INTRODUCTION

Cultural Production in a Digital Age

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If you are like most contemporary American social scientists (in 2005), you are probably reading this volume of the *Annals* online, or you have downloaded it from a local network and printed this article from your personal computer. You would not have been able to find these pages in a digital library in 1995, or even in 2000, and so you would have traveled to the periodicals section of a university library to get them. If the journal was not there, you might have been able to borrow it from another institution, waiting days or weeks for it to arrive. The relatively slow pace of scholarly production means that this single delay would not likely have caused you much trouble. But when, upon receiving the text, you found citations to others that you needed for your research, and those articles were also unavailable in your library (or from its partners), then the problems began to mount. You adapted, learning to focus on journals stocked by your local institution rather than less accessible specialized literatures. Perhaps on occasion you left out relevant data because your deadline arrived before they did. Usually you just slowed down, and there is little reason

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to believe that scholarship suffered for it. Maybe the delays helped, giving you more time to research, reflect, and write.

But digital libraries and electronic communication networks can facilitate scholarly production. If, for example, you are interested in the theme of this volume, cultural production in a digital age, you can print these contributions; identify, link to, and download cited articles in other journals (and so on); search the network for academic, journalistic, and professional publications on similar themes; buy books (including texts you would never find in local bookstores); and assemble your own portable bibliography over the next few hours, all without leaving your seat. If your interest relates to a collaborative project, you can e-mail colleagues to keep them updated on your progress or provide direct links to useful articles (although you lose efficiency when you e-mail friends about unrelated matters in the process). When you begin writing and distributing your text via e-mail, colleagues and collaborators will use word processing software to insert edits, queries, and comments, returning the document to you electronically, and paving the way for an interactive intellectual exchange. The speed of communication facilitates collaboration in real time, but so does the standardization of formats, the ease of access to working files, the ability to record different iterations of the text, and the declining significance of distance made possible by digital networks.

We do not yet know whether technologies that reduce the barriers of time, space, and access help to advance social science or how they affect the outcome of intellectual work. But there is no question that digital technologies have changed the way scholars and academic institutions operate (Koku, Nazar, and Wellman 2001) and that the cultivation of novel research practices and the outcome of conflicts over the control, circulation, and application of advanced technologies in the university will shape the conditions of intellectual production. This volume of the *Annals* explores whether and how digital technologies and the actors who use and design them have altered cultural production more broadly, in fields ranging from journalism to gambling, social movements to marketing. We use an expansive concept of cultural production here since we are concerned with different kinds of symbolic, textual, and meaning-making activities. We include the news media, advertising, and emerging political cultures (particularly those generated by Web designers, net activists, and civic groups), as well as the traditional arts. The contributors work in different academic disciplines—sociology, anthropology, business management, and communications—and use a variety of theoretical and methodological approaches to assess recent changes in creative fields. But whether they analyze activists, media industries, or public policies, the articles in this volume cohere around a set of issues that are central to cultural producers, consumers, and citizens today. The authors disagree on some questions, such as whether, given the unequal access to advanced technologies (let alone more basic goods) within and among nations, it is appropriate to define the current period as a "digital age" (Norris 2001; Servon 2002; Zook 2005). Yet none use the concept to advance arguments for technological determinism. Rather, they share a guiding premise that social institutions, public policies, business organizations, and ordinary users adapt

the products of software designers, engineers, and network architects to collectively, albeit contentiously, shape the conditions of cultural production.

Social scientists who rely on the Internet and other computer networks to conduct research know from firsthand experience that the most fundamental effects of digitalization on cultural production involve the restructuring of time, space, and place in daily work processes. This is not the place to document the numerous ways that digital technologies alter the spatial organization and temporal sequencing of creative labor. Because these themes have featured so prominently in previous publications (see especially Castells 1996, 2001), we chose not to make them the focus of this volume. Yet we must note that digital networks and the infrastructure systems that support them allow cultural producers to instantaneously transmit enormous amounts of information—audio, video, text, graphics, databases, and combinations of them all—across the globe, or simply across town. Those on the receiving end can add to or edit the contents, taking advantage of standardized formats and shared software to become coproducers (even when the original authors or copyright owners do not want them to), or they can quickly publish or broadcast the information, as media companies do with breaking news stories.

Digital Production

We are particularly interested in what happens to cultural products when they are crafted and distributed through digital channels (so, too, are major media companies and governments). Historically, the most influential new communications technologies have reduced the price of entry into a cultural field, creating openings for actors and organizations who were previously unable to get their work into the public. Today, for example, artists can easily alter and repackage digitally recorded music and video, sampling tunes or assembling images into new work, occasionally with high commercial or aesthetic value (as in DJ Danger Mouse's *The Grey Album*). Technologies such as SoundScan, which digitally tracks music sales figures so that commercial music companies can purchase market data in real time, allow big labels that can afford the service to increase efficiency, reduce opportunities for competitors (especially smaller, independent labels), and consolidate control over the field (McCourt and Rothenbuhler 1997; Anand and Peterson 2000). News companies can repurpose "content" (a term that is replacing "journalism" in some newsrooms) across platforms, adapting a single digital file to suit a newspaper article, Internet publication, or teleprompter script. This is a significant transformation (as Klinenberg argues in his article here) since it changes the meaning of cultural products and, in turn, the status of professional journalistic labor. In some companies, for example, reporters who are highly skilled at multimedia production (for on-screen television appearances and newspaper or Internet writing) have become more valuable employees, and they often get prime assignments because of their flexibility. Individual users can participate in the design of open-source software. But social scientists still know little about how producers in different fields use digital files in their creative processes.

Consumers can also repackage music and video into transferable files, as anyone who followed the news coverage of file sharing through software like Napster knows (McCourt and Burkart 2003). When the contents of electronic files are protected by copyrights, and the owners or producers object to outside manipulation of the work, innovative practices of digital cultural production can land someone in prison or in debt (as Siva Vaidhyanathan explains here). How nations and corporations define, control, and regulate this kind of activity is one of the major cultural and economic questions of our time, and collective interest in the issue has brought previously arcane debates over intellectual property law into the realm of popular culture as well as Congress and the courts (Lessig 2004; Vaidhyanathan 2001, 2004).

The Political Economy of New Media

There are high stakes in these and other disputes over the use of digital systems in cultural industries, so it is important to explore the relationship between technological development and the political economy of contemporary media, marketing, and entertainment fields. In some fields, such as video gaming, edutainment (as Mizuko Ito shows here), and casino gambling, designers have used digital devices to dramatically enhance the experience of playing, resulting in increased popularity and soaring profits. The short-term benefits for users can be offset by long-term costs, particularly (as Natasha Schull illustrates in her article) for gamblers, whose absorbing interactions with machines typically result in personal financial loss. In advertising, entertainment and retail companies are collaborating to blend interactive shopping opportunities with television and other cultural programming, taking product placement to new levels by giving viewers a chance to click and purchase clothing, furniture, and other products displayed on screen. Marketing firms are also using digital technologies to assemble detailed databases about consumers at the individual and group levels and to target campaigns based on information gathered through their surveillance. Surprisingly (as Joseph Turow shows here), consumers are often willing to exchange personal information for specialized services and elite status with certain companies, as with airline frequent flier programs or grocery and drug store discount cards.

New communication technologies create both threats and opportunities for major media corporations. Digital cable, for example, provides consumers access to hundreds of television channels, undermining the dominant position of traditional networks; and digital recording devices allow viewers to bypass commercials, potentially reducing the value of advertising and thereby the profits of stations. But the markets tell another story. As their stock prices and ad revenues show, big networks have become more valuable to investors and advertisers because established brands command attention in fields crowded by small players. Major media companies exploit digital technologies to expand their presence into different domains (they call this "extending the brand"), asserting themselves (their products as well as their logos) online, in print, over the airwaves, and

through cable. Conglomerates have invested heavily in developing synergistic relationships between their various media holdings, integrating their production processes into "convergence" systems that yield content for different outlets, "cross-promoting" programs in different media, and establishing lines of vertical and horizontal integration in production and distribution (Klinenberg 2000). Digitization facilitates these processes (Boczkowski 2004).

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In addition to the protections from copyright law, recent regulatory changes driven by the proliferation of new technologies in the media field have facilitated the growth of large conglomerates. Operating with the explicit premise that digital outlets (especially the Internet and cable) give consumers more choices than ever, the Federal Communications Commission raised the proportion of the national market that television companies could reach, cut restrictions on cross-ownership (for print and broadcast) in local markets, and gave away approximately $70 billion of digital spectrum to major media companies without significant public debate (Aufderheide 1999; Baker 2002; McChesney 2004). The period in which digital media developed has been marked by consolidation and concentration of ownership, not openness. This is true not only in television and radio but also on the Internet. Although users have virtually unlimited options for viewing information, audience ratings show that in the United States the most popular online news sources are Web sites from the largest media companies, including CNN, MSNBC, CBS, and *The New York Times*. (Even these sites rely heavily on the same wire services and photo agencies, so their stories are often identical.) According to a recent survey by Jupiter Media Metrix, five sites account for 50 percent of user time online. Thirty years ago, media scholar Ben Bagdikian warned about the dangers of a "media monopoly" in the United States because roughly fifty corporations controlled the industry. Today, according to the seventh edition of his classic book, the U.S. market is dominated by five conglomerates (Bagdikian 2004).

Cultural Politics Online

Yet digital technologies and the Internet have also allowed new voices to enter the media, in journalism as well as entertainment. Blogging, for example, has become a popular and increasingly influential form of online cultural production—so much so that in 2004, presidential candidates and other public figures began publishing their own blogs to gain publicity and attention online. Most bloggers are independent actors, usually journalists, techies, professors, and young people with free time, who post their personal experiences or daily observations online. Some technology experts and cultural critics have gained cult followings for their daily postings, and a few journalists have gained large readerships (especially among other journalists) by posting links to news stories and commentary about political issues on their blogs. Occasionally bloggers force reporters and political officials to address an issue that they had initially neglected. Most famously, bloggers repeatedly called attention to Trent Lott's inflammatory remarks about race, ultimately turning the issue into a major news story and forcing Lott to resign as the Senate majority leader. With a few notable exceptions, however, bloggers have not added much primary reporting to the journalistic field. (This may change as blogging evolves. In the summer of 2004, for example, U.S. political parties gave some bloggers press passes for their national conventions.) They offer opinion and, in some cases, insightful analysis of the issues that concern them (the media, technology, select political issues), and the most serious bloggers have emerged as important watchdogs of media and technology companies. But blogging is not a substitute for journalism, and there are real hazards in treating them that way. According to Alex Jones (2004), director of Harvard's Shorenstein Center for the Press, Politics, and Public Policy, "There is already talk of bloggers who would consider publishing items for cash and commercial blogs that tout products. Blogging is especially amenable to introducing negative information into the news stream and for circulating rumors as fact. Blogging's fact-checking apparatus is just the built-in truth squad of those who read the blog and howl loudly if they wish to dispute some assertion. It is, in a sense, a place where everyone has his own truth." While bloggers have enriched the cultural content of the Web, there is little reason to believe they will ever provide an adequate alternative to mainstream news.

Citizens, community groups, activists, political parties, and governments have also used the Internet to expand their reach, coordinate communication, and assert their presence in the political process. Political candidates established an online presence as early as the 1996 presidential campaigns (Klinenberg and Perrin 2000), and by 2004 the Internet had become one of the most important resources for fund-raising, advertising, and organizing. Professional Web design firms specializing in political sites have driven this process, not only helping candidates and parties post content but also (as Phil Howard's essay here shows) generating data about visitors. National, state, and local governments also use the Web to disseminate information, blending public relations projects that promote their

programs with reports that citizens can use to learn about local conditions (such as crime rates, pollution levels, and school systems) or engage in political action. Many towns and neighborhood districts have set up electronic bulletin boards and discussion groups to help residents participate in civil society. Some cities use the Internet to interact directly with citizens, too. A recent national survey of local officials conducted by the Pew Internet and American Life Project found that 61 percent used e-mail "to communicate with citizens at least weekly," 56 percent claimed that their use of e-mail has "improved their relations with community groups," and 54 percent said the Internet has "brought them into contact with citizens from whom they had not heard before." Still, 38 percent believe that "community listservs and email cannot support public discussion of complex issues," and local officials are considerably more likely to use phone calls, letters, and meetings to communicate with their constituents. Federal officials, including congressional representatives, feel overwhelmed by e-mails and "often dismiss emails as not very meaningful" (Larsen and Rainie 2002). The early enthusiasm for the Internet as a source for new kinds of democratic interactions between citizens and officials has not only diminished in the United States. As Balazs Vedres, Laszlo Bruszt, and David Stark show here in their study of Eastern European civil society Web sites, even voluntary organizations working to advance democratic projects usually failed to use the Internet as a tool for participatory democracy.

Activist groups have developed more innovative and democratic uses of the Internet and digital networks. By the mid-1990s, as Castells explained in *The Power of Identity* (1997), dissident political actors of all persuasions (from the Zapatistas in Mexico to the right-wing militias in the United States, the anarchists in Europe to the Falun Gong in China) were adapting the network to break down communications barriers that had previously limited their reach. By the late 1990s and early 2000s (as Jeff Juris argues here), the network logic of social movements expressed itself in their public demonstrations as well as their electronic exchanges. The so-called antiglobalization protests, which in fact are not opposed to globalization but to the neoliberal versions of it, integrated a heterogeneous set of activists from throughout the world and yet were often organized without clear hierarchies or authority structures. The movement has been animated by the creativity and spontaneity made possible by horizontal networks and by participants' expertise in performing for and working with the media. Moreover, activists have digital photography, video, and text messaging to make their own media during protests, constructing temporary electronic communications centers to ensure that their experiences and perspective are disseminated online in real time, even before news outlets generate their own reports. Digital cultural production and novel forms of political expression merge whenever the network moves into action.

Digital Hubs

If international social movements reveal the ways digital networks enable the global dispersion of creative activity, innovative technology firms and cultural pro-

ducers express the opposite tendency, clustering in small places such as Silicon Valley and (as Gina Neff shows here) Silicon Alley of New York City. Ironically, the technology workers whose products help other actors collaborate from a distance and the creative laborers whose work circulates through electronic networks reap special benefits from physical proximity to their colleagues and competitors. As in the film, music, and publishing industries, technology companies flourish in geographically concentrated "milieux of innovation" (Castells and Hall 1994), which facilitate face-to-face interactions between coworkers and blur the lines between social and professional spheres in ways that (managers believe) increase creative productivity. It is important to identify the prevalence of spatial clustering in certain fields of cultural production since the notion that advanced communications technologies have rendered place irrelevant is one of the leading popular myths of the digital age. Urban scholars such as Saskia Sassen (1991) and AnnaLee Saxenian (1994) have shown that banks, law firms, and other advanced service industries choose to cluster in particular cities not only because proximity to other business services yields economic advantages but also because executives and valuable employees (and potential employees) have strong lifestyle preferences for certain places. Recently, the geographer Alan Scott (1999) has documented similar trends in fields of cultural production, too; and in the spirit of Howard Becker's *Art Worlds* (1982), ethnographers are now beginning to explore the internal conditions of digital creativity clusters through observational research.

The Sociology of Cultural Production

In several fields, empirical research projects designed to assess the role of new technologies in cultural production are helping social scientists evaluate and revise grand theoretical statements about "the network society," "e-topias," or "digital ontology." As early as the 1980s, scholars argued that digital communications systems have the transformative power of previous epoch-defining technologies, with capacity to alter symbolic production (Negroponte 1995), democratic politics (Sunstein 2001), even constructions of the self (Castells 1996). By 2000, when advanced technologies had diffused broadly, it was not unusual to read statements such as this one, from Manuel Castells (2001, 1): "The Internet is the fabric of our lives. If information technology is the present-day equivalent of electricity in the industrial era, in our age the Internet could be likened to both the electrical grid and the electric engine because of its ability to distribute the power of information throughout the entire realm of human activity. . . . The Internet is the technological basis for the organizational form of the Information Age: the network." But major disagreements remain over the extent, the pace, and the character of cultural changes caused by digital technologies; and we can identify three organizing schools—*the digital revolutionaries*, *the cyber-skeptics*, and *the cultural evolutionists*—in the current literature on cultural production in a digital age.

Digital revolutionaries argue that new technologies have generated deep structural changes in the fields of cultural production. The most enthusiastic revolution-

aries emphasize the utopian and libertarian features of decentralized and deregulated informational networks. Nicholas Negroponte (1995) was most concerned with the material transformation and distribution of cultural objects, shifting from tangible "atoms" to digital "bits." On one hand, he argued, digitization moves the source of a cultural object's value away from the channel of distribution and more squarely into the object itself. On the other hand, historically established distinctions between aesthetic genres lose their significance when symbolic objects are repackaged into digital codes. Movies, for example, "become just a special case of data broadcast" (p. 49). In a similar vein, William Mitchell (1999) and Donna Haraway (1991) have argued that digital communications technologies blur conventional divisions that long organized cultural life, blending the material and immaterial, organic and artificial, actual and virtual, and breaking down leisure, labor, and family time in ways that alter the rhythms of daily life. Digital revolutionaries need not be cyber-celebrationists or utopians. Castells (1998), for example, argued that new communications technologies have facilitated widespread cultural and political change. Yet he also expressed serious concerns about emerging and ongoing inequities in the network society.

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Cyber-skeptics do not deny that digital technologies have helped change cultural production, but they see digitization as a mechanism through which culture industries advance larger projects, thereby threatening the integrity of creative fields or the relative autonomy of artists and intellectuals. Moreover, they believe that technology is not a primary causal force of change as much as it is an effect of investments driven by economic, political, or cultural interests. Skepticism and anxiety are common during periods when new technologies enter the matrix of cultural production. They flourished in the nineteenth century with the rise of dime novels in the United States and serials in England (Williams 1958; Starr 2004), in most nations with the emergence of commercial television (Hoggart 1957), TV journalism (Hallin 1992), and commercial fashion (Ewen 1988). Many critics of technological "advances" in cultural production work in the tradition of the Frank-

furt School (Adorno and Horkheimer 1976; Adorno 1985; Benjamin 1968), applying long-standing concerns about the commodification of aesthetics, the homogenization of popular culture, or the loss of authentic expression to the digital age. Contemporary critics have added another layer of concern. Inspired by Foucault's (1977) analysis of surveillance and the capillary forms of micro-power or control, scholars such as Joseph Turow and Phil Howard (in this volume) are beginning to show how software and interactive digital technologies help entertainers, news companies, marketers, and political parties collect data from and about their audience, often with their consent.

Other cyber-skeptics are inspired by Pierre Bourdieu's (1993, 1996) analysis of the "fields of cultural production," expressing concerns over the ways "intrusions" by actors (institutions and individuals) in the economic or political fields alter conditions inside fields of literature, science, journalism, and art (see especially issue number 134 of *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales*, which is dedicated to digital technologies in the workplace). Commercial culture industries, these scholars argue, often use new technologies to shift control over work conditions from those with specialized craft skills to those with managerial or technical expertise (Saint Laurent 2000; Klinenberg 2000), thereby weakening the position and further compromising the autonomy of cultural producers.

Cultural evolutionists share elements of Bourdieu's approach, but they emphasize the slow pace of organizational and institutional change between periods of technological development, arguing that deeply embedded practices, routines, and beliefs structure the incorporation of new materials into any production process. Studies of cultural production have long been a hallmark of American and European sociology. But in the 1970s, scholars such as Paul Hirsch (1972), Richard Peterson (1976), Peterson and David Berger (1975), and Charles Kadushin (1976) developed an approach that closed the gap between cultural, organizational, and occupational sociology, analyzing symbolic production through the concepts and questions that previously guided industrial research.

While the Frankfurt School critics decried the commodification of culture, a growing number of American sociologists studied creative industries just as they would car manufacturing, asking about the institutional arrangements that stabilize markets, define an organizational field, structure career opportunities, and fine-tune the product. Creativity, regardless of the field, is constrained or enabled by the conditions of production, and cultural sociologists have studied the internal workings of diverse industries including architecture (Sarfatti-Larson 1993), country music (Peterson 1976), the news (Tuchman 1978; Fishman 1980; Gans 1979), commercial television (Gitlin 1981), cuisine (Fine 1992), and fashion design (Crane 1997). These industries change, but not instantly, not predictably, and not simply because engineers introduce a new technology to the labor process. Cultural fields, and the economic, creative, and organizations forces that constitute them, determine the uses of new technologies just as much as new technologies shape cultural objects. In a recent review essay, Richard Peterson and N. Anand (2004) proposed that there are six key facets of the cultural production process:

technology, law and regulation, industry structure, organizational structure, occupational careers, and the market. Citing the printing press, the pianoforte (which allowed Beethoven to express his skills), and music recording devices, the authors acknowledge that "changes in communication technology profoundly destabilize and create new opportunities in art and culture." Yet even these powerful technologies were filtered through the other five facets of cultural production, just as the Internet is today. The implication of this model is that social scientists should be cautious before directly attributing change in the culture industries to digital devices. New communications technologies offer "affordances" (to use Boczkowski's [2004] term) that enable new production practices and processes, but a broad set of contextual features determine how cultural industries change.

The conceptual toolbox developed through the sociology of cultural production provides a useful set of analytic resources for studying the social conditions that shape creative industries. Yet scholars have criticized the conventional approach of American cultural sociology for letting a focus on what is social in a cultural product displace attention to its meanings and social uses, including the ways it inspires new kinds of expression (see Zolberg 1990; Halle 1993; Heinich 2002; Mukerji and Schudson 1991); for treating cultural fields as relatively autonomous spheres, thereby marginalizing questions about power, exploitation, and the political economy of culture industries (Hesmondhalgh 2002); for failing to explain periods of revolutionary change within cultural fields; and for refusing to acknowledge the distinctive character of cultural production as a creative process, one that differs sharply from production of other commercial goods. "In practice," Peterson and Anand (2004, 326-27) explained, "the production perspective denies that there is something essentially unique about fine art, constitutional law, or theology. Rather, it emphasizes that these high-status fields can be studied like other symbol-producing institutions."

Yet the sociology of culture approach can be productively joined to other forms of analysis. In the study of digitalization, for example, we need to understand what motivated the creation and adaption of new technologies for cultural production (see Galloway in this volume), what affordances the new products offer (see Boczkowski and Ferris, Howard, Klinenberg, and Turow in this volume), and what ways consumers and producers make meaning through them (see Ito and Schull in this volume). As the uses of digital technologies blur traditional distinctions between producers and consumers, social scientists need to move the sites of their research to new arenas and to deepen understanding of the ways circulation of cultural objects (or now, electronic files) contributes to the production process. The questions of how people use new technologies for cultural work and what role these practices play in daily life are increasingly important to the study of creativity in action. So too are questions about the balance of power and control in cultural fields, which are dominated by a small number of commercial conglomerates whose reach extends nearly as far as the network itself.

The emerging conflict between states, corporations, and creative actors who aim to harness the power of digital technologies in different ways promises to be

one of the most important policy disputes of the twenty-first century. The essays assembled here can only assess the embryonic stages of digitization in cultural production, but the history of other communications technologies shows that the outcome of early struggles over their use, regulation, and circulation can set the path for future development (Starr 2004). This volume of the *Annals* could not be more timely.

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