

# THE PRODUCTION OF CULTURE PERSPECTIVE

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■ **Abstract** The production of culture perspective focuses on how the symbolic elements of culture are shaped by the systems within which they are created, distributed, evaluated, taught, and preserved. After tracing the consolidation of the perspective in the late 1970s, we introduce six facets of production (technology, law and regulation, industry structure, organization structure, occupational careers, and market) and use them to theorize within the production perspective a wide range of research. Third, we show the utility of the facet model in coherently theorizing a research study based in a quite different perspective. Fourth, we explore the recent application of the production perspective in organizational research. Fifth, we outline the recent extension of the production perspective to autoproduction, the study of identity formation, and meaning in informal relations. Finally, we discuss criticisms of the perspective and suggest opportunities for research.

## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

The production of culture perspective focuses on how the symbolic elements of culture are shaped by the systems within which they are created, distributed, evaluated, taught, and preserved. Initially, practitioners of this perspective focused on the fabrication of expressive-symbol elements of culture, such as art works, scientific research reports, popular culture, religious practices, legal judgments, journalism (Peterson 1976), and other parts of what are now often called the culture or creative industries. Recently, the perspective has been successfully applied to a range of quite different situations in which the manipulation of symbols is a by-product rather than the purpose of the collective activity (Crane 1992, Peterson 2001).

Looking back, the utility of the production perspective seems clear, but in the 1970s, when it emerged as a self-conscious perspective, it challenged the

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<sup>1</sup>Portions of the introduction draw on Peterson (1979, 1994, 2000).

then-dominant idea that culture and social structure mirror each other. Then, a symbiotic relationship between a singular functioning social system and its coherent overarching culture was embraced by a wide range of theorists of contemporary society, including most Marxists who distinguished between social structure and cultural superstructure and functionalists such as Talcott Parsons. The former asserted that those who controlled the means of producing wealth shaped culture to fit their own class interests; the latter believed that a set of monolithic abstract values determined the shape of social structure. Breaking from these mirror views, the production perspective—like most of the other contemporary perspectives in cultural sociology—views both culture and social structure as elements in an ever-changing patchwork (Berger & Luckmann 1966, Peterson 1979, Schudson 2002).

A number of bellwether studies during and since the 1950s exemplified aspects of what would become the production perspective. For example, C. Wright Mills's 1955 essay, "The Cultural Apparatus," pointed to the role of the mass media in inadvertently shaping American culture. Howard S. Becker (1974) showed that artistic creativity is not so much an act of individual genius as it is the product of the cooperative effort of a number of people. The "news-making" studies of the 1970s (see, for example, Molotch & Lester 1974, Tuchman 1978, Gans 1979) exemplified the production perspective because they went beyond tracing the social dynamics of newsrooms to reveal how organizational routines determine what would be defined as "news." And, in her analysis of the "invisible colleges" where science is created, Diana Crane (1972) showed that the kind of scientific knowledge produced is a function of the reward system within a particular occupational community.

However, the early work that most completely embodies the production perspective is Harrison and Cynthia White's (1965) *Canvasses and Careers*. They found that theories associating changes in art with revolutionary changes in society or with the emergence of persons of genius could not account for the emergence of impressionist art in nineteenth-century France. They showed that the older royal academic art production system that had survived the economic turmoil and ideological changes of the French Revolution collapsed a generation later with the advent of the art market created by Parisian art dealers and critics, who promoted unconventional artists such as the Impressionists.

Together, these studies illustrate the emerging production of culture perspective insofar as they (a) focus on the expressive aspects of culture rather than values; (b) explore the processes of symbol production; (c) use the tools of analysis developed in the study of organizations, occupations, networks, and communities; and (d) make possible comparisons across the diverse sites of culture creation. In common they show that culture is not so much societywide and virtually unchanging as it is situational and capable of rapid change.

However, not until publication in 1976 and 1978 of collections entitled *The Production of Culture*, edited by Richard A. Peterson and Lewis A. Coser respectively, did scholars collectively recognize that these and other scattered studies illustrated elements of culture being shaped in the mundane processes of their production. The empirical studies were drawn from sites as diverse as science laboratories,

artist communities, and country music radio stations. These two collections of essays signaled the emergence of the production perspective as a coherent and self-conscious approach to understanding how the expressive symbols of culture come to be (DiMaggio 2000).

This review assesses the success of the project in the quarter century since it was first formulated. To this end, we introduce a six-facet model of production. We then discuss numerous studies that illustrate one or more of these facets. We examine recent extensions of the production perspective to organizational research and to studies of informal relations, and finally we discuss critiques of the production perspective and sketch new opportunities.

## SIX-FACET MODEL OF THE PRODUCTION NEXUS

Cultural products change slowly over time (Lieberson 2000), but occasionally such drift gives way to rapid change, altering the aesthetic structure of a cultural expression. We have already seen this in White & White's (1965) study of the transformation of the nineteenth-century French art world. Other studies of such rapid reinstitutionalization of a culture-producing system include Peterson & Berger's (1975) study of popular music, DiMaggio's (1982) study of visual art and symphony orchestra, Powell's (1985) study of book publishing, Crane's (1997) study of fashion, Peterson's (1997, pp. 12–32) study of country music, Ferguson's (1998) study of gastronomy, Rao et al.'s (2003) study of restaurants, and Lee's (2004) study of radio broadcasting. Such rapid change exposes the constituent elements comprising a field of symbolic production composed of six facets. These include technology, law and regulation, industry structure, organization structure, occupational career, and market.

Examining how rock music displaced swing bands and crooners to become the dominant form of U.S. popular music in just three short years between 1954 and 1956, Peterson (1990) first used the six-facet model. Before rock, innovations in *technology* were in the hands of the major corporations; after rock, technological advances worked to the advantage of smaller independent firms, and the same change occurred in the workings of *law and regulation*. Four firms dominated the *industry structure* of the swing/crooner era. Because of destabilizing changes triggered by the alterations in law and technology, large numbers of independent record companies and radio stations successfully entered the field by making music targeted at a specific audience. In the swing/crooner era, the bureaucratic *organizational structure* of the dominating firms facilitated the efficient monopolizing of all the factors of production but could only respond slowly to changing popular tastes. In the rock era, innovative, small, loosely structured organizations gained market share by being attuned to changing tastes of a particular slice of the public. In the crooner era, participants typically lived out their *occupational careers* as specialists within one corporation, but rock-era workers in the small companies had little job security, and many specialists in major firms worked on short-term

contracts. The safe but often stultifying bureaucratic environment was replaced by the tension-filled freedom of freelance work. In the swing/crooner era, the *market* for popular music was identified as one homogeneous mass, and the oligarchs competed for a larger piece of the pie. Beginning with the rock era, the market became defined as an ever-expanding set of heterogeneous niches.

Changes in each facet seemed mundane, but working together they made possible the rapid displacement of the swing-based crooners and ushered in the rock revolution that made way for the diversity of popular music that followed. This facets scheme is a convenient way of organizing our discussion of a range of studies using the production perspective. Although most studies are mentioned in conjunction with only one facet, most are relevant to other facets as well.

## Technology

Technology provides the tools with which people and institutions augment their abilities to communicate, and changes in communication technology profoundly destabilize and create new opportunities in art and culture. The classic example is the role played by the invention of the printing press in overturning the world of the Middle Ages, creating the Renaissance and the Protestant Reformation (Eisenstein 1979).

At the microlevel, DeNora (1995) shows that Beethoven's ability to express his skills as a performer/composer depended on the development of a new music-making machine, the pianoforte. Beethoven's playing style was notably heavy, emotional, and imprecise, making him a mediocre harpsichordist but ideally suited to the pianoforte because, as its name suggests, the instrument could be played very loudly or softly and sensitively, thus expressing a wide range of emotions (Goodall 2000). Beethoven and most later composers chose the pianoforte for composing large orchestral works, and as Goodall (2000, p. 175) notes, "the structure of a vast amount of orchestral music owes its shape to the mind set of the piano." Were it not for the advent of this technology, Beethoven would have remained a provincial musician on the streets of Vienna, and the world would not have his magnificent body of work (DeNora 1995).

The amplification, manipulation, and transmission of sound radically altered music in the twentieth century (Thompson 2002). Recording and radio made it possible to project sounds over time and space (Chanan 1995), and the use of microphones enabled soft-voiced crooners such as Bing Crosby and Frank Sinatra to displace full-voiced operatic pop singers such as Enrico Caruso (Lockheart 2003). More recently, the electronic manipulation of guitar sound transformed pop music (Waksman 1999), and the digitalization of music provided perfect pitch to those unable to carry a tune (Peterson & Ryan 2003). Digital communication media have also facilitated the rapid globalization of culture. Now art market prices (Crane et al. 2002) and television programming are instantly available worldwide (Kretschmer et al. 2001, Roe & De Meyer 2001, Bielby & Harrington 2002). Digital media have also influenced culture by making possible the creation of

cybergroups focused on musical tastes (Ryan & Peterson 1994, Marshall 2001, Lee & Peterson 2004), and through digital sampling rap music has created a new venue for discussing racial identity and politics (Lena 2003).

## Law and Regulation

Law and regulation create the groundrules that shape how creative fields develop. Griswold (1981) shows how changes in copyright law can influence the kinds of novels that are published. She notes the popularity in America of novels that traced the struggles of lone men against the forces of nature in the nineteenth century, and she contrasts these with the British preference for novels of domestic manners. Literary critics saw these differences as illustrating enduring differences between American and British culture, but Griswold found that American publishers preferred works by English authors because they could be sold in the United States without paying author's copyright fees, whereas American authors had to be compensated. To sell their work, American authors turned to specialty topics, including the man-against-nature theme. The copyright law of 1909, however, put American and English authors on the same footing, and a rapidly increasing number of American authors successfully published "English-style" novels of manners. Restrictive notions of intellectual property continue to shape cultural expressions, as has been shown by Kretschmer et al. (2001), Marshall (2001), and Vaidhyathan (2002).

Since the earliest days of printing, when the right to publish books was controlled by the Crown, regulation and censorship of the culture industries have shaped what could be produced. Restriction on multiple ownership of newspapers and of TV and radio stations has fostered competition and diversity in the United States, and deregulation has had serious consequences. As Lee (2004) finds, in 1989 the largest radio industry company owned 20 stations, whereas in 2002 the largest company owned 1225. Consequently, fewer people made decisions on what music to air, so that in 2002 just about half as many songs were aired often enough to become popular as indicated by the pop music charts.

## Industry Structure

Industrial fields (Bourdieu 1993) tend to coalesce around new technologies, evolving legal arrangements, and newly conceptualized markets, a process identified as "institutionalization" (DiMaggio & Powell 1991). Studies of this process include DiMaggio (1982, 1992) for the fine arts, Ennis (1992) for the seven streams of commercial music, Peterson (1997) for country music, Battani (1999) for photography, and Jones (2001) for the film industry. Established industrial fields reconstitute themselves largely in response to the same three forces, as shown in White & White's (1965) and Wijnberg & Gemser's (2000) observations on the French art world, Bielby & Bielby's (1994) account of the reinstitutionalization of prime-time television production, and Carroll & Swaminathan's (2000) study of the rise of microbreweries.

Creative industries tend to be structured in three ways. There may be many small competing firms producing a diversity of products, a few vertically integrated oligarchal firms that mass produce a few standardized products, or a more open system of oligarchy composed of niche-market-targeted divisions plus many small specialty service and market development firms where the former produce the most lucrative products and the latter produce the most innovative (Crane 1992, Ryan & Wentworth 1998, Caves 2000). The commercial music industry has evolved through all three of these forms. In the late 1940s, a few large firms dominated the field and bland homogenous music predominated. In the 1954–1968 period, many small record companies prospered, and the music became highly diverse and innovative, but by the late 1980s, the oligarchic firms were able to dominate by buying or building niche market divisions and making diverse music that generally was not innovative. See especially Peterson & Berger (1975, 1996), Lopes (1992), Negus (1999), and Lena (2003).

## Organizational Structure

Three forms of organizations are characteristic of the cultural industry: (a) the bureaucratic form with a clear-cut division of labor and a many-layered authority system committed to organizational continuity, (b) the entrepreneurial form having neither a clear-cut division of labor nor a many-layered hierarchy committed to short-term success, and (c) a variegated form of large firm that tries to take advantage of the potential flexibility of the bureaucratic form without giving up central control by acquiring creative services through short-term contracts. Large firms are better at exploiting the commercial potential of predictable routines and large-scale distribution channels (Coser et al. 1982). Small organizations are better at scanning and exploring new fads and fashions (Crane 1997). Small and simple structures tend to foster entrepreneurial leadership and informal interaction that allow for the rapid decision making and rich communication required to facilitate innovative production (Peterson & Berger 1971). The logic of synergy and branding strategies that results from creating interrelated products in distinctive cultural fields (such as tie-ins among movies, books, videos, and toys) has led to the rise and domination of a few large conglomerates that have sought to pool diverse inputs through vertical integration (Caves 2000) and to consolidate access to markets (Turow 1992, Hesmondhalgh 2002). However, to reap the benefits of simple structures, large conglomerates tend either to reorganize into multiple, small, distinctive units (Starkey et al. 2000) or to simplify control by favoring an entrepreneurial leadership style (Eisenmann & Bower 2000).

As Thornton (2002) has shown in her study of the adoption of the multidivisional form in the publishing industry, large organizations are dictated by the logic of standardization and marketing. Routines are designed to sort the unfamiliar into the familiar at every step of the decision chain (Ryan & Peterson 1982, Gitlin 1983). Music label executives, for example, seek to tailor the sound of new bands in the mold of accepted genres (Negus 1999). Lutz & Collins (1993)

argue that even though the internal organization of *National Geographic* magazine allows for variety and experimentation in the sourcing of photographs, standard operating procedures guide its picture editors to make very predictable choices.

## Occupational Careers

Culture is produced through sustained collective activity, so each cultural field develops a career system (Becker 1982, Menger 1999), and the networks of working relationships developed by creative workers make for what some have called “cultures of production” (Fine 1992, Du Gay 1997). The distribution of creative, craft, functionary, and entrepreneurial occupations in a field is determined largely by its structuration. Bourdieu (1993) and Anheier et al. (1995) characterize the field of professional writing as both vertically stratified as “elite” and “peripheral” and horizontally differentiated as “literary” or “light” works. Such structuring produces the need for specialized gatekeepers (Hirsch 1972) such as talent agents (Bielby & Bielby 1999), who selectively favor a subset of producers over others, thereby magnifying distortions in age, gender, and other demographic characteristics (Tuchman 1989, Lang & Lang 1990, Bielby & Bielby 1996).

Crane (1976) showed how reward systems in art, science, and religion shape occupational careers that in turn influence the symbols produced. Rosenblum (1978) found that distinctive work demands on three kinds of photographers create three distinct aesthetic standards by which their work is judged. Likewise, Peterson & Anand (2002) contrast two general ways careers are shaped. In the normatively controlled fields, regulative societal forces create an institutional pattern of predictable careers from the “top down.” In competitive environments, careers tend to be chaotic and foster cultural innovation, and career-building market-sensing entrepreneurs enact careers from the “bottom up” by starting from the margins of existing professions and conventions.

## Market

Markets are constructed by producers to render the welter of consumer tastes comprehensible (Peterson 1990, Fligstein 1996). As White (1981) explains, markets result from the actions of cliques of producers who interact with and observe each others’ attempts to satisfy consumer tastes. Peterson (1997) shows how the market for what, in the 1950s, became called “country music” was reconceptualized several times after it was first commercialized as “hillbilly music” in the mid-1920s (see also Peiss 1998 on the creation of a female beauty market, Keyes 2002 on rap music, Gebesmair 2001 on Latin American music, and Turow 1997 on the role of advertisers in the process).

Once consumer tastes are reified as a market, those in the field tailor their actions to create cultural goods like those that are currently most popular as represented by the accepted measurement tools. In the music industry, for example, the numerous weekly charts published by *Billboard* magazine are taken to represent the ebb and flow of consumer tastes. Anand & Peterson (2000) assert that such measurements,

in effect, serve to structure fields so that a change in the way the *Billboard* charts are compiled radically alters the measured popularity of several genres, consequently changing the allocation of resources to them. Podolny (2001) suggests that markets function as networks in two ways. First, as prisms, networks refract prestige by signaling legitimacy and credibility connected with particular market offerings (Greenfeld 1989). The prestige of a potential Hollywood blockbuster (Baker & Faulkner 1991) or a prime-time network series (Bielby & Bielby 1994) is signaled by the reputation of the cast and crew involved in its production. Second, networks serve as conduits through which products and services are replicated across diverse markets. Greve (1996) shows that the diffusion of the “soft adult contemporary” radio format was facilitated largely by cross-market network ties that allowed for imitation and transfer.

## Summary and Comment

Looking at these studies together, it is possible to suggest two regularities. First, the facets appear to be coupled enough that a major change in one of the facets can start a cycle of destabilization and reorganization in the entire production nexus. Second, depending on the configuration of the production facets, cultural fields trend toward one of three states: (a) oligopolistic and stable, producing unimaginative cultural fare; (b) turbulent and competitive, nurturing cultural innovation; and (c) competitiveness managed by oligopolistic control fostering diversity without innovation. The consequences of this increasingly common third form for culture and creative people is not yet well understood. Does the combining of oligopoly and competition accentuate the advantages of each, stability and innovation, or their darker sides, stifling control, career instability, and low rates of innovation in culture? This question is vital for culture and deserves close attention in the years to come.

Although the production system profoundly influences culture, the conditions of production do not alone shape culture because other factors, including individual creativity (DeNora 1995), social conditions (Liebes & Katz 1990) and, as Lieberman (2000) has shown, regular endogenous variations in taste, are vitally important. Kaufman (2004) also suggests a number of ways in which culture changes and reproduces itself independent of the effects of the production system or society.

## THE CASSETTE CULTURE CASE: A TEST OF THE MODEL'S UTILITY

To powerfully illustrate the utility of the production perspective and the six-facet model, we use it to better understand an excellent empirical study conceived and implemented completely without reference to the production perspective. The study in question is Peter Manuel's (1993) investigation of what he calls the “cassette culture” of North India. He writes from a cultural Marxist perspective and



cites none of the authors associated with the production perspective. Still, it is possible to reorganize, systematize, and better understand his perceptive but scattered finding by using our model. Dramatic changes took place in Indian popular music during the 1980s. Before 1980, film music was about the only commercial music genre available on records in India, but in just five years a technology-led revolution altered every facet of the production system and fundamentally transformed Indian commercial music so that diverse sorts of popular music genres were nurtured and flourished. To show the utility of the facet model, it is deployed to order and systematize Manuel's presentation. To this end, each of the facets is considered in turn.

## Technology

Until 1979, the key medium of Indian popular music was the vinyl LP record. The technology for pressing disks was concentrated in the hands of multinational corporations, and only film producers could afford the high recording cost. Turntables and disks were too expensive for the public at large, so film screenings and radio broadcasts were the means for disseminating popular music. In the early 1980s, affordable and portable cassette tape players became very popular in India, creating a demand for music on cassettes. The relatively low costs of producing commercial music on cassettes enabled the emergence of hundreds of indigenous record producers. As a result, sales of popular music increased tenfold between 1980 and 1985.

## Law and Regulation

Indian laws restricting imports and regulations mandating high taxes of luxury goods were relaxed in the early 1980s. This fostered the rapid growth of the cassette industry, and in just five years India became the second largest producer of cassettes in the world. Pirates who duplicated local and foreign LPs onto cassettes flourished, operating without state sanctions because of lax enforcement of copyright law. Legitimate businesses also failed to check piracy because the pirates were addressing market demand that could not otherwise be satisfied, and because creative artists were paid a flat fee for recording, rather than receiving royalties for cassettes sold, they did not object to piracy as it increased their market exposure.

## Industry Structure

Until 1980, manufacture and marketing was a virtual duopoly, with the Gramophone Company of India (GCI) and Music India Limited (MIL), subsidiaries of EMI and Polygram respectively, controlling the 90% market share enjoyed by film music. Moreover, seven or eight composers controlled the scoring of film music, and six singers accounted for almost all the output. With the spread of cassette technology, the market share enjoyed by GCI and MIL dropped to less than 50%, and by 1985 there were over 400 active homegrown firms, the majority catering to

local and small regional markets. In addition, a pirate market developed, becoming about ten times larger than the legitimate market. In this turbulent situation, a locally owned firm became the largest in the industry by initially focusing on genres with local appeal and by practicing the tactics required to exploit and defend itself against cassette piracy.

## Organizational Structure

Until 1980, the large and bureaucratically organized GCI and MIL prospered by controlling production and distribution. The cassette revolution put production and marketing in the hands of hundreds of entrepreneurs skilled at adapting quickly to changing market conditions. Successful early entrants typically employed an elastic concept of ethics, engaging in pirate duplication of hit film music whenever opportunities arose. The market sensitivity and agility of these tiny organizations nurtured an array of viable commercial alternatives to the bland homogeneity of film music.

## Occupational Careers

The assembly lines of actors, composers, singers, musicians, and technicians of the “Bollywood” film studios discouraged creative diversity, and the decoupling of singing and acting meant that singers performed behind the scenes while all the adulation was thrust upon the lip-synching screen actors. The cassette culture facilitated the establishment of two new career paths. One was the entrepreneurial producer/marketer. People embarking on this career had diverse backgrounds ranging from fruit stall merchants selling cassettes on the side to radio repairers and subcontractors to GCI. The other new career was that of the professional singing star who made a living recording and performing outside of Bollywood’s orbit. Two genres also flourished in the early 1980s. *Ghazal* was derived from courtly Muslim performances of abstruse Persian poetry toned down and rendered more accessible to an Indian audience. The Hindu devotional *bhajan* genre had its roots in the traditional stock of religious music. Alongside these, a number of regional, communal, and sometimes explicitly ribald folk genres sprang up, creating career opportunities for many aspiring popular music singers.

## Market

Before 1980, film producers regarded recorded music as a promotional vehicle for cinema ticket sales. The film industry’s economies of scale necessitated a simplified view of the market, and the product offered was highly standardized in language, diction, and musical style. In the cassette era, the highly decentralized entrepreneurs developed niche markets devoted to traditions of communal folk, devotional, and bawdy genres. The new entrepreneurs also fashioned entirely unprecedented genres such as Punjabi truck drivers’ music and nationalistic Hindu

music, thus creating an overall market that more nearly reflected the linguistic and stylistic diversity of India.

This presentation of Manuel's study suggests two points. First, the production perspective and facets model are useful for systematically understanding the workings of diverse cultural production systems even if they are studied using a quite different framework. Second, it highlights the need to understand more systematically the differences between various kinds of production systems and their influences on culture. Accordingly, we review the perspective's use in organizational research and then in informal relations where the symbolic elements of culture are used in marking distinctions and forming identities.

## THE PRODUCTION PERSPECTIVE IN ORGANIZATIONAL RESEARCH

The production perspective, often called the "culture industries" model in academic management circles, has become the prime model of postbureaucratic organization, and four recurrent research foci are outlined here. These include studies of (a) how theories of effective management change over time, (b) the institutional processes that guide decision making in ambiguous contexts, (c) how organizational networks facilitate symbol production, and (d) the dialectic between specialist and generalist organizations in making markets. Together they show how culture shapes and is shaped by organizations.

### Evolving Theories of Effective Management

Scholars interested in understanding theories of effective management have deployed the production perspective extensively. Abrahamson (1996) has shown that elements of managerial culture such as "quality circles" evolve through distinct stages. Innovations that appear contrary to existing practice require extensive symbol processing to find acceptance (Hackman & Wageman 1995, Clark & Salaman 1998). Zbaracki (1998) argues that for the rhetoric of a new management fashion to take root, extensive negotiation between initial advocates and pioneering users is required to find the process by which such ideas can be rationalized and translated into organizational reality. Westphal et al. (1997) found that in the early stage of an innovative management practice, demonstrations of its efficacy are important in its diffusion, whereas at a later stage sheer popularity leads to its adoption. Additionally, Greve (1995) and Abrahamson & Fairchild (1999) demonstrate that the abandonment of fads is as complex a phenomenon as their adoption.

Barley & Kunda (1992) note an oscillation of the fashion for theories of effective management between those based in rational ideology, such as "scientific management," and those based in humanist ideology, exemplified by "human relations." Abrahamson (1997) shows that the substantive elements of management fads wax and wane with the general economic performance of corporations.

Rationalist theories tend to gain currency at the end of an economic contraction, whereas humanist theories emerge at the beginning of an expansion cycle.

## Institutional Decision Processes

The production perspective's focus on institutional processes, such as the rules for making decisions in ambiguous situations (Ryan & Peterson 1982, Perrow 1986), has been a significant influence on the new institutional perspective in organizational theory (Anand 2000). Institutional theory, in turn, has developed a rich corpus of studies that inform how culture is produced (Anand & Watson 2004).

Two key themes have emerged. In the first, when there is high social uncertainty, producers of cultural products use mimicry and links to legitimate actors and institutions to get their work accepted (DiMaggio & Powell 1983). For example, Bielby & Bielby (1994) show that imitation, reputation, and genre are the strategies most commonly used by television networks to develop new prime-time series. In the second theme, overarching logics within an institutional sphere govern the type of organizational decision processes in play at any given time (Fligstein 1990) and result in the production of one type of cultural artifact rather than others. For example, Thornton & Ocasio (1999) found two distinctive institutional logics operating in the higher-education publishing industry between 1958 and 1990. The earlier "editorial" logic focused on building a prestigious imprint and on organic growth with reliance on internal labor markets. The later "market" logic focused on achieving a competitive market position, on aggressive acquisition-led growth, and on more open external labor markets. Levitt & Nass (1989) show that the institutional constraints of the market logic imposed on college textbook editors lead to competing products that are virtually identical in terms of sequence of topics, content, and even the images used on the cover.

## Networks of Production

Based on their observations of the dissemination of scientific work, Crane (1976) and Kadushin (1976) find that the production of culture can occur within tightly knit networks, circles, and "invisible colleges." In corroboration, Faulkner & Anderson (1987) found that the core of the Hollywood production network comprising 10% of all producers made 38% of the industry's output of over 2400 films released between 1965 and 1980, whereas the 64% of peripheral producers made just one film. In addition, Jones (1996) concludes that in fields such as film production that involve extensive subcontracting, the inner core of producers tends to be a small world of tightly knit individuals, whereas the periphery is more open, allowing individuals with special skills, resources, and capital to participate.

Three implications of network-based systems of organization are important for the production perspective. First, production networks are restrictive by nature (Faulkner 1983), which means that advantages of gender, class, and ethnicity observed in occupations in general apply to the culture industries too (Bielby & Bielby 1999). Second, sociological editing processes play out in two stages in the

form of networks of discovery and of routinization. In “empty fields” theorized by Tuchman (1989) in the context of the emergence of the novel in publishing, peripheral actors who obtain a connection to a central player help initiate a new genre, but once the genre is established, peripheral actors are cast out in favor of members of the inner core who are tied to the central player. In contrast, Rao et al. (2003) have shown that in highly normative fields such as gastronomy, innovation occurs at the center of production networks and diffuses to the periphery. Prestigious two- and three-Michelin-star chefs were the initiators of the *nouvelle cuisine* movement in France that emphasized fresh ingredients, lighter menus, and greater informality in service and presentation. Finally, although networks shape the creation of new cultural entities, innovative cultural products in turn reshape production networks. As Baker & Faulkner (1991) show, the rise of the Hollywood blockbuster in the 1970s had the effect of fusing the artistic roles of director/scriptwriter and differentiated the specialist role of producer.

### Resource Partitioning: Generalist and Specialist Organizations

Peterson & Beger (1975) found a diachronic dialectic between small and large organizations in the music industry in which the bland homogenization of music resulting from the consolidation of large generalist firms was broken by the innovative sounds produced by numerous specialist firms in the 1950s. In the process, market niches were created, refined, reconceptualized, and ignored depending on how firms in an industry organized themselves to tackle unsated consumer demand. Carroll’s (1985) resource-partitioning theory suggests that the niches supporting the generalist and specialist organizations are clearly distinct. Using as example the newspaper industry, he shows that large generalist organizations that cater to a mass audience can coexist with small specialist organizations that rely on an ethnic or special interest audience. Carroll (1985) argues that it is the competition among large generalist organizations to capture the broadest range consumers that opens specific niches to specialist organizations. Therefore, intensive competition among generalist organizations might actually increase diversity and innovation even though they do not compete with the specialists.

Mezias & Mezias (2000) tested Carroll’s hypothesis in their study of the history of the founding of firms in the early American film industry. They discovered that greater intensity of competition among generalists led to an increased rate of founding of specialists, and that innovative film genres (including adventure, detective, western, and horror) were more likely to come from specialists. Noting that most consumer industries are able to support both distinctive specialist and generalist mass-market niches, Carroll & Swaminathan (2000) posit that a minority of postindustrial consumers seeks to avoid being identified as consuming products of the large and dominating oligarchic bureaucracies. Such consumer behavior has led to the founding of many microbreweries in the United States, an increase from 43 in 1983 to over 1400 in 1999. Thus, the resource-partitioning view shows

that industry changes are dictated by whether producer firms are specialists or generalists as well as by the nature of product offered.

## THE PRODUCTION PERSPECTIVE IN STUDIES OF INFORMAL RELATIONS

The production perspective was developed to better understand contexts in which cultural symbols are consciously created for sale, but it has been adapted to informal situations in which individuals and groups select among the symbolic products on offer and in the process create collective meanings and identities for themselves. In the 1940s, consumption was commonly seen as an unreflexive response to the seductions of the mass media (Rosenberg 1957, Shils 1959). This extreme elitist alarm over mass culture has fewer proponents now (Gans 1999), and a growing number of studies focus on how people produce identities for themselves from elements of traditional and mass-mediated symbols.

This active production of a lifestyle by individuals and groups has been called the autoproduction of culture (Peterson 2001). Initially marginalized groups, such as youth, ethnics, eccentrics, and the like received much scholarly attention in this regard (Gelder & Thornton 1997), but in recent years the production perspective has been used to show how diverse collectivities create meanings that constitute their distinctive identities (see Fantasia 1988 on factory workers; Willis 1990 on youth; DiMaggio 1982 on the highbrow elite; Schwartz 1991 on the American public; Peiss 1998 on women's use of cosmetics; Halle 1993 on upper-middle-class householders in New York; Gamson 1994 on celebrity watchers; Abrahamson 1997, Salaman 1998, and Clark & Salaman 1998 on management fad consumers; Battani 1999 on photographers; Entman & Rojeck 2001 on TV-show producers; Fine 2003 on self-taught artists; Lena 2003 on rap musicians; Ferguson 1998 and Rao et al. 2003 on French gourmards; Waksman 1999 on electric guitar aficionados; and Grazian 2004 on Chicago blues fans).

## Social Class/Culture Class Link

One of the prime research questions in the sociology of culture has been the degree of fit between social class (groupings of people defined by their relationship to the means of production) and culture class (groupings of people ranked by their patterns of consumption). Shils (1959) and Bourdieu (1984) assert that the correspondence is very close. However, recent studies of cultural autoproduction suggest that although more people of high status still consume the fine arts and the other markers of cultural capital, they no longer snobbishly shun as inferior all forms of popular culture.

In their study of the musical tastes of the range of status groups, Peterson & Kern (1996) found that the cultural symbols of class position are undergoing a profound transformation. Now persons and groups show their high status by being cultural omnivores, consuming not only the fine arts but also appreciating many, if not all (Bryson 1996), forms of popular culture. Importantly, Peterson & Kern

(1996) did not find at the bottom of the status hierarchy the indiscriminating couch potato. Rather they found groups who are univores—that is, people involved with a narrow range of cultural expressions (see also Peterson & Simkus 1992; Bryson 1996, 1997). Omnivorousness, first identified in the United States, has also been found in Canada (Fisher & Preece 2003) and in Europe [Gebesmair 1998 (Austria), Carrabine & Longhurst 1999 (England), Warde et al. 1999 (England), van Eijck 2001 (Holland), López-Sintas & García-Álvarez 2002 (Spain), and Coulangeon 2003 (France)].

## The Dialectic of Resistance and Appropriation

In the 1970s the Center for Contemporary Culture Studies of Birmingham University began a series of studies of marginal youth groups (Gelder & Thornton 1997). These studies focused on how young people take the products tendered to them by the culture industries and recombine them in unique ways to show their resistance to the dominant culture and to give expression to their own identities (Hall & Jefferson 1976, Willis 1977, Hebdige 1979). Many recent studies have built on the basic model of resistance elaborating a dialectic of symbolic resistance and appropriation (see Gelder & Thornton 1997). Looking at these studies together, the dialectic has the following stages.

1. The multinational producers of popular cultural goods attempt to structure the desires of potential buyers by flooding the market with new products and promoting them intensively.
2. Individuals pick and choose among the goods on offer to construct an “authentic” expression of themselves. Most strive to be in fashion, but some recombine popular products into patterns that are quite different from the styles being promoted by the dominant society.
3. Stigmatized as “different,” these people seek out like-minded rebels and consolidate a distinctive set of cultural choices (music, dress, behavior, drugs, argot) that constitute individual and group identity, providing a badge of difference from others and resistance against authority. Beats, hippies, mods, punks, straightedge, and hip-hop exemplify such resistant groups.
4. Authorities may ignore the resistant style, but this changes when the style is seen to deliberately defy the law or the norms of decent behavior. In some cases, the reaction builds into a full-blown, media-driven moral panic.
5. The reaction of the authorities, and the notoriety provided by media attention, attract large numbers of diffusely disaffected youths who emulate the superficial style of resistance without committing themselves to the politics and dangerous actions that signaled group affiliation at the outset.
6. (and 1.) The final stage of the dialectical cycle is the first stage of the next. The industry co-opts and denudes the resistance of any symbolic force, converting revolt into mere style. The sanitized symbols are then mass marketed back to the many followers who want to buy into the form of the resistance without committing to its subversive potential (Ross 1996, Vognar 1998).

Although the heroic notion of symbolic resistance to dominant culture may shape fans' definition of authenticity in popular culture (Frith 1996), a number of studies have suggested that much of what is taken to be subcultural resistance is manufactured by the consumer industry (Laing 1985, Negus 1999). Perhaps the most graphic illustration is found in the *Frontline* (2001) documentary *The Merchants of Cool*, especially the section "Teen Rebellion: Just Another Product," featuring the corporate construction of the late-1990s anti-establishment rage-rock band Limp Bizkit. Fans may actively participate in fabricating authenticity, as Bielby et al. (1999) show when fans participate with TV soap opera writers in crafting plots. This complex interplay between the artifice of manufacture and the fans' experience of authenticity is arguably the most important unresolved paradox of cultural sociology, the autoproduction of authenticity.

### Fabricating Authenticity

The classical idea that "tradition" is the repository of all that is ancient and virtually unchanging has been attacked on all sides as factually incorrect and self-serving. For example, Hobsbawm (1983) shows that much of the British monarchical "tradition" was, in fact, deliberately created in the middle of the nineteenth century. He coined the felicitous term "invented tradition" to describe such fabricated rituals [see also Anderson's (1983) study of how the Western idea of nation-building spread around the world, and DiMaggio's (1982) and Levine's (1988) studies of the "cultural entrepreneurship" involved in the creation of the idea of "fine art"].

The term "collective memory" is now often substituted for "tradition," in recognition that the past is continually reinterpreted to fit the changing needs of the present. Illustrations include Barry Schwartz's (1991) study that shows how George Washington's reputation was democratized over the years since his death and Sewell's (1996) study detailing the misremembering of a battle at the Bastille that set off the French Revolution. The idea of authenticity as a renewable resource is illustrated in Peterson's (1997) study of the fabrication of authenticity in the creation of country music, Lena's (2003) study of the continuing process of valorizing rap music, Grazian's (2004) study of the many facets of authenticity in the Chicago blues scene, and Fine's (2003) study of how self-taught artists craft identity. An array of applications of this sort of culture production can be found in Lamont & Fournier's (1992) anthology *Cultivating Differences*. Although there are numerous examples, the characteristics of the autoproduction of cherished ideas and symbols has not been systematically formulated.

### CRITIQUES AND DISCUSSION

The production perspective has had its critics. First, some have claimed that "production of culture theorists [ignore] what is special about art, what distinguishes it from the production of automobiles or shoes" (Alexander 2003, pp. 80). In practice 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 (Peterson 1976), and in that context focusing on the particular ways institutional arrangements of the elite forms differ from their popular counterparts (Blau 1989; Crane 1976, 1992; Frith 1996). What is important about art, popular culture, and the other foci of the production perspective is that they provide techniques for researching the constructed nature of collective representations, values, and the other aspects of culture.

Second, the perspective has been faulted for defocalizing the role of fans and consumers in shaping the content of cultural symbols. This was done to clearly distinguish it from approaches that focus on interpretations made by consumers (Liebes & Katz 1990, Press 1994, Kaufman 2004), but the recent studies of the autoproduction of culture, outlined above, show how reception can be better understood within the production perspective.

A third critique is that proponents of the perspective ignore the meaning of cultural productions (Gottdeiner 1985, Eyerman & Ring 1998). Deducing meaning from reading texts is not part of the perspective (but see Mohr 1998). The production perspective is vital to those who interpret meaning nonetheless, because, as noted above, it alerts the analyst to differences between symbols produced under differing conditions (Griswold 1981, Bryson 2000, DiMaggio 2000). Although Lutz & Collins (1993) do not mention the perspective explicitly in their monograph *Reading National Geographic*, they provide an excellent illustration of how a study of reception and interpretation of meanings attributed to cultural objects can be integrated with the perspective. Finally, since the 1990s it has been increasingly used to study the production of identity and meaning for individuals and groups, as we have seen in the section on the autoproduction of culture above. A fourth criticism is that the production perspective has defocalized questions of power and exploitation (Hesmondhalgh 2002). This is true in the narrow sense that, except for the authors anthologized in Du Gay (1997), most scholars working in the production perspective focus on data and hypothesis testing rather than interpreting through the lens of a particular critical perspective. However, studies exploring each of the six facets of production regularly expose the workings of power and exploitation. Gitlin (1983), Ryan & Peterson (1982), and Bielby & Bielby (2002), among others, demonstrate the exploitation of creative people. Tuchman (1989), Lang & Lang (1990), and Bielby & Bielby (1992, 1996), to name just a few, show the systematic exploitation of women, and Bielby & Bielby (1999) and Dowd & Blyler (2002) reveal the suppression of ethnic minorities. All such findings as well as many in the domain of autoproduction have clear policy implications. What is more, the claim for the production perspective is that it is necessary to understanding culture and not that the perspective is sufficient for a full understanding. For this reason, numerous scholars interested in questions of power and exploitation have recommended using the production perspective in conjunction with other perspectives (Peterson 1976, Rosenblum 1978, Wolff 1999, DiMaggio 2000, Entman & Rojeck 2001, Edles 2002, Hesmondhalgh 2002, Schudson 2002).

## OPPORTUNITIES

A number of research opportunities have been noted above, but a major set of opportunities remains to be discussed. As David Hesmondhalgh (2002) notes, the production perspective has largely ignored the macro- or societal-level of analysis. According to Peterson (1979) this was initially done to dissociate the perspective from the macrocultural perspectives that focused on *Zeitgeist* and the tautological functionalist unity of societal values. Also, as DiMaggio (2000) notes, it was easiest to show the effects of production processes on symbols in specifically delimited institutional fields. When doing such institutional-level research, it was often convenient to take changes in law and technology as exogenous to the system under study, but, having established the utility of the production perspective, societal-level analysis provides the opportunity to see all six facets as part of a fully interdependent system and develop theoretically significant new lines of research (Ceruleo 1995).

Focusing on the societal level immediately brings into question the dependence of the six facets of production on the logics of corporate capitalism, the nation state, and democracy. For example, the interdependence between the number of competing music firms and the diversity of music produced was shown above to depend on the interplay among the six facets of production (Peterson 1990). By widening the focus of the production perspective from the institutional to the societal level, one is drawn to ask how the specific relationships between competition and diversity relate to two linked, centuries-long struggles, the one between competitive market capitalism and oligopolistic corporate capitalism and the other between capitalism and the democratic state. One might ask, for example, if the early twenty-first-century contest over the deregulation of media ownership in the United States is merely a contest between interest groups but, when seen more broadly, it is a battle between the needs of corporate capitalism and First Amendment rights where the nature of democracy is at stake.

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