedies to Hollywood.

The cross-fertilization of comparatively obscure cultural pursuits in the fine arts with the more popular forms of the mass media is one way that

bohemia acts as a generative field useful to cultural-industry interests.

I knew a lot of people that had already moved to Chicago and told me it was really easy to start your own shows and stuff—which it was. I couldn't believe how easy it was for us to get a space. With all the creative people . . . it was very easy to collaborate, to come up with scripts. I remember we were writing and producing our own material like the minute I got into town. I went to all the open mikes, tried to do some comedy, I slammed [competed in a poetry competition] in '91 or '92, I think, when I first moved here.

Along with his collaborators, Shappy almost immediately mounted a sketch comedy show called "Every Speck of Dust that Falls to Earth Really Does Make the Whole Planet Heavier," staged in the upstairs of Urbus Orbis before it converted into a futon outlet. Over the years he developed a substantial local and national following for his poetry and comedy, hosting comedic "Shappenings" at venues like the Note and the Empty Bottle, and traveling with the heavily sponsored summer music festival Lollapooza as part of the poetry tent. In 2001, after many years honing his manic persona, he moved to New York.

Steve Pink, whose New Crime Theater Company opened the Chopin Theater in Wicker Park with a production of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, moved to Los Angeles in 1994. This veteran of small Chicago theater now works developing film and television projects, co-writing and co-producing the major studio releases *Grosse Pointe Blank* (1997) and *High Fidelity* (2000), both starring Pink's Evanston High School classmate John Cusack. According to Pink, despite the enormous number of writers and performers that concentrate around LA's film and television industries, the scene there is comparatively atomized, undermined perhaps by the intense competition for film and television dollars:

There is culture [in LA], but there is no interaction, there's no interconnectedness, there's no people being expressive. When we were doing theater [in Chicago], everyone came and saw our shows, and liked them or criticized them, and then we saw everybody's shows, and everyone knew what we were doing. I'd see people from 20 theater companies every week, you know, you don't see

that [in LA]. In LA, "the Industry" is film and television. . . . That's what people do. On a much higher kind of financial and class level, that's all happening. I don't go to the parties. They bore me. 'Cause it's not interesting. You know what I mean, its about making films and making money and being successful and making deals, so it's a lot different. . . . The difference is in LA everyone thinks you're doing it for the money, even if you're not, it doesn't matter . . . because the money is involved. So it kinda sucks. There's a kinda dirty sordid aspect to it, which is: you're doing it because you want to make money, you want to be successful. You're not doing it because you want to express something specific. If you even say you want to express something specific, and you say it with such pure idealism, that it doesn't really occur to you that you'll make money doing it, then people look at you like you're insane, and you sound insane.

The lower stakes in Chicago make it a better spot for the development of new talent that can then, like Pink, relocate, and for the trying out of more innovative products. Chicago theater is a staging ground for New York as well as LA, with theatrical hits like *The Producers*, *The Sweet Smell of Success*, and Brian Dennehy's turn as Willie Loman in *Death of a Salesman* all first running in Chicago, working out their kinks away from the big-money pressure cooker of Broadway. Stephen Kinzer reports in the *New York Times*:

Robert Brustein, artistic director of the American Repertory Theater in Cambridge, Mass., said Chicago had become "the city that's of primary interest to theater people in New York. It's a big city, funding channels are extremely generous, and there's a nice electricity there that vibrates into culture. . . . Chicago does something that New York isn't doing much anymore, which is taking chances on new plays. There's so much financial pressure on New York theaters these days that they feel unable to take those chances."⁴²

Though Pink now lives full time in Los Angeles, he retains ties to Wicker Park and to Chicago. He successfully lobbied to have *High*

a long history of ambivalence toward the LA effect on creativity by the artists and writers who have worked there, and this too is registered in cultural products, from Nathaniel West's novel *The Day of the Locust* (1933) to the Coen brothers' film *Barton Fink* (1991).

There is no one way that place contributes to the process of cultural production. Sites of cultural production as disparate in character as Wicker Park and Hollywood are united by networks of exchange in a multi-site division of cultural labor. Throughout the 1990s, Wicker Park evinced properties that encouraged an influx of individuals working in creative media, and its reputation helped to link these aspirants to relevant industries based in cities like New York and Los Angeles, as well as closer to home in Chicago's Loop.

Filling the Room

Though the cultural knowledge and technical skills that abound among Wicker Park artists only rarely lead to their individual market success, the artists have beneficial effects on the local art market as a whole. Individuals who have invested time and energy into mastering complex cultural conventions become exceptional consumers of culture. They are positioned to get in early on other cultural innovations, to value and reward new artistic efforts before a wider audience does this. Indeed, participants pride themselves on their ability to do so, and the constitution of bohemia involves a commitment by members to being ahead of the game, on the cutting edge. This local selection process raises the visibility of some artists, making the work easier for more formal cultural gatekeepers on the lookout for potentially marketable cultural objects. Other consumers, who are also attracted to some notion of the cutting edge, use the consumption practices of artists as a model as well, and thus the number of participants in such a scene swells.

Thus, for most of the cultural offerings in the neighborhood and nearby, including musical acts, poetry readings, and art openings, a substantial portion of the audience will be artists themselves, although not necessarily artists who work in the same medium. As Pink indicated above, a collective bargain is maintained, essentially that "I'll go to your shows if you come to mine." Indeed, William Bullion, a founder of

Fidelity filmed in Chicago, despite the fact that the Nick Hornby novel on which it is based was set in London.⁴³ The film tracks the romantic mishaps of Rob (Cusack), a hip, disaffected slacker and owner of a secondhand record store called *Vintage Vinyl*. The store in the film is in the heart of Wicker Park, where much of the shooting took place. Says Pink, "Rob's record store was on Milwaukee Avenue, across the street from Burger King, across the street from Salvation Army, because that's where alternative records stores are, and that's where alternative culture exists. It existed for us. We needed him to walk those streets." Indeed, the actual alternative record store Reckless Records is only a hop, skip, and a jump away from *Vintage Vinyl*'s fictional location. The climactic scene of the film is set a few blocks away on Milwaukee, at the real-life *Double Door*, where Rob hosts a release party for a recording by a band of local skateboarders that he produced. The character's personal growth is signaled by his move from being a cultural curator to a culture producer, drawing on local resources.

Pink continues to extol the virtues of Chicago as a generative milieu for cultural production, noting that the city offers him more in the way of inspiration as a writer:

It's better in Chicago, because you read the paper and talk to people and you're exposed to things all the time. So much better in every single way. You can see a hundred thousand people a day in Chicago if you went downtown. In California, you don't really see them; you just see their cars. You're not exposed to things happening. You're isolated. That's the difference. In some sense, really all I'm saying is it's more fun to write in Chicago because I'm more inspired.

To be sure, many people, including Pink, do write for a living in Los Angeles. In addition to the thousands of hopeful or actual film and television writers, Los Angeles is also a seedbed for one of the most distinctive literary traditions in U.S. history, noir, exemplified in the work of James M. Cain, Raymond Chandler, and, more recently, James Ellroy. In *City of Quartz*,⁴⁴ Mike Davis offers an excellent analysis of

noir as a distinctive LA art form. But as Davis also points out, there is

Sliced Bread Productions, tagged the e-mail announcement of a 2001 play that he directed with the plaintive reminder "I go to your shows." Art openings, musical performances, and theatrical productions fill the social calendars of local artists (Figure 7.2). Particularly strong new cultural offerings will generate local buzz among the creative community, another factor influencing the eventual selection process by formal industry gatekeepers.

Even when not spending money, artists contribute to local strategies designed to turn cultural production into profit. Paul Klein, the owner of a successful gallery in River West, estimates that at an opening, only 10 percent of those who attend actually have the potential to purchase a work on display. But it is important to "fill the room" he says; if attendance is slack, it "looks like there's not enough interest in the work." Artists are likely fillers, projecting an appropriate look and demeanor for such events gleaned through iterated participation. They decorate the room, and are available to discuss the work with potential buyers in an apparently knowledgeable way, conveying enthusiasm for

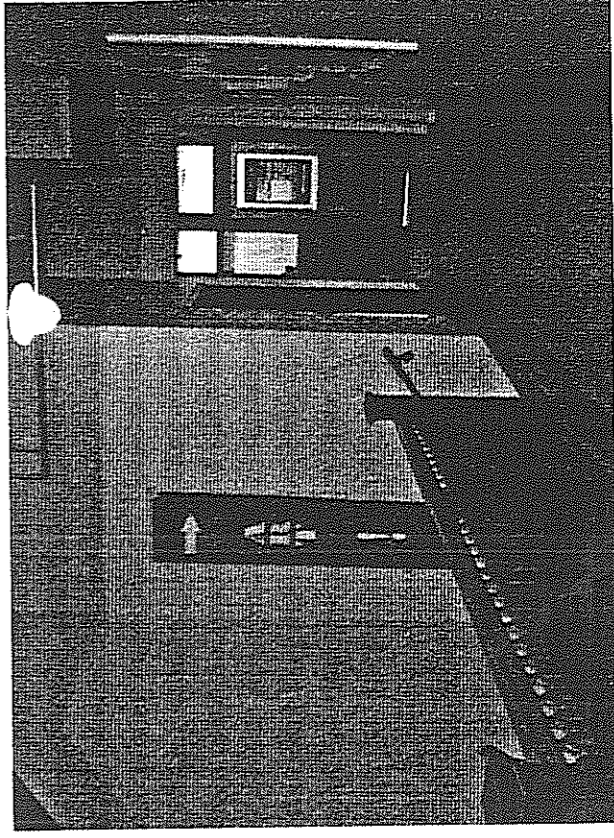


Figure 7.2 Flat Iron Interior. Photo by author.

her "cuteness" could be a selling point: "I'm cute enough that you can photograph me, you can dress me up, and I'll do it, I'll smile and dance around."⁵⁴ She may have misrecognized the appropriate pose for an ambitious artist in the "alternative" musical genre popular in the 1990s. Despite *Rolling Stone's* cover declaration that "a rock & roll star is born," her sophomore effort *Whipsmart* never cracked the Billboard top 100, selling in the solid but unspectacular range of about 250,000 copies.

Further, even many of her supporters were disenchanted by its more commercial tone. However, her third album, *whitochocolatespaceegg*, dealing with adult themes of marriage and parenthood, was better received by critics. Meanwhile, she augmented her income with modeling, appearing on a lower Manhattan billboard for Calvin Klein,⁵⁵ and by contributing songs to various popular films (*13 Going on 30*, *How to Deal*, *She's All That*, *Chasing Amy*) and television shows, including MTV's *The Real World: Chicago*. With the song "Shitloads of Money" she responded to critics of her material girl program, arguing that while "most of her friends" espoused conventional bohemian antipathy toward material rewards, this stance concealed a secret longing for success, including, well, shitloads of money.

Critics were especially rough on her 2003 release, the eponymous *Liz Phair*, in which she enlisted the help of the production team The Matrix, best known for their work with bubblegum punk purveyor Avril Lavigne. In this case, the consensus seemed to be that Phair had substituted a highly packaged, faux subcultural style for her rawer and therefore authentic earlier efforts. In 2004, I hit San Francisco's legendary Fillmore Theater to watch Phair headline the "Chicks with Attitudes" tour (also featuring veteran Swedish performers The Cardigans and the teenaged chanteuse Katy Rose). Clad in apparel appropriate to her latest bout of reinvention, if not her age, Phair had shed the awkwardness on stage that characterized her Wicker Park-era outings. Her dancing was energetic and self-assured, and years of voice work since her debut had immensely strengthened her vocal delivery. Still, despite her efforts to court the teen pop audience, the crowd in the all-ages show was heavily populated by patrons who appeared to be, like Liz and me, in their thirties or beyond. Nor did she neglect those in attendance who were attached to her earlier efforts;

development led to fine distinctions made on length of residence, in which local artists already living in the neighborhood (for whatever length of time) would catalogue the comparative inadequacy of newcomers. Among the complaints lodged against the increasing numbers of young people that formed a second and third wave of bohemian aspirants was that they were more interested in making the scene than they were in making art. Feldman suggests that there was a qualitative difference between the artists of the late 1980s and early 1990s, many of whom graduated to successful careers, and the next generation: "All these people that were around here were very committed to their art, and very good at it, and some of that's changed. A lot of people started moving in from the suburbs and saying, 'Yeah, I'm an artist! Wooh!' And they're not so committed. They're not so educated about what they're doing." Jimmy Garbe expresses a similar sentiment: "It [used to be] a different breed of artist. They were, to me, a lot more serious about their art. They're like lifers and really, really dedicated, compared to what I see now. Anybody who picks up a brush or a guitar labels themselves a musician or an artist, and to me I don't think everybody's putting their heart and soul into it. I think it's become as much of a hobby as a career move or passion."

Thus the paradox of urban hipsters seeking to occupy the cutting edge, expressed by one San Francisco-based musician I spoke to: "They want to be out in front, but not so far that no one can see them." For many in the neighborhood, the explosion of media popularity and the arrival of next-wave artists ratified what they had already suspected, that they were onto something special. Some used the neighborhood as a springboard to fame and material success, but many others were disappointed to find that they were simply priced out of their lofts. Still, even if they are destined to go uncompensated, these individuals have played their part in forging the Wicker Park milieu of innovation. The value of cultural commodities is the result of a social production process, but the profits generated by this activity tend to concentrate in a tiny number of hands. In Wicker Park, a large number of aspirants not only are alienated from the profits, but must scramble to subsidize their own exploitation.

indeed, virtually the entirety of *Guyville* was included in her set. And it was the songs from her breakout debut that routinely elicited the most enthusiastic response from the audience, including the two teenage girls standing near me on the floor who sang along word for word with "Fuck and Run" and "Flower."

Prior to her success, Phair was already heavily invested in the neighborhood's internal status hierarchy. She confessed in later interviews, "It was important to me to be hanging out with the coolest artists," some of whom she was linked with romantically. But Phair was not herself highly placed in that hierarchy (as Billings' "artsut" characterization indicates), demonstrating the limitations of the local status system as a predictor of future success. And even the massive critical success of *Guyville* did not lead to a universal reevaluation on the part of locals. Her parting with the neighborhood was not without acrimony: "There's a lot of suspicion and bitterness when someone does make it," Phair told *Billboard* in 1993. "The standoffishness of the indie scene just screams insecurity to me."

Local Status Distinctions

As Phair indicates, the artistic milieu is characterized by insecurity, along with associated petty jealousies and cliques. Tensions were exacerbated in Wicker Park as the art scene attracted more attention and some participants achieved fame. However, even prior to this the milieu was not egalitarian, despite one artist's claim: "There were no stars then, just a bunch of dumb artists hanging out." Some in the neighborhood were the "coolest artists" before anyone got famous, and these were not necessarily the ones who got famous. The local scene, like other urban bohémias, provides a setting in which issues of self-understanding and notions about what "being an artist is" are worked out, usually far in advance of what Tom Wolfe calls the "consummation" of material success.⁵⁶ Local status is easier to come by than meaningful market rewards, but it is still earned in a competitive field, in which individuals are ranked in a hierarchical system of distinction.

The competition for local prestige accelerated as the increased visibility of Wicker Park's arts scene in the local and national press brought with it new aspirants clamoring for participation. This

8 MAKING THE SCENE

In a real dark night of the soul,
it's always three o'clock in the morning,
day after day.

— F. Scott Fitzgerald, "The Crack-Up," 1945

In his pioneering 1970s book *The Tourist*, Dean McCannell writes, "The industrial epoch has biased sociology in several ways. Our research is concentrated on work, not leisure, and on the working class, not the middle class."¹ A perception of what constitutes "real" work, formed during the industrial period, persists stubbornly among social scientists, privileging blue-collar manual labor as the proper focus of serious study. But leisure activities and middle-class consumption also imply processes of work and social production. With the hollowing out of the old industrial core, service provision becomes a major source of urban employment. The educated professionals who constitute the elite sectors of the postindustrial economy demand a distinctive amenity mix in the city, raising the importance of what Zukin calls the "symbolic economy."² In Chicago, culture and entertainment are now core

enterprises, in terms of both exportable cultural products and local entertainment scenes.³ But the requirements for such production remain poorly understood.

The "industry" jobs in the bars and restaurants of the West Side's neo-bohemia differ from the bulk of the work performed in food and beverage retail. The uniformed employees at fast-food restaurants manufacture practically identical hamburgers as if on an assembly line, following formally rational procedures to crank out standardized Big Macs.⁴ Writes Zukin, "In contrast to the depiction of the labor process as flexible, self-propelling, and intellectually demanding, many service industries rely on extreme standardization of labor, multiple levels of managerial authority, and rote performance."⁵ In these jobs, principles of Fordist production persist, although absent the rising wages and job security that characterize the Fordist social contract of capitalism's "golden age." As Katherine Newman shows, this kind of labor increasingly becomes the primary source of (legitimate) employment opportunity available for those inner-city populations whose life chances have been almost decimated by the flight of traditional manufacturing jobs from the city.⁶

Conversely, managers and owners in Wicker Park's trendy bars, restaurants, and nightclubs do not provide a routinized script for their employees to follow. As in many other post-Fordist workplaces, the individual creativity of employees is a thing to exploit, not to suppress.⁷ In Wicker Park, uniforms are a rarity, and where they exist they are juxtaposed with the worker's striking individual characteristics. Instead, the workplace norms of appearance usually require that workers display a honed neo-bohemian fashion sense—at their own expense—in order to improve the overall ambiance of hipness. In addition to their aesthetic contributions, such workers are also expected to put their personalities on display, with their mastery of nocturnal compartment serving as a blueprint of cool for scene consumers.⁸ Employers purchase the aesthetic predilections of young artists, nurtured in the local subculture.

Arlie Hochschild notes that the service industry demands emotional work, and she documents the way in which flight attendants, expected to produce smiles that aren't just painted on, experience alienation

resistance now contributes to the ready acceptance by educated intellectuals of manual-labor jobs in the post-Fordist entertainment industry. The manual labor of service industry work in Wicker Park is very different from that found on the manufacturing and construction job sites that eventually employ Willis' lads. Though labor in the bars and restaurants of the West Side is often physically grueling, it also requires varying degrees of performative competence, that is, the mastery of hip social codes. The anti-intellectual ethos engendered among Willis' lads does not serve these labor requirements well, but the countercorporate culture of neo-bohemia does. Neo-bohemia nurtures both the aesthetic competence and the subjective dispositions required by these jobs.

So unlike Willis' account, this is not a story of social-class reproduction. Taken on their face, these jobs appear to represent downward class movement, but this is also not an entirely satisfying interpretation. Participants would certainly resist it, and the contingent and partial nature of their service employment makes it hard to locate in a conventional class framework. Typically, service sector jobs are considered to be temporary stops on the way to something else—few artists take them with the idea that they will last more than a few years, and the premium on youth in the bar scene discourages extended terms of employment in any event. Nonetheless, many of the service workers/artists that I encountered were in their mid- to late twenties or early thirties—that is, well into adulthood. There can be little doubt that, for some, the self-designation of artist amounts mostly to a self-legitimization strategy through which the children of the middle class can experience servile labor as something other than downward social mobility. Moreover, many serious young artists discover over time that the demands of service employment and its associated lifestyle are less compatible with their artistic interests than they initially thought. Since the odds are stacked against any given artistic career taking off financially, the question of what these jobs are a stop on the way to begins to loom large.

An art degree nearing a decade old and a résumé of bartender and wait-staff jobs are not likely to entice a wide range of professional employers. Nor is the laboring habitus engendered through years of service work compatible with the many occupations whose norms of

from their own emotions.⁹ Service workers in Wicker Park also contribute emotion work; additionally, artists are likely to incorporate highly aesthetic self-presentation into their persona, along with the argot and demeanor of the urban hipster. This self-presentation satisfies the expectations of young professional patrons, who may also have read *On the Road* in college.

In his study of Chicago Blues clubs, David Grazian dissects the construction of a nocturnal self: "That is, a special kind of presentation of self associated with consuming urban nightlife."¹⁰ Construction of this persona draws on a range of competences, such as fashionability, that Grazian refers to as "nocturnal capital." It goes without saying that some possess more of this sort of competence than others, and the bohemian milieu is a setting in which a cool demeanor and hip fashion sense are nurtured. Moreover, the neighborhood is a place where these competences are convertible into economic value, value often captured by players other than the artists themselves. Thus, aesthetic self-work on the part of young service workers "makes the scene" in Wicker Park and may be highly valued by discerning consumers. Entrepreneurs strategize to take advantage of these attributes, going out of their way to hire individuals whose exotic and funky personae elevate them to the status of attractions, or "bar stars."

How Middle-Class Kids Get Working-Class Jobs

But why do young artists accept work that is physically demanding and possibly demeaning, making a mockery of their often superior education and middle-class pedigrees? To recast Paul Willis' question slightly,¹¹ why do middle-class young people take working-class jobs, all the while defining the situation such that it is not experienced as downward social mobility? In Willis' study of working-class youth in 1970s Manchester, England, he argues that the counter-school subculture of the tough kids is rehearsal for a life of manual labor, its participants learning to identify with their brawn rather than their brains. The irony is that a strategy of "resistance" ends up contributing to the reproduction of their own economic marginality. The contemporary bohemia likewise involves ostensible resistance to the terms of bureaucratized, "corporate" labor-force participation. Ironically, such

dress and comportment—and working hours—differ substantially. Like other manual-labor jobs, service work takes its toll on young bodies, and the damage is compounded by the high incidence of substance abuse in the industry. As Krystal Ashe, a local bartender and writer, observes, "It's easy to get sucked in, and I've seen a lot of people lose their looks, quit college."

Artists take service sector jobs on the premise that these jobs will support their "real" work as cultural producers. Says Krystal, "I'm not bartending because I can't get another job or because I'm an alcoholic and I need to be around drugs or anything like that. I make it work for me. I can spend time writing something if I want." After all, work schedules are typically less than full time, often as little as twenty hours a week, with significant flexibility to rearrange shifts from week to week. For the most part, it is nighttime work, seemingly leaving days free. But as Amy Teri, a former Borderline bartender, notes, "You get your days off, but you get home at five in the morning and you sleep all day."

Young people in the service industry typically find that it encroaches on their lives to an extent disproportionate to formal work hours. Nocturnal dispositions and embeddedness in a thick network made up of other local artists/service workers produce social pressures to spend an inordinate amount of personal time in the same sort of bars as those where they toil, pressures that many service workers are unable to resist. The labor of bar work, along with the associated party life, proves extremely draining, and thus may be incompatible with the diligent pursuit of other interests. Amy Teri was still employed at Borderline when she told me:

I think it happens with a lot of people, they get stuck in the hustlebustle of this job, and they quit doing the things that they were inspired to do, such as their artwork. They're caught up in the bullshit and they're too tired to explore their outlets any more. . . . This job can be very distracting if you're trying to do it for a living. . . . I think it has a huge impact on people evolving. I think people really get stuck.

She added, "If I'm still here in a year, kill me."

Because personal style is a high priority, young artists also value these jobs for the freedom that they provide to cultivate one's "own look" and cultural tastes. In Wicker Park, many artistic aspirants are more successful producing themselves as a work of art than they are at producing art itself, and the bar/restaurant scene valorizes these efforts. Says Amy Teri, "I guess that the good thing is that you can you listen to your own music, and you don't have to wear a uniform." Katie Baker, a Borderline bartender with aspirations as a clothing designer, says, "I usually dress up [at work]. I definitely use it [the job], a lot of the time, to wear my clothing and use it as my own little advertising nook. . . . I can wear what I want. I can listen to my music. I can be myself." Such sentiments highlight the differences that neighborhood service workers experience in their jobs from more Disneyfied service employment. This expanded "freedom" generally suits neighborhood employers, who incorporate the tastes of employees into their venues' aesthetic.

Broadly speaking, working as a waiter or a bartender is not an occupation traditionally conferring much prestige.¹² The sociospatial field of neo-bohemia has its own status norms, however, and artists as service workers have an outside amount of local prestige, especially the workers in the better regarded establishments. These jobs put their occupants on stage in a seemingly glamorous world, and their ability to provide favors such as expedited service and the occasional free drink make them sought-after friends. In a study of fashion models and new media workers, Gina Neff, Elizabeth Wissinger, and Sharon Zukin argue that these cultural industries are marked by "cool" jobs, 'autonomous' workers, and fluid organizational structures—at a cost of job instability, foreshortened careers, and winner-take-all rewards.¹³ Cool jobs generate local prestige. The reward structure of bar and restaurant work is more circumscribed than those of Neff's targeted occupations, but the imagination of "coolness" and "autonomy" clearly applies to service workers' understanding of their occupations' status appeal. The costs of job instability and foreshortened careers are likewise the salient trade-off for a cool bar job.

become rote. Bartenders are constantly on their feet, and during rush periods, which might on a Friday or Saturday night last for several hours, they are in almost constant motion. Since the demand can be literally relentless during crowded periods, the variance in profit becomes entirely a function of the bartender's speed and efficiency in dispensing drinks. Whatever other contributions an artist may bring to the scene, the owners of these establishments will not tolerate a bartender who either cannot or will not keep up the pace during these grueling periods.

For all the differences between service sector labor and industrial manufacturing, the basic requirement that employees' labor generate profit over their wages still applies. Studying factory workers, Burawoy poses the question: "How are workers persuaded to participate in the pursuit of profit?"¹⁴ Likewise, we might ask how management gets service workers in Wicker Park to work as hard as they do satisfying the demands of patrons, in the process creating the fundamental conditions of a bar's profitability. Burawoy writes of the efforts by employers to secure diligent labor, "Obviously one way—but generally not a very efficient one—is by continuous application of coercion, that is, by firing those who do not achieve a given quota. Coercion, of course, always lies at the back of any employment relationship, but the erection of a game provides the conditions in which the organization of active cooperation and consent prevails."¹⁵

Employers in Wicker Park certainly have recourse to coercive tactics; firing of service employees is common. But as we have seen, owners and managers (often the same people), prefer to employ other strategies.

The willingness of service employees to really sell out, delivering exceptional efforts in the face of extreme demands, is not a function of the low base pay they receive, which industry workers indicate is a negligible part of their total compensation. Nor does it spring from their exceptional loyalty to the entrepreneurs who employ them; despite the communitarian efforts of employers like Landise, service workers around the neighborhood most often express antipathy toward their bosses. Loyalty toward other employees appears to provide a stronger incentive. The limited space behind a bar generally means that no more

Playing the Game

When reduced to the basic tasks required, the activities of preparing and serving drinks or waiting on tables are highly repetitive and not particularly demanding on the intellectual capacities of service workers. At the same time, these jobs are physically strenuous, especially on high-volume nights. Aside from traditionally low pay, it is the relatively low demands on abstract reasoning capacities and high demands on physical labor that have led these jobs to be regarded as *déclassé* and held in low social regard. This is complicated in the case of artists as service workers in the hip bars of the West Side. But though artists distinguish themselves with their aesthetic contributions, this does not absolve them from the ordinary, unspectacular obligations that go with the job. As Krystal Ashe notes, "Bars generally hire [people] because of their looks. They will hire people because they look good that don't know how to do their job. [But] once you get in the door you start working, and nobody is going to keep you if you can't make drinks."

Making drinks is not complicated. Although my copy of *The Mr. Boston Official Bartender's Guide* (the venerable gold standard of bar books) lists several hundred drink recipes, bartenders in real work situations rarely encounter more than a few staple orders, many of which, like a gin and tonic, have names that are self-explanatory. Patrons who attempt to order complicated mixed drinks with puerile names like Sex on the Beach or a Screaming Orgasm are automatically typed by bartenders as hopeless amateurs and suburbanites, and at bars like the Borderline, these requests are summarily refused. "This is a drinking bar," says Amy Teri. "This is beer and hard liquor. I won't make those drinks." Though bartenders in Wicker Park experience themselves as actively constituting the establishment's aesthetic, they do not see their creative contributions as residing in the ability to mix terrific Bloody Marys.

The challenge of bar and restaurant work is not in amassing an extensive repertoire of drink-making skills, but rather in being able to respond quickly to the demands of the customers, and to make rapid-fire decisions about what must be prioritized at a given moment among a number of necessary tasks. This comes with experience, accomplished

once the simple tasks of locating the right bottle or the right tin-

than three bartenders can be working at any one time, for example, and should one fail to keep up the pace, this is likely to create more work for the others and engender resentment. Under heavy assault from demanding patrons, a foxhole mentality no doubt develops. But these concerns are dwarfed by the motivation inherent in the real source of compensation for bartenders and servers: customer tips.

Tips serve a function similar to the piece rates paid to Burawoy's factory workers, as a variable source of income, the pursuit of which gets constructed as a "game" by employees. Though this may appear to not be a management strategy at all, but rather a discretionary reward supplied by customers themselves, in fact owners forgo some potential income and cede a certain level of workplace control so that workers can strive to maximize tips, in the process both increasing workers' personal income and allowing them to play an absorbing game.

The ability to generate substantial tipped income is enhanced by the willingness of bar owners to endure a "shrink," that is, a certain number of drinks given away, mostly to other local service workers and neighborhood hipsters. For many establishments, the arrangement is explicit. Matt Gans, who managed West Side nightclubs like the Funky Buddha Lounge and Wicker Park's Big Wig as well as the restaurant Mirai, told me, "You set up guidelines. Like 'Here's your bottle of shit vodka. You can make as many lemon drops [for free] as you want.' You have to allow them to be the star, to be the bartender." Brent Puls says that the shrink at the Note was expected to amount to "about 10 percent of the ring." "Everyone always rang everything up even if they comped something. There was a certain amount of trust involved. You'd always comp other bartenders from the neighborhood."

At Borderline, this arrangement is implicit, Raul indicates: "The owners know it. They don't want to know it, but they know it."

Such activity "juices the tips" for the server, as local norms require that a free drink be met with an exceptional gratuity, and can in fact be viewed as a cost-effective way for bar owners to improve employee compensation. The reward for the business is further realized in the ability to attract patrons whose mastery of social codes of hipness improves the bar's overall image. Given the markup on drinks, and the fact that a drink given need not imply a drink that would otherwise

have been sold, the net cost to the business turns out to be a relatively negligible investment in labor relations and human décor. In enacting this strategy, the owners rely on the discretionary judgment of their employees, which in turn endows servers with a sense of control over the work environment (in contrast with the rigidity of routinized service provision). Still, there are limits to the amount that owners are willing to invest in this outcome, as servers are aware. Says Raul, "You can't give the bar away. The only way they're going to be able to tell is by looking at the register at the end of the night to see how off the register is. If your ring last week was very high and then this week you had a lot of people but the ring was low, you gave the fucking bar away. Then they look at your tip jar, and they see that thing, and they know you gave the bar away. [Then] they start watching you closely."

Soft strategies of control allow the server to actively make decisions that translate into production of the bar's ethos. However, if owners perceive that the employee's strategies have become misaligned with the business' goals (extracting surplus value), then control will become more rigid, and if the employee is unable to realign that strategy, he or she gets fired.

The pursuit of tips is a game that servers play, governing a host of strategies of comportment and conferring status as well as income. Within the structure of the work environment, the game enhances intensity of effort, just as Burawoy writes of industrial workers striving to "make out" (meet piece quotas). "The rewards of making out are defined in terms of factors immediately related to the labor process—reduction of fatigue, passing time, relieving boredom, and so on."¹⁶ In the course of a given shift, the game of maximizing tip income serves primarily to foster the sense among workers of being engaged, strategic actors as opposed to just drink-dispensing automatons. Game playing, as Csikszentmihalyi observes, is a social activity especially conducive to producing "flow," in which even mundane, repetitive activities can come to be experienced as highly absorbing.¹⁷ In this way, the grind and multiple indignities of service provision are made bearable.

Bar workers in Wicker Park strategize inventively to optimize tipped income, a fact that confounds the claims of "just being oneself" through dress and demeanor. Tip pursuit leads employees to tailor their personal income, a fact that confounds the claims of "just being oneself" through dress and demeanor. Tip pursuit leads employees to tailor their personal

it quite as entertaining." Most of the women working in the local bar scene settle on a strategy in which they try to appear distinctive, without being unduly provocative. Says Amy Teri, "I think when you dress more provocatively, then the women are pissed, and so they don't tip you, and/or the guys are hitting on you, and you're rejecting them, and then they're pissed off about it."

Women in the bar industry must endure exposure to harassment routinely. They find themselves in a tricky situation, since flirting and sexy dress can be effective ploys in the tip-maximizing game but can also lead inebriated male patrons to misrecognize salient boundaries. Says Katie Baker, "Sometimes it definitely borders on harassment. I get a lot of people that grab, people will lean over the bar and touch. I'm like, 'Why are you touching me? You don't know who I am.' I'm tattooed, and people think that's free rein to clutch on my arm and yank it like a chicken bone. . . . For me, I dress up every day, and I'm pretty much a skirt girl. Sometimes that can make it worse, definitely."

At least Katie has the bar as a buffer. Cocktail servers, who work amid the crowds delivering drinks, are almost always women, and they are the most vulnerable to the bad behavior of customers. Amy Teri "worked the floor" before being shifted to the comparative safety behind the bar. She recalls, "Being on the floor sucks royally. You have no protection around you, with guys who want to touch and grab you." The game of tip optimizing encourages bartenders and wait staff to be attentive to the mundane cues of the service situation. Cocktail servers who work the floor must be aware of where previous drink orders will be drawing low, so that they can replenish the table before the customer takes it upon himself to go to the bar and thus tip the bartender directly. As much as possible, servers will attempt to remember a patron's previous drink order, and may even attempt the gambit of preemptively pouring a "fresh one" before an order is even placed. Moreover, the effective server learns to read the crowd. Says Brett Puls, "You gotta know who needs schmoozing and who doesn't. If you got somebody who's trying to show off to his girlfriend or something, you gotta hook him up, make sure he's getting good drinks. Make 'em all fancy."

Bartenders make it a point to keep careful track of who is tipping well and who isn't, rewarding those customers who are appropriately

aesthetic in accordance with the nocturnal norms of fashion and comportment. Even where this is consistent with an employee's stylistic preferences, it nevertheless transforms self-expression into instrumental action. Krystal Ashe shows how freedom to construct one's own aesthetic amounts to the ability to be strategic in playing the tip game:

I've never worked at anyplace that required me to wear a uniform. . . . I think there's such a great freedom in what you can wear. It's really funny, I was describing to my friend last night, "I'm getting ready for work, I have to wear my tall shoes." She asked why, I said, "I'm working with this tall bartender, and if I'm short nobody's going to come to me, everybody's going to go to her, and she will make all the money." It's weird. You put that much thought into it. I know the reason that I make more money than other people is because I am the only girl working, or on other nights, the only blonde working. I stick out more. If I wear a hat, people come to me because I am the only one wearing a hat. It's just what people see when they walk in the door. They seem to go to whoever's most different. . . . I try to dress the way my crowds want me to dress. I have a really young clientele. Some people would say, "Why are you dressing like that if you're 33?" I don't think I look 33.

Though Krystal began with noting the "great freedom" in what she could wear, she immediately shifted to cataloguing the ways that dress strategies were geared to instrumental concerns, concerns that mirror those of bar owners wishing to sell a distinctive ambiance. Her comments also alert us to the fact that co-workers, while usually friends, can also be construed as the "opponents" in the tip-optimizing game.

Again and again, informants' sense of "being themselves" in the work environment is complicated by instrumental concerns and social dilemmas. Especially for women, flirting and provocative dress can be a means to enhance their tip potential, but it also can invite attention from male patrons that is unwelcome, while turning off some other patrons. Krystal notes, "A lot of women in the industry make jokes like 'This is my "paying the rent" shirt.' I don't tend to wear low-cut shirts because I serve just as many female customers who wouldn't find

grateful, and, more important, punishing those who aren't. Shaming is one popular technique. Katie Baker told me, "Sometimes if I have the right confidence and the right amount of time, I'll stand there and stare at them. I finally got the look down. I look out of the corner of my eye—put that dollar down.' If I make the right eye contact with them, they will go back into their pocket and pull the money out and put it back onto the bar."

Tactics are often far less subtle, and Amy Teri claims that she will occasionally yell at deadbeat customers. Especially when the bar is busy, bartenders have considerable discretion to withhold service from certain patrons. Says Katie, "Tipping is necessary. It is. I will tell people if they're being cheap. I will not serve people if they're not tipping. I will tell other bartenders [not to serve them], too. If multiple rounds have gone by, and [the customer] hasn't left me anything, I'm not going to waste my time on [him or her]. I have other people who will give me their money, and I will go to them, priority. I'm there to make money. I'm there to make more than \$5.50 an hour. That's what I'm there to do."

Amy likewise shows little forbearance to patrons who fail to reward her efforts. "Quite frankly, if you come in here and you don't tip me, you're not getting waited on. I will full-on tell you, 'Money talks, and bullshit walks, and if you don't have money in your hand, you can leave and I don't care.' This is how I make a living, and everybody knows this. We're not in China. TIPS: To Insure Proper Service."

As Amy's comment indicates, patrons with any nocturnal savvy should understand how the game is played and hold up their end. As far as she is concerned, if they fail to do so, they have earned shabby treatment, and aren't the kind of patrons the bar wants anyway. Quite possibly she is right. Though owners would be unlikely to actively encourage behavior that leads patrons to take their money elsewhere, the fact remains that the reputation of the place relies on a crowd that is for the most part well versed in bar rules. This sort of patron knows to tip well (none better than other service workers). In any event, while most bartenders I spoke with confirmed that they sometimes employ these aggressive tactics, none reported ever being reprimanded by their employers for doing so.

Thus, withholding as a mode of informal social control in Wicker Park bars goes on with the tacit approval of bar owners and managers, so long as the bartender keeps the ring at standard levels. Allowing the bartender this shallow social authority helps maintain "soft" control over the workforce. Bartenders control the terms of their work environment to a necessarily limited and contingent extent, in the process playing a game whose score is registered in the proliferation of dollars in the tip jar. The reward to owners comes from intensified labor. Says Raul, "It's easy to forget your job, because it's such a fun place to be at." But the absorption, if not the fun, that comes with playing the game blocks out such distractions, reminding bartenders that, as Raul explains, "you have to do your job. The minute the bartenders are not doing their job is the minute they're not making money. And the bartenders are the workhorses, they're the front lines."

Why Bartenders Make Less Money than They Think

The game of tip optimization thus helps to absorb service workers intensely in their menial tasks. Does it also provide a reasonable income? Bartenders that I spoke with report that in fact a person can make a pretty good buck in the Wicker Park bars. Says Krystal Ashe, "Artists and writers work in this industry because where else can you work for four hours and make \$200, \$300, even \$400? If you're a waitress [as opposed to bartender] you can make \$100 or \$200 in four hours. That's why artists flock to the service industry. You can support yourself on twenty hours a week." These estimates, which vary from job to job and from night to night, indicate that the compensation for service labor, coming almost entirely from tips, far exceeds the averages expressed in official service sector statistics.¹⁸ Other service workers in the neighborhood estimate incomes that fall within the broad parameters Krystal stakes out. The money looks even better given that most industry workers interviewed own up to the fact that "Uncle Sam" is generally cut out of most of it—that is, service workers neglect to report their incomes in full for tax purposes. As one bartender put it, "I can tell you what I make in a year. I probably make between—I've been fluctuating back and forth between bars—I can make \$40,000 a

establishments where they are well acquainted with the staff. On these forays, they are the recipients of "professional courtesy" in the form of free drinks. However, this does not serve to defray the expense of inordinate participation in the entertainment economy in any meaningful way, since free drinks are met with tips that generally amount to more than the price of the comped item. Service workers tip better than ordinary people do—much better. In Wicker Park, service workers frequent the bars, and tip income is inflated by the extraordinary gratuities they leave. Since the norms for participants in the industry require that this largess be returned in kind, that portion of their income contributed by other people in the industry is devoted to a ritual exchange of money, the true meaning of which is to be found in the performance of status among participants.

The tipping behavior of local service workers thus turns out to be a circular process of mostly symbolic exchange. Says Krystal, "I work service industry nights, so I get people tipping \$10, \$20 a round. [But] believe me, I'm in the same boat. If I go out, I have to tip \$20 a round. If you're going to get one drink, and you're a bartender who just works a so-so bar, you're probably going to tip me \$2 to \$3. If you are a bartender who works at a really great place, you're probably going to tip \$5 to \$10 for one drink. That's how it works."

As Krystal indicates, both tipping and the attendant "comps" are a central part of the performance of local status. Bartenders at elite spots, the ones that are most popular and respected, expect and receive a larger amount of preferential treatment. But they are also supposed to "represent" by laying out outside gratuities. The perks of "free drinks," given as a courtesy to those known to work within a given circuit of bars, turn out not to dramatically alleviate the financial burdens of overactive party lives. According to Matt Gans, service industry workers from the elite spots "pay for less. You'll get five drinks for free. But the money you would have paid for drinks, you'd better tip. You may get drinks, but you're tipping forty bucks a round."

The more a worker is known and numbered among the elite in the neighborhood nightlife, the greater the onus to give and receive monster tips. Thus, when it is an interaction between status equals, the exchange resembles the wagering patterns that Geertz describes in

year bartending, working four days a week. Only half of that is pretty much declared, that's nice."

Tips therefore allow servers to earn incomes far in excess of their cost to the employer, which typically amounts to minimum wage and some comped drinks. However, extended observation and interviews indicate that workers in these jobs are imperfect accountants when it comes to estimating their own incomes. The uncertainty about actual income is apparent in the quotation above, in which the informant shifts quickly from a promise to reveal what she does make to what she probably makes and finally to what she can make. Income estimates typically are distorted by the perhaps willful tendency to ignore the substantial contingency involved in tipped remuneration. The rates of tipping can vary enormously depending on the time of evening the person is working, making some shifts much more profitable than others. Different days of the week also generate wide variations in income. Part of the service job involves setting up for later or cleaning up at the end of a shift, tasks that do not earn tips. Moreover, many service workers do not have fixed schedules, and may get to work plum hours only sporadically. Especially for establishments that have outdoor seating, there is significant seasonal fluctuation in labor requirements. Vacations are unpaid. Even those who are permanently assigned desirable nights like Friday and Saturday typically must also turn in shifts on much less remunerative nights.

But despite this variation, service workers often speak as if their best hours are actually their average hours.¹⁹ This could lead one to extrapolate weekly and annual incomes that are much higher than those actually realized by employees in Wicker Park's bar and restaurant industries. Further, workers in the industry often achieve their peak in earning potential fairly quickly, after which earnings plateau or even decline. Thus, even where bartenders do earn more money than entry-level professionals, in five years the bartender's income will be roughly the same, but the professional's will have improved substantially.

Moreover, earnings from tips are further complicated by the norms governing the behavior of bartenders and other servers when they themselves go out. Service workers in Wicker Park are inveterate consumers of the local nightlife, on off-nights, frequenting the Balinese cockfight: "So far as money is concerned, the explicitly expressed attitude towards it is that it is a secondary matter. . . . [The wagers] mainly look at the monetary aspects of the cockfight as self-balancing, a matter of just moving money around, circulating among a fairly well-defined group of serious cockfighters."²⁰ Like the cockfight, then, what the tipping game "talks most forcibly about is status relationships."²¹

Amy Teri indicates that her tipping behavior, while always exorbitant by any reasonable standard, varied heavily depending on whether or not the person serving her also came into the Borderline when she was working and thus directly participated in the symbolic exchange that governs local tipping behavior. "I tip a lot to people who come into my bar. If they don't come into my bar, then I tip average. Two bucks, five bucks, ten bucks. If there is somebody that comes in all the time, I tip forty bucks." Amy acknowledges that this behavior has little rational justification: "I don't know why industry people tip each other. It's stupid. It's like a big pissing contest over who can tip the most. It's really stupid, and it's especially stupid when bartenders who work here tip the other bartenders who work here. It really is a big pissing contest."

Puls likewise notes the circularity of the tip game: "It's really funny, all the bartenders in the city make like two hundred and fifty bucks [a shift], but if they go out, they have to spend a hundred bucks on tips to the same bartenders. So it goes right back into the other bartenders' pockets. You know, there's all this circular motion, no money is made, just changing hands."

The norms of circulation that attach to these tips thus suggest that they should be significantly discounted, since a large amount of the excess will simply be returned into a more or less closed local economy of tip exchange. Those who give in to the social pressures to make the scene on off nights—and the overwhelming majority of service workers that I observed do so—thus find themselves spending their incomes (helpfully received in cash) as fast as they collect them. This is how so many local service workers can claim such impressive incomes (though not on their taxes) and yet still find themselves pinched at the end of the week for things like art supplies, groceries, or rent.

La Vie de Bar

We can see that for neo-bohemian service workers, leisure activity is patterned by their conditions of employment. Their identities both as artists and as workers in a service industry provide a vested interest in differentiating themselves from normal customers and particularly the young professionals they wait on. Unburdened by 9-to-5 jobs and usually working on Friday and Saturday night, employees in the bar and restaurant industry prefer to go out on weeknights, when they will be less infringed upon by regular people, who they refer to derogatorily as "amateurs." A circuit of destinations evolves, with different bars favored on Sunday through Thursday nights. These are called "industry nights," and they have a certain cachet that also attracts other patrons who pride themselves on being "in the know."

Service workers, frustrated by being on the wrong end of nighttime revelry, often find ways to go out on the nights that they work as well as on off nights. Shifts vary across different venues and types of service sector employment. Restaurant workers typically complete their duties by midnight or 1 a.m., with several members of the wait staff being "cut" even earlier, following the dinner rush. Different bars have different closing times approved by the city. Many are legally required to close at 2 a.m., while others are allowed to remain open until 4 a.m. Sunday through Friday, and 5 a.m. on Saturday. Bars with the later closing times become popular destinations for service workers who have completed shifts earlier at other venues. During the week, the Borderline, which is licensed as a 4 a.m. bar, will typically attract patronage from the staffs of local restaurants and bars that closed earlier. Betty's Blue Star, a Ukrainian Village corner bar on Ashland and Grand Avenues, is also popular with the workers in other Wicker Park bars, and 2 a.m. typically signals the beginning of a rush in which both ordinary patrons and employees of establishments that close earlier migrate in.

Though it is ordinary at many bars for the employees to drink while working, they generally do not get excessively inebriated on the job. But in the so-called after-hours bars they strive to "get their drunk on," feverishly making up for lost time. There are also a small number of clubs that flout the city's mandated closing time, particularly an

to special considerations. These considerations bring with them a heavy obligation to evince appropriate comportment—that is, in terms that are nebulously defined yet clearly recognized, to be cool. Since other service workers should be aware of the pressures that bartenders are under and of the hard work that they perform, they are expected to be able to order efficiently and display appropriate gratitude. Says Amy Teri:

It amazes when people that I know for a fact are in the industry can't even order a drink. Normally, there's etiquette of bartending, and people order their beers all together, and their drinks all together [efficiently]. But you get people who order however which way and say "um" between each sentence and have no idea what you're talking about, and you have to think, "You [the customer] are really dumb. What bar do you work at?" People who come in that are in the industry, if they don't have their money in their hand, they will get charged extra.

Failure to comply with expectations results in the loss of ordinary favors, known as "professional courtesy," and in loss of local regard. Even the places of employ lose status when their workers behave badly on their off nights, for failing to have properly acculturated them to the norms of the night.

Brent Puls, whom no one would accuse of being anything but a smooth operator, demonstrates the costs and benefits that go with participating in the off-hours party circuit:

When I go out to bars, I pretty much only go to places where I know people, and I'll drink for free. Because there's a network of people that know people. Especially being at the Note, the reason that you hooked up everybody at Pontiac [Bar] is because people at the Pontiac knew who you were, so of course. . . . You go out quite a bit in the industry. I keep telling myself not to. But it's kind of nice in the neighborhood, because any time I'm really bored I can get off my ass and go to the Note, without calling anybody or making plans with anybody and know there will be some people

establishment in the Clybourn corridor known as the "Cop Bar" because members of the city's law enforcement community patronize it heavily as they wind down from their own graveyard shifts. Loft and house parties planned for after hours are also popular with bar and restaurant employees. Advertised by word of mouth, these are more exclusive, allowing workers to avoid rubbing elbows with those that they may have served earlier in the evening. This is an extra advantage on Fridays and Saturdays, the nights that service workers consider bar patrons to be especially boorish and socially unattractive.

Anne appeared sheepish when asked how many nights a week she went out. "Three or four nights a week," she said, then amended, "I go out three." Given that she also worked until closing on Friday and Saturday nights, this signals an extremely grueling nocturnal regimen, one with obvious health consequences. Anne continued, "Now that I'm working [at Borderline], I'm going out more, I'm smoking more, I'm drinking more. It sucks you in, and it's hard to stay away from it all. It's like this big social thing. Everybody talks about everybody else. It's hard to stop socializing once you get into that sort of scene, the bar scene."

The desire to patronize local bars is abetted by the fact that working in the industry generates a network of relationships that extends beyond one's specific place of employment. Turnover is high, and Wicker Park bartenders and wait staff typically have many former co-workers now employed in other local venues. Gans, who managed the West Side establishments Big Wig and Mirai in Wicker Park and the Funky Buddha Lounge in neighboring River West, recalls, "When I was [in the industry] we went to every single club that was around. We'd bounce around. We have a friend named Harold, so we gotta see Harold. Wherever Harold was. Or Hugo is bartending, or Richie. You go where you're going to get in the door fast. Get in, get your drunk on. Returning favors. [You say] 'Here's where I work.' People come into your place, you go to theirs."

When going out, neighborhood workers in the bar and restaurant industry are under pressure to perform competently and separate themselves from the amateurs. Status in the local scene is registered

there I can talk to. But yeah, I probably go out three nights a week [in addition to the nights that he works]. And when you're out, you have to represent big time.

Some explicitly link the demands of going out to their job, involving the instrumental desire to maintain a high profile in the nocturnal community. When out socializing, bartenders and wait staff may encourage others to come to their establishment on nights when they are working, helping to maintain the popularity of their venue through this informal advertising, while hinting at the possibility of favor exchanges. Says Krystal Ashe, "It's part of the industry. You go out to promote your nights, and you go out because all of your friends want to go out." Here partying appears as an extension of work. As Neff notes of fashion models, another occupation in which an active nightlife is apparently *de rigueur*, "Networking means that playtime is no longer a release from worktime; it is a required supplement to worktime, and relies on constant self-promotion."²² Krystal perceives that this double duty increases her income potential, but she does not factor these informal ventures into her accounting of total weekly work hours, and she does not discount her weekly income by the substantial amounts that she spends spreading tips around while "promoting." The real winners are the bar owners, who benefit from Krystal's high-profile persona, whether she is behind the bar or improving the standard of the patronage.

That Dark Night of the Soul

The bars in Wicker Park are places where local artists and intellectuals engage in debates about art and ideas, debates that not surprisingly tend toward increasing incoherence as the evening progresses. These lofty exchanges compete with other priorities, such as the pursuit of sexual liaisons and other sensual pleasures. Such objectives do not differentiate the hip, arty set from the yuppie patronage that crowded the local bars as the 1990s wore on, though local service workers are unanimous in their view that scene insiders are better behaved. Nevertheless, artists are hardly immune from making decisions under the influence of drugs and alcohol that they later regret. Indeed, Liz

Phair comments ruefully on the emptiness of the neighborhood's sporadic sexual encounters in the song "Fuck and Run" from *Exile in Guyville*. Wicker Park hosts a nightly Bacchanalian festival, with important consequences for those who make it the scene of their labor. The opportunity to make money while inhabiting a superhip nighttime environment is a major attraction for the young artist/service worker, but it is also the source of serious occupational hazards.

The sexual charge of the bar scene, lubricated by alcohol and other intoxicants, generates both welcome and unwanted sexual attention for workers. Female employees in particular complain about grossly inappropriate behavior by aggressive male patrons. Male bartenders tend to be more tolerant, or even solicitous, of their flirtatious female customers. Brent indicates, "On the weekend sometimes I'd wear a nice shirt, so that maybe a hot girl would come up and hit on me. Which happened maybe 50 percent of the time. And also it would kind of juice the tips." In general, the opportunity to meet potential sexual partners is viewed by men in the industry as more of a perk than a drawback. Women also flirt while working, in part for instrumental tip considerations, sometimes just to pass the time. Says Amy:

Everybody flirts. As far as bartenders going home with people at the end of the night, at this bar not so much. At other bars, definitely yes. Some people don't even wait to leave the bar. The bathroom has been frequented. Not by me. I want to say that for the record: not by myself. But the owners, the bartenders, the staff of any kind. People who don't work here at all. The women's bathroom, have you ever been in there? It's not like the men's. The women have these steel dungeon doors, and it must turn everybody on because everybody has sex in those.

Sex is not the only illicit activity that takes place in the Borderline bathroom. Like many bars in the neighborhood, Borderline has a well-known reputation for drug use: "It's always been known as the Snort-a-Line," Katie Baker told me, referring to the heavy cocaine intake among customers. Before bartending, Raul worked security at Borderline, and he indicated that efforts to curtail drug use were fairly

rate was less than one-fifth of the population between 18 and 45.²³ Conversely, the bartenders and wait staff of both genders that I observed in Wicker Park typically consumed five or more drinks most nights of the week. They seldom acknowledge that this behavior might be a little bit problematic.

Food preparation workers, waiters, waitresses, and bartenders collectively have the highest rates of any occupational category for both current illicit drug use and heavy alcohol use, at 18.7 percent and 15 percent respectively. Rates among industry workers in Wicker Park appear much higher. At most local bars, blatantly open drinking on the job is tolerated by owners and managers so long as it does not clearly diminish performance—among the establishments that I observed most closely, only Mirai, owned by the unusually authoritarian Meia, was an exception. Indeed, drinking is often a standard part of the scene-making interaction with customers. Doing a shot of hard alcohol with a customer is an ordinary, accepted practice. Says Teri, "If somebody says, 'Let me buy you a shot, you will do a shot.' But as far as getting excessively wasted, no." Likewise, Puls indicates, "At the Note everybody drank on the job. Everybody would do shots with the customers."

It is clear that these workers have much higher than ordinary tolerance for alcohol, and it would take a lot for them to feel "excessively wasted." This becomes part of the status identity of industry workers, by which they distinguish themselves from ordinary patrons. Amateurs are those who behave sloppily when drinking or doing drugs, while industry professionals pride themselves on remaining competent even after heavy intake. Workers do not view their performance as impaired even after they have consumed amounts that would put their blood alcohol ratio well over the legal limit for, say, handling a motor vehicle. They imagine that others cannot even tell that they are drinking or drugging. Still, Katie Baker indicates that "there are a couple of employees who drink way too much. At work, it's really aggravating because you can see the effect. It slows them down. Their drawers are all screwed up, they get clumsy, they get in the way."

The norms of bohemia also contribute to the vulnerability of these workers to excessive drug and alcohol consumption, since substance abuse is less likely to be negatively sanctioned than in other milieus,

halfhearted: "There's a lot of coke floating around. It's ridiculous. You try to catch them, and it's like: 'Man put that shit away, go have fun.' But people have vices, man, that's it. You can't hate anybody for having vices. They're going to do what they're going to do. Once I walked in on a guy doing smack [heroin]. We threw him out. That's classless. It's a little too much of a procedure." On several occasions I also witnessed furtive, and sometimes not so furtive, drug taking in the bathrooms of the Borderline and other bars. On one occasion, I saw a couple of young males get caught by a Borderline doorman (not Raul) sharing hits from a vial of cocaine. The doorman asked for some, and then told them to wrap it up after his request was satisfied.

Working in the bar industry exposes employees to inordinate opportunities to take drugs. Working while high on marijuana is so common that it is taken for granted—almost everyone I spoke with acknowledged that they had co-workers who imbibed before a shift or even on breaks, and none felt that this was a major problem. Cocaine use was taken more seriously, but informants concurred that it was also fairly common, if not specifically in their place of employment, then certainly industrywide. Says Krystal Ashe, "Coke was out for so long, and then coke came back in. There are some bars in the city where the whole staff is going to be yacked up, and there's other bars in the city where the management goes on Ecstasy and GHB just to take it [deal with the pressure]." Amy Teri denied that there was a major drug problem with the Borderline staff: "I think everyone here is pretty clean and sober. Even here you're smoking a little pot or whatever, but other than that there are no major drug problems in this bar, which is a rarity. Other bars have major problems. I've worked at a few other bars, and cocaine is the number one enemy of the majority of bartenders."

In fact, it appears likely that alcohol is the number one enemy of the majority of bartenders, both in Wicker Park and nationwide. In Wicker Park, heavy alcohol intake among service workers is so common as to be taken for granted, though in the context of national data on adult alcohol consumption its eccentricity becomes clear. Data from the 1997-1998 National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) indicates that only about a third of adults ages 18-45 consumed five or more drinks in one day at least once in the previous year. The

at least if the user can maintain a certain level of performative competence while under the influence. The temptations to participate in these activities are compounded for artists who take jobs as service workers, and are thus surrounded by other revelers. Older, more experienced service workers indicate that young, green employees present the biggest problems. This appears to be because these workers have not learned to incorporate substance abuse into their habitus such that they can still be functional while working. Says Krystal, "Those are the people that get the most caught up quickly and make stupid moves. I'd rather hire a manager that was an alcoholic than someone that was new and didn't drink and didn't do any drugs because that person is going to be most susceptible probably."

Everyone has a story of some co-worker that became a casualty of the temptations that come with the scene. Raul explains:

I've seen people go downhill, get into dire straits, because they took it for more than a job; they let it get into their personal lives. They took it personally. You see people getting fucked up, you're going to get fucked up. Some people at work, while they're working they're drinking. Easily done, but it's an easy way to lose hold of yourself. It becomes a habit like anything else. It's all habits in there. It's all people's vices exercising themselves. People get rid of what they want to get rid of, emotionally, spiritually. Shoot their load off, get the fuck out, you know, drink and get fucked up, and forget who you are for another night. And working in a place like that can drain you. It makes you very depressed, and you pick up habits of your own. And sometimes you lose your cool and lose grip of who you are.

For most participants, bars and nightclubs are liminal spaces²⁴ where they can throw off ordinary inhibitions, often recklessly pursuing intoxication and sexual objects. However, this carnivalesque atmosphere poses challenges for those who make it the scene of their labor. In this context, boundaries are hard to maintain. Industry workers are on display in spectacular leisure-time apparel, grooving to music that they themselves may have selected, perhaps angling for sexual partners,

perhaps participating in the intake of drugs and alcohol. In these ways, their labor may bear a striking resemblance to play. But if this is the case, it is a game that can have exceptionally high stakes. It is what Geertz calls "deep play": "play in which the stakes are so high that it is, from a utilitarian standpoint, irrational to engage in it at all."²⁵

But people do play, despite the drawbacks of foreshortened careers, limited upward mobility, overexposure to drugs and alcohol, and, as time goes by, a general feeling of exhaustion and malaise. The attraction of the game comes from its apparent compatibility with the norms of the bohemian ethic: the exaltation of the sensual and the aesthetic, the resistance to "corporate" styles of labor, commitment to flexibility, and the desire to be in the scene, whatever the terms. It's a potent elixir, the gritty neo-bohemian glamour of the neighborhood nightlife, but one that can also produce a nasty hangover, as Raul reports:

The bar culture is the bar culture, you know. I've been pulled into the bar culture, and I mess with it, but it's a tough business to be in. It could be a little demanding at times, because when you don't want to talk to people, sometimes you have to. And it can drain you. Now I'm trying to get back to things I did with a passion. You can't really drink your life away, smoke your life away, and I'd forgotten about all my ambitions. I think a lot of people fall into that. It's like trying to go to sleep, and you can't go to sleep.

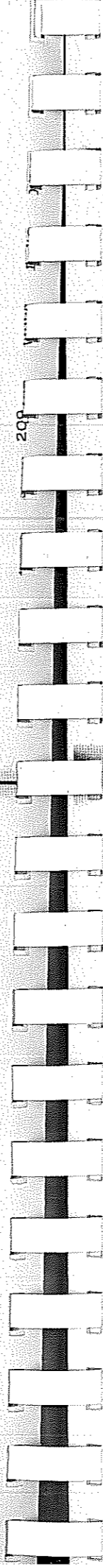
9 THE DIGITAL BOHEMIA

Making money is art, and working is art, and good business is the best art.

—Andy Warhol, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol*, 1975

New Media in the New Bohemia

The office windows on the sixth floor of the Northwest ("Coyote") Tower provide a panoramic view of the Wicker Park neighborhood and—in the distance, straight down Milwaukee Avenue—of the looming skyscrapers of the Loop. Periodically, one hears the rumbling of the El Train pulling into and out of the stop a block away, a still vital "retro" emblem of Chicago's place identity tethering the neighborhood and its various manifestations of hip commerce to the Loop's glistening fortresses of capital and, in the other direction, to O'Hare International Airport. Entering the 1990s, the Tower's offices lay largely dormant, but as the decade came to its close they housed numerous ventures in the neighborhood's proliferating media-design sector. It is a familiar paradox, a retro building housing the high-tech commerce that sprouted in Wicker Park at millennium's end (Figure 9.1).



10 THE BOHEMIAN ETHIC AND THE SPIRIT OF FLEXIBILITY

I had reservations about making art a business. But I got over it.

—Mary Boone, SoHo gallery owner, 1982

Bohemia has received considerable attention in recent years, in both scholarly works and entertainments directed at high- and middlebrow consumers, with major revivals of *La Bohème*,¹ the success of the Broadway musical *Rent*, an Academy Award nomination for Baz Luhrmann's film musical *Moulin Rouge*, and the release of smaller films including *Joe Gould's Secret* and *Beat*. This should not surprise us; as Wendy Griswold argues, revivals say as much about the contemporary period as they do the past.² Examining Wicker Park illuminates why fantasies of *la vie bohème* resonate with contemporary cosmopolitan audiences, if not with some mythical mass culture. This contemporary district in Chicago updates many of the thematic principles of classic bohemia; indeed, participants often make explicit recourse to past bohemian examples in their contemporary designs for living. Nor is the Wicker Park case eccentric; similar districts have become more frequent, more visible, and more important to understanding the culture and economy of contemporary cities around the United States.

Beyond even this, though, are changes in the contemporary economy broadly, with an enhanced emphasis on both individual creativity and the individualization of risk. Compared to a previous era, flexible capitalism demands greater adaptability from its workers, and even educated professionals must learn to live with contingency and vulnerability. In other words, the reality of their work lives pushes them closer to the lived experience of urban bohemia in key respects. Thus, while David Brooks argues that BoBos maintain bourgeois orientations to work, taking only their consumption cues from bohemians, in fact the contemporary resonance of bohemia penetrates more deeply than just a fashion statement. New economy professionals are not bohemians, but they are not "organization men" (or women) either, and in this period of neoliberal capitalism, it may be the bohemian ethic, not the Protestant ethic, that is best adapted to new realities.

Structural Nostalgia

Despite, or perhaps because of, its prominent place in the popular vernacular, bohemia remains a tricky concept to pin down, used in a wide range of loosely affiliated fashions. I have attempted to harness it by emphasizing bohemia's material, place-based attributes as well as its cultural connotations, and by anchoring my analysis in a specific case example. Still, while elaborating this project over a number of years, I have encountered periodic resistance to my application of even a modified concept of bohemia to Wicker Park. Principally, skeptics make recourse to the loaded concept of authenticity, essentially asserting that the facile efforts of contemporary Wicker Park artists do not warrant so distinguished a pedigree. A smaller cadre, usually drawn from a younger audience, argues in the other direction, claiming that today's hip urbanites are something brand new, having transcended the tired ethos of bohemian alienation. Both objections are profoundly value-laden, and arguing them is useful only up to a point. I have been at pains to demonstrate that there is sufficient continuity between Wicker Park and the traditions of the urban bohemia to make the term a useful conceptual (not normative) point of departure, even as I have affixed the prefix "neo" to highlight the important ways in which

contemporary bohemians are historically distinct from their predecessors.

lost bohemia. Since it recurs incessantly, bohemia dying a thousand deaths, it cannot be only the product of some objective change, like the closing of Urbus Orbis or the opening of Starbucks. Rather, bohemia is always already over because it always already falls short of its adherents' fantasies of social autonomy, expressed in the vaunted ideology of *art pour l'art*. From their very beginnings, bohemias and neo-bohemias are subject to external and internal pressures, pressures that differ in each historical period; thus the perpetual nostalgia for an imagined moment of genuine independence (and efficacious opposition). And, as Michael Herzfeld argues, "the static image of an unspoiled and irrecoverable past often plays an important part in present actions."⁵ The continuously revived image of an elusive Edenic moment—the "good old days" of bohemia—in this manner becomes itself part of the ongoing representations, and conflicts, within contemporary Wicker Park.

Bohemias old and new are nested communities, embedded in initially poor or working-class neighborhoods where the bohemian participants are a minority of the overall population. As subcultures they are defined in relation to an increasingly diffuse parent culture.⁶ Problems of coherence, membership, and authenticity are present virtually at the creation of these entities. These problems have only grown more intense in contemporary contexts; artistic subcultures animate the fantasy lives of young people now more than ever, and even urban professionals with college educations agitate for participation. This tendency increases the marketing advantages of new bohemian spaces in the city, while complicating boundary maintenance for committed scene makers.

But if more complicated now, the activities that constitute bohemia have nonetheless never stood apart from the broader forces of economy and society. The Parisian prototype cannot be understood without taking into account the structural upheavals of nineteenth-century modernity—the explosive growth of the metropolis, the ascendance of the bourgeoisie, the submission of artistic output to new market forces. The beats of the mid-twentieth century (to take another example) similarly elaborated their artistic and performative innovations in the context of postwar Fordism, with its unprecedented expansion of the middle class, the growth of the suburbs, and the correspondence of

Still, even if prepared to concede the efficacy of "bohemia" as a characterization of some recent period of Wicker Park's past, many will argue that this is all over now. In fact, by the time I began making the neighborhood rounds in the fall of 1993, it was already a commonsense assertion locally that the neighborhood's best days as a bohemian enclave were already over. In the time that I lived and/or worked in the neighborhood, a span of some eight years, numerous events were identified as signaling the new bohemia's ultimate demise: enhanced corporate sponsorship of "Around the Coyote," the closing of Urbus Orbis (or the Busy Bee, or the Hothouse, or Mad Bar, or whatever), the opening of Starbucks, the arrival of MTV. Obviously much has changed, and I myself experience almost unbearable bouts of nostalgia on return to the neighborhood streets. For all the new development, though, Wicker Park retains a good deal of lively and funky ambiance and much of the vaunted gritty feel of days past.

The sense of being always already over is an apparently structural feature of both classic bohemias and their contemporary heirs. As Ross Wetzsteon writes in his history of Greenwich Village:

For all the rhapsodizing about "happy days and happy nights," from its very birth, bohemia seemed to exist in the past. "Bohemia is dying," even its most ardent residents lamented; "the great days of bohemia are over." This sense of lost grandeur has existed in every generation—just as Floyd Dell said in the teens that "the Village isn't what it used to be," Murger's followers were saying in the 1850's that "Paris isn't what it used to be." "Whatever else bohemia may be," a Village magazine editorialized in 1917, "it is almost always yesterday."³

In Jonathan Larson's rock opera *Rent*, the *La Bohème* of the early 1990s East Village, the first-act climax features the lines: "Bohemia! Bohemia is a fantasy in your head. This is Calcutta, bohemia is dead."⁴ Likewise, anyone who has lived in Wicker Park for more than a few months feels entitled, and perhaps obligated, to insist that the neighborhood was much better in the old days.

What is the source of this structural nostalgia? It is not reducible to the life-course transition of participants—fusing that you, with

mass standardized production with a social ethic of mass consumption. Neo-bohemia, for all that it derives from the examples of bohemias past, is distinguished from them by its own structural contexts, today associated with globalization, neoliberalism, and the postindustrial metropolis. Bohemia has traditionally been considered marginal and subversive within the capitalist economy that nonetheless called it into being, a position that was probably always overstated. Today's bohemians have not necessarily abandoned that stance (despite Richard Florida's claims to the contrary), but as a practical matter Wicker Park's neo-bohemia enhances profit-generating strategies in a variety of new, and occasionally surprising, ways.

Wicker Park's neo-bohemia thus confounds traditional conceptions of urban subculture, which offer the alluring image of a counter-hegemonic resistance to capitalist domination.⁷ While proponents of this view typically concede that such subcultural innovations may be co-opted by capitalist interests in arenas like fashion and media (in the process robbing them of their subversive intent), this is presumed to happen after some more pristine moment.⁸ But this division does not capture the actual fluidity of the boundaries between the articulation of cultural innovation and strategies of accumulation. Rather than looking at artists as a resistant subculture, I became compelled to think of artists as useful labor, and to ask how their efforts are harnessed on behalf of interests that they often sincerely profess to despise.

The New Bohemia and Flexible Labor

As in past bohemias, contemporary participants in the Wicker Park scene insist upon their opposition to an imagined mainstream. When elaborating upon this objection, local artists specifically repudiate participation in a corporate workforce committed to conformity and the base pursuit of material security. Yet this imago of the mainstream is anachronistic, as the old promises of career and social security under the terms of the Fordist corporation and the welfare state have increasingly evaporated. As Vicki Smith notes, "Uncertainty and unpredictability, and to varying degrees personal risk, have diffused into a broad range of postindustrial workplaces, service and production alike. Tenuousness and uncertainty have become 'normal' facts of work and

employment across the occupational spectrum in the United States.⁹ In addition to requiring that workers acclimate themselves to greater flexibility, with volatile compensation and irregular work schedules, the flexible workplace makes increasing demands on the individual's creative capacity, even in mundane service sector jobs. Writes Ulrich Beck:

Never before has individual creativity been as important as it is today. . . . But never before have working people, irrespective of their talents and educational achievements, been as dependent and vulnerable as they are today, working in individualized situations without countervailing collective powers, and within flexible networks whose meaning and rules are impossible for most of them to fathom.¹⁰

Today, workers must be competent to the task demands of flexible production—able to demonstrate “individual creativity” to an unprecedented degree—and they must also be able to acclimate themselves to enormous amounts of uncertainty and risk.

The “ethical” dispositions nurtured in the bohemian milieu (but not confined there) may indeed have been incompatible with the highly routinized labor that prevailed in the Fordist city, the world of the assembly-line worker, or the other directed “organization man.” But *la vie bohème* has long been characterized by the insecurity that now infects broad swaths of the postindustrial economy, and we have seen that the bohemian ethic elevates tolerance of uncertainty to a virtue: “As an artist you know that you may not be secure for the rest of your life.” And the disposition to wear risk as a badge of bohemian honor is carried by neighborhood artists even into non-art employment.

Consistent with tradition, what lends this gesture its heroic aura is the conviction that one is consciously rejecting a more secure, conventional, and stultifying life. Recall Andrei, an Internet designer/punk musician, indicating, “I could have gone out to look for a job somewhere else, but one of the reasons [that] I didn't is because I know it would probably be a tighter and more corporate culture, and I wouldn't have as much freedom to do things I want to do.” But the

at the center of a new mainstream, happily embracing the risk society, at least until something actually goes wrong. Wicker Park's technology sector presents a less rosy picture, one in which opportunity is more limited, compromised vision more common, and fantasies of spectacular wealth increasingly no more likely to materialize than are dreams of becoming the next Cobain or Basquiat. Moreover, whether or not these creative workers are willing to acknowledge it, they are haunted by the ghosts of bohemia past as they deploy their efforts in a new urban milieu. The traditions of dead generations are what make it possible to understand oneself as resisting the stultification and injustice of corporate capitalism while working twelve-hour days making recruitment ads for Nike.

Winners and Losers

Throughout the 1990s and beyond, Wicker Park concentrated a large number of talented, ambitious individuals, and no doubt an even larger number of dabblers and hangers-on. To varying degrees, these participants could imagine that they would eventually join the ranks of the cultural elect, winning fame and fortune for their creative output. From our current vantage point, we can easily slot them into the appropriate categories: those who succeeded in the arts were talented and ambitious, and those that didn't were dabblers and hangers-on. After all, reading backward creates the illusion of career inevitability, but reading forward is a far trickier matter. The truth is that even with its dramatic expansion, the cultural marketplace provides a limited amount of opportunity, not nearly enough to accommodate even the very serious and very talented. Moreover, hardly anyone believes that this market is an efficient or transparent mechanism for sifting out the worthiest individuals and products, any more than there is local consensus on who is worthy and who is not.

It is only to be expected that most associate bohemian scenes with those whose creative profile is the highest, so that Jack Kerouac exemplifies the beats and Kurt Cobain exemplifies grunge. But these individuals are necessarily a tiny minority of participants, and over-credited in retrospect with making the scene. To focus only on the successful artists obscures the fact that even the poseurs and dilettantes

corporate culture to which he refers is derived less from current reality than from the inherited image of the “organization man” that still animates bohemian ideology despite its increasing inadequacy. Rejecting such labor in the 2000s is a very different gesture from what it was in the 1950s, since to a large extent it doesn't exist anymore. In this broader context, the bohemian disposition that makes “living on the edge” a supreme virtue is in fact quite adaptive to labor realities.

Against the antagonism presumed by Daniel Bell in *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*, what I am suggesting is an “elective affinity” between the dispositions enshrined in bohemian ideology and the requirements of select new capitalist enterprises. By maintaining that the “techno-economic realm” of society remains essentially bureaucratic and hierarchical,¹¹ Bell failed to adequately anticipate the consequences of the postindustrial society whose arrival he was forecasting in the early 1970s.¹² He therefore did not see that rejecting “sober bourgeois capitalism” or routinized mass production does not necessarily mean rejecting capitalist labor altogether. The production of art has always entailed frenzied jags of activity. Indeed, both Balzac and Murger hastened their deaths through the copious ingestion of caffeine, fueling all-night writing sessions. Is this so different from software designers, similarly stoked by what is today the signature beverage of yuppie overachievers, crunching to make deadline? Is Kerouac's roll of butcher paper, used to compose *On the Road*, so different from the continuous scroll of the word-processing program that I am using now? Past styles of capitalism may not have been able to harness the excesses of creative energy in bohemia beyond the limited cultural marketplace, but contemporary capitalism, accentuating design, fashion, and flexibility, exploits these energies in myriad ways.

The education and diverse cultural competence of young artists further increases their usefulness in a changing urban economy. The traditional do-it-yourself ethos of bohemia fits in well with the entrepreneurial imperatives of neoliberal capitalism. Not surprisingly, enterprises eager to exploit these qualities gravitate to the neighborhood. It is this confluence that sits behind Richard Florida's imagined resolution of bohemian alienation. Though bohemians once patrolled

the margins of society, Florida insists that the creative class of today

play an important role, showing up at performances, gallery openings, and loft parties, and thus ensuring that there is a scene at all. In fact, self-absorbed local talents often free-ride on the efforts of the other locals who do the work of organizing shows and assembling congregations. As with Mabel Dodge or Sylvia Beach in bohemia's past, the hosts of the salon remain a core, if underappreciated, component of the collective enterprise, without which Marcel Duchamp or James Joyce might well have had nowhere to go.

The work that goes into maintaining the local scene benefits artists and also a variety of other economic interests. Culture industry gatekeepers follow the crowd of tuned-in consumers in the search for new talent. Though unpaid for their advance work, Wicker Park locals are useful as avatars of cool. Moreover, as has been stressed over and over, the cultural marketplace is no longer the only, or even the primary, way that the new bohemia intersects with the urban economy. The paucity of direct economic returns does not make the arts unimportant to the local economy; rather, this importance is complex and mediated.

As I've shown, participants typically bring with them unusually high levels of education, or human capital; as they interact within the neighborhood, they further increase their stocks of another sort of capital. Knowing how to dress, how to evince the appropriate demeanor, how to talk knowledgeably about various non-mainstream cultural offerings—these are skills honed in the local milieu, and are attributes that can be conceived of as subcultural capital, though only in specific contexts. What makes competence into capital is the opportunity to leverage it for social rewards. Under the right circumstances, subcultural capital can confer privileges of status and money. Artists have many more ways than in past periods to sell their dramatic personae and hip tastes in the contemporary city, for example in bars and nightclubs, or the media-design sector. Still, the greatest profits frequently accrue to players other than the artists themselves—property entrepreneurs, venue operators, or like Nike and MTV.

Antonio Negri argues that in the contemporary period of capitalist development, “work processes have shifted from the factory to society, thereby setting in motion a truly complex machine.”¹³ But while creative labor may resist the routinization of the factory floor, it still occurs in

actual places. The practical interactions in these Wicker Park venues shed light on how this “complex machine” operates in concrete locales. Art and the artist’s lifestyle are organizing principles, giving coherence to the local scene, but the new bohemia generates value in a wide variety of ways. Regardless of their talent, participants are seldom able to sustain themselves through pursuits like acting, performing music, writing poetry, or painting; nor do these pursuits in themselves generate much surplus value for others to extract. But even “leisure” activities in spaces like *Urbus Orbis* or *Phyllis’ Musical Inn* turn out to be much more; Wicker Park concentrates what we might call productive leisure.

An analogy can be drawn here between the arts in Wicker Park and the type of plot device that Alfred Hitchcock termed a “MacGuffin.”¹⁴ Essentially, a MacGuffin forms a pretext that sets into motion the real action of the plot. While of crucial importance to the characters, its importance to the story lies in its function as a catalyst rather than in its intrinsic value. The arts serve as a MacGuffin for postindustrial economic activities in Wicker Park, a pretext for particular patterns of congregation that then prove useful for other kinds of enterprise. The paltry returns for most artistic efforts are precisely what enable the incorporation of local artists into these other labor contexts. Indeed, if fields like theater, poetry, or the visual arts had a larger market and better-compensated participants, it would reduce the need and opportunity for artists to capitalize on their subcultural competence in the more commercially viable enterprises that have agglomerated in and around the neighborhood.

Place and Cultural Production

Even with the staggering rise of suburbs and edge cities as sites of residence and economic activity, cultural production still privileges the old center city as a generative milieu and site of fantasy brokering consumer desire, particularly for consumers in the coveted youth demographic extending to age thirty-five. In the 1990s, major trends of youth fashion—including grunge, hip hop, and heroin chic—were clearly sold as emerging organically from street culture (and each came with its own musical soundtracks and celebrity icons). The suburbs,

with their strip malls and “virgin sidewalks”¹⁵ generate no such ally-

the realization of local value, even if starving artists are priced out. Undoubtedly new sites, still unrecognized by the media, sit poised to assume the mantle of “cutting edge’s new capital,” and undoubtedly they will also relinquish the title quickly thereafter. But the theory of neo-bohemia is about much more than the life of a single neighborhood; it invites us to rethink in broad ways the interrelations of lived space, subjectivity, and instrumental labor in this contemporary period of globalized capitalism and flexible accumulation.

associations. A neighborhood like Wicker Park, put on the cultural map in the 1990s by rock ‘n’ roll culture and its associated street aesthetic, can be a “real world” model for constructing the image of “a hip downtown scene” that becomes pseudo-universalized as it enters the global swirl of commodified signifiers.

Making the argument for neo-bohemia as a key feature in new urban economies requires sensitivity to the embedded nature of all local space in larger processes. But these global processes are only the accumulated effects of diverse localities and networks of localities. By zeroing in on the neighborhood, using the most intimate and site-specific methodologies, this study restores materiality to an economy in which the older spatial anchors, particularly the factory, recede in explanatory power, at least for the postindustrial West. The study also tells us much about the process of identity formation among the “cosmopolitan” social subjects of the global city, with local identification turning out to play a larger role than is often suspected.

During the 1970s, the decade that brought us *Taxi Driver*, fiscal crises were undermining even basic service provision. Generally speaking, it was the suburbs that were believed to have the amenities most appealing to the middle and upper classes, from Galleria-style malls to the all-important good schools. But if *Taxi Driver* reflected a pervasive sense that the city had become a dangerous and disorderly warehouse of vice, by the 1990s the suburbs were under increasing attack for their own inadequacies.¹⁶ While artists have long dismissed the suburbs as sites of culture death and conformity, this view has now extended along with the bohemian ethic to affect ever-larger swaths of the populace. And the new amenity that the suburbs are said to be so sorely lacking is precisely the sort of lively, culturally diverse sidewalk life that Jacobs gleaned in Greenwich Village, America’s proto-bohemia.

For its part, Wicker Park may no longer appeal to those most keen to find the cutting edge, and they will have to look elsewhere. But pressures and contradictions within the structural field foreordained the scene’s instability; neo-bohemia is not a reified natural area but rather a mode of contingent and embedded spatial practices. Like Greenwich Village, the legacy of its bohemian moment still contributes

to ongoing representations of Wicker Park, patterns of enterpris-

AFTERWORD

SEPTEMBER 17, 2009

In 2007, the Chicago “eco-wellness” magazine *Conscious Choice* ran an article entitled “Shake-up in Neo-Bohemia” reporting a startling change in tenancy on the ground level of the Flat Iron Building, a core symbol of Wicker Park’s arts identity. The popular 2000s-era coffeehouse Filter had been evicted, to be replaced as the building’s anchor tenant by a local branch of Bank of America (Figure A1). The Flat Iron’s upstairs lofts remain dedicated to artist-tenants and galleries, as they were in the 1990s; still, substituting a multinational bank for an independently owned café certainly belied the commitment that building owner Bob Berger had long expressed to fostering offbeat businesses consistent with the neo-bohemian neighborhood vibe. Indeed, he had boasted about refusing Starbucks’ applications for tenancy during the 1990s, precisely to protect the viability of places like Filter.

On the other hand, Starbucks had at last penetrated the neighborhood in 2001—only a year after opening an outlet in Beijing’s Forbidden City,¹ and just on the heels of *The Real World: Chicago’s* wrap party—jousting with the Flat Iron’s funkier ensemble from an opposing prong