CLASSIFICATION IN ART*

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A framework is proposed to analyze the relationships between social structure, patterns of artistic consumption and production, and the ways in which artistic genres are classified. This framework helps to integrate findings of consumption surveys and to explain the emergence of new artistic genres as a form of ritual classification. Societies' artistic classification systems vary along four dimensions: differentiation, hierarchy, universality, and boundary strength. These dimensions are affected by formal characteristics of social structure, the organization of educational systems, and internal relations among cultural dimensions. The dynamics of ritual classification are mediated according to whether artistic production is carried out through commercial, professional, or bureaucratic means.

INTRODUCTION

Classical sociology viewed societal cultures as totalities. For Weber, art mirrored a society's religious cosmology, and changes in art reflected changes in social organization (1958). Similarly, Durkheim (1915) viewed symbol systems as externalizations of the manner in which communities are organized into groups.

Thus early efforts to characterize systems of formal culture employed societal-level typologies that comprehended systems of artistic production and consumption. Sorokin (1957) believed that societies and their art cycled among ideational, idealistic, and sensate patterns. Some Marxist scholars have contrasted hegemonic cultural systems, wherein a dominant culture exerts symbolic control over subordinate classes, to an oppositional model, wherein cultural pluralism exercises an emancipatory function (Gramsci 1971; Williams 1982). Theorists of mass society (Kornhauser 1959; MacDonald 1957) distinguished among (*a*) folk culture, both created and consumed by members of a solidary community; (*b*) class culture, wherein production and consumption are stratified; and (*c*) mass culture, wherein taste is

homogenized by the centralization of artistic production in corporate hands (Mills 1963; Enzensberger 1972).

The virtue of mass-culture theory was that it called attention to the societal-level relationship between cultural consumption patterns and the structure of social relations. But much of its appeal was ideological, synthesizing liberal concerns about citizenship in a postfascist era, Marxist notions of alienation, and elitist contempt for popular culture. This ideological quality proved its undoing: by the mid-1970s, mass-culture theory had been decisively rebutted on both empirical and theoretical grounds (e.g., Lowenthal 1961; Gans 1975). Sociologists of culture demonstrated that cultural *consumption* patterns failed to conform to the theory's predictions (Wilensky 1964) and that considerably more diversity among artistic genres existed at the level of *production* than the theory held (DiMaggio 1977).

The critique of mass-culture theory opened the way to much progress in the study of artistic production and consumption. Researchers concerned with the latter collected and analyzed important new data sets, identified audiences for the high-culture arts, and described the cultural practices of a variety of demographically defined social segments (Wilensky 1964; DiMaggio and Useem 1978b; Frank and Greenberg 1983; Peterson 1983; Robinson 1983; Bourdieu 1984). Researchers concerned with the production of artistic goods (Hirsch 1972; Peterson 1977; Becker 1982) have provided ethnographic and historical accounts of cultural industries, interring the notion that artwork passively reflects social change or public tastes (Wolff 1981, pp. 31–32).

These two research streams have flowed independently, however. In discrediting mass-culture theory, sociologists failed to replace it with a more compelling framework for integrating research on artistic production and consump-

tion. Consumption studies have assumed that genre categories used in surveys reflect natural divisions and have taken as given commonsense classifications of cultural forms and activities. By contrast, production studies have defocalized demand and viewed individuals as content to choose among whatever genres producers offer. Neither consumption nor production studies have developed a systematic theory of genre development and differentiation.

This paper presents a new framework for addressing the classical concern with cultural systems as totalities. Its approach is consistent with Durkheim's focus on the relationship between social organization and systems of classification (Durkheim 1915; Douglas 1966; Schwartz 1981). Unlike Sorokin, Marxists, and mass-culture theorists, I do not regard cultural systems as classifiable into discrete types, but view them as varying along several analytically distinct dimensions.

The ambiguous notion of *genre* is central to this discussion. Literally, a genre is a "kind" or "type" of art. The notion of genre presumes that some aggregation principle enables observers to sort cultural products into categories. Formalists treat genres as comprising works that share *conventions of form or content* (Wright 1975). Art historians also define genres in terms of shared conventions, but focus as well on *social relations among producers* in identifying "schools" or "artistic movements" (Rosenberg 1964, chap. 21; 1972, chap. 13). Although students of popular culture and literary theorists of the "reader-response" school consider formal similarities, they acknowledge that genres are partially constituted by *the audiences that support them* (Fish 1980; Tompkins 1980; Radway 1984; Rosmarin 1985).

Efforts of humanists to define genre in terms of form or content similarities represent attempts to impose normative order on systems of classification that are socially constructed.[1] I use *genre* to refer to sets of artworks classified together on the basis of perceived similarities.[2] The challenge for the sociology of art is to understand the processes by which similarities are perceived and genres enacted. I suggest that genres represent socially constructed organizing principles that imbue artworks with significance

beyond their thematic content and are, in turn, responsive to structurally generated demand for cultural information and affiliation.[3]

More concretely, I consider processes by which genre distinctions are created, ritualized, and eroded, and processes by which tastes are produced as part of the sense-making and boundary-defining activities of social groups. The two sets of processes come together in what I call *artistic classification systems* (ACSs): the way that the work of artists is divided up both in the heads and habits of consumers *and* by the institutions that bound the production and distribution of separate genres. The ACS refers to the system of relations among genres and among their producers in a given collectivity. As such, an ACS reflects both the taste structure of a population and the structure of production and distribution of cultural goods.

Four dimensions of ACSs are salient. First, societies vary in the extent to which their art is *differentiated* into institutionally bounded genres. Second, they vary in the extent to which genres are ranked *hierarchically* by prestige. Third, systems differ in the extent to which classifications are *universal* or differ among subgroups of members. Finally, ACSs vary in the extent to which *boundaries* among genres *are ritualized*.

Because artistic classifications must be continually enacted in art worlds if they are to persist (Becker 1982), each dimension contains a cognitive *and* an organizational component. Highly differentiated ACSs are characterized by many identifiable genres and by finely segmented art worlds. In strongly hierarchical ACSs, genres are accorded varying prestige and unequal resources. Universal ACSs are characterized by homogeneity in the way individuals recognize and classify genres and by national systems of cultural distribution. Finally, strongly bounded ACSs are characterized by the clustering of tastes within ritual boundaries and by barriers that make it difficult for artists and enterprises to move among genres.

This set of four dimensions may be illuminated by bifurcating them to characterize the categories posited by mass-culture and Marxist typologies (see Table 1). For example, in complex societies folk cultural systems are

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[1] For an insightful discussion of the crisis in genre theory, see Williams (1977, pp. 180–85).

[2] By *art work* I refer to high and popular cultural products in the visual arts, the performing arts, and literature. The classification "art/nonart" is itself socially constructed and historically specific (Wolff 1983); however that classification has been relatively stable in the West for several centuries and in the rest of the world for most of this century. This zone of stability defines the scope of the arguments to be made below.

[3] If we imagine a matrix defined by persons on the vertical axis and artworks on the horizontal axis, with *l*s signifying relationships (knowledge about, like for, dislike of) between persons and artworks, genres consist of those sets of works which bear similar relations to the same sets of persons. The logic behind this imagery will be familiar to students of network analysis as one of "structural equivalence" (White et al. 1976; Burt 1980). It is hypothesized that perceptions of "clustering" of works into genres follow from and, by channeling attention, reinforce the clustering of tastes.

Table 1. Characteristics of Conventional Typologies of Societal Cultural Systems

	Mass-Culture Theory			Marxist	
	Folk	Class	Mass	Hegemonic	Pluralistic
D	High	High	Low	Low	High
H	Low	High	Low	High	Low
U	Low	High	High	High	High
R	High	High	Low	Low	Low

Notes: D = differentiation; H = hierarchicalization; U = universality; R = ritual potency (for inclusion and exclusion).

highly differentiated but nonuniversal, with contents that are ritually strong but by virtue of their isolation relatively nonhierarchical. By contrast, class-segmented cultural systems are differentiated, hierarchically ordered, and consist of components that are broadly recognized (universal) and ritually potent. Mass cultures are weakly differentiated, universal, ritually weak, and because nondifferentiated, relatively nonhierarchical. Whereas conventional typologies reduce societal cultures to limited types, this perspective maintains that systems are multidimensional. Even if one dichotomizes dimensions as in Table 1, the presence of eleven combinations that do not fit into conventional typologies demonstrates the limitations of categorical approaches. The dimensional perspective permits analysis of societal movements among these ideal types (e.g., folk, hegemonic, mass) as resulting from conjunctures of processes affecting each of the four dimensions independently.

Why is it necessary for sociologists to focus on the organization of artistic systems at the societal level rather than studying artistic consumption and production patterns separately? First, by studying consumption patterns in isolation, we fail to explain the menu from which "consumers" make their selections. Unless sociologists wish to forfeit the field to economics (e.g., Stigler and Becker 1977), we cannot afford to take artistic categories as given or to treat taste as exogenous. Second, by studying production systems without a theory of demand, we run the risk of implying that the production and distribution of art can be explained simply as an imposition upon consumers. Third, a focus on the dynamics of artistic classification can inform our approaches to such classic problems as the sources of artistic innovation and the degree to which art "reflects" its social milieu. Fourth, the divorce of consumption and production studies has led to an estrangement between the sociology of art and the study of social organization, and a marginalization of the former, that a more integrative position can help be bridge.

This approach departs from much other work in the sociology of culture in focusing on the production and consumption of artworks to the exclusion of their styles or contents. Given that no approach can do everything, several reasons recommend starting with the structure rather than the content of cultural systems. First, I focus on the ways that people use culture to make connections with one another. Artworks that have no explicit content (e.g., abstract art or instrumental music) may nonetheless serve as significant bases for interpersonal interaction and collective mobilization. Moreover, artworks lend themselves to multiple interpretations; their intended meanings may be sociologically less important than the ways in which they signify group affiliation.[4] Second, the structure of artistic classification systems is logically prior to their content in that opportunities for the emergence of new genres influence the degree to which new styles or themes can be developed. The framework developed below explains the creation of openings for thematic innovation but leaves to others the job of explaining the content or styles of genres that occupy these niches. Third, questions of style are independent of the structure of artistic classification systems insofar as works within the same genres may vary substantially in their thematic content.

I first propose an account of the social uses of taste that can order research findings on patterns of cultural participation. Second, I address the relationship between these uses and the emergence of genres as ritual classifications. Third, I move from specific genres to artistic classification systems, presenting formal hypotheses about determinants of differentiation, hierarchy, universality, and boundary strength of ACSs. Fourth, I describe three subordinate and competing principles of classification that mediate the articulation of demand and supply at the industry rather than the societal level. The last section notes some implications of this approach.

THE SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF TASTE

Douglas and Isherwood (1979, pp. 59–60) have argued that consumer goods represent a communication system that renders "visible and stable the categories of culture" and enables individuals to "make and maintain social relationships." The same is true of the arts, but with an important difference: material goods are physically present and visible, whereas cultural

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[4] Thus Denisoff and Levine (1971) and Robinson and Hirsch (1972) found that teenagers were unable to report correctly the content of protest and underground rock songs to which they listened; and Radway (1982) discovered that readers of romance novels interpret them in a very different manner than do the intellectuals who castigate that genre.

consumption (save for the purchase and display of paintings or sculpture) is invisible once it has occurred. This evanescent quality makes artistic experience, described and exploited in conversation, a portable and thus potent medium of interactional exchange.

Conversation is a negotiated ritual in the course of which participants must find topics that reflect their level of intimacy and to which each partner can legitimately contribute (Collins 1981; Romo 1986). Persons entering into conversation seek to "establish co-membership" by identifying groups to which they both belong, even when the goal of the interaction is instrumental (Erickson and Schultz 1982). If conversing strangers use linguistic variants "to probe for shared background knowledge" (Gumperz 1982, p. 72), the same is true, a fortiori, of the deployment of various conversational contents. Shared cultural interests are common contents of sociable talk. Consumption of art gives strangers something to talk about and facilitates the sociable intercourse necessary for acquaintanceships to ripen into friendships.[5]

As Douglas and Isherwood (1979, p. 12) write of goods, artistic tastes "are neutral, their uses are social; they can be used as fences or bridges." Some cultural consumption, notably of television, provides fodder for least-common-denominator talk, infusing conversation within local, socially oriented groups with time to spend on interaction for its own sake (Collins 1979, pp. 60–62; Fine 1979). By contrast, conversations about more arcane cultural forms — opera, minimalist art, breakdancing — enable individuals to place one another and serve as rituals of greater intensity. Conversations about scarce cultural goods bind partners who can reciprocate and identify as outsiders those who do not command the required codes (see, e.g., Fine 1983). Investors in specialized tastes join together in "the joy of sharing names" (Douglas and Isherwood 1979, p. 75).

Taste, then, is a form of ritual identification and a means of constructing social relations (and of knowing what relationships need not be constructed). It helps to establish networks of trusting relations that facilitate group mobilization and the attainment of such social rewards as desirable spouses and prestigious jobs (Collins 1975; DiMaggio and Mohr 1985). Symbols (goods or tastes) become increasingly important

to the organization of social life as the division of labor and the number of human contacts increases. As interaction moved beyond kin and neighborhood groups, physical property assumed increased importance as a status marker (Veblen 1967). When social worlds extend beyond the town to the metropolis and the nation, the home becomes less important as a focus for sociable interaction. Subjects of conversation supplant objects of display as bases of social evaluation.[6] This process is accompanied by the rise of meritocratic ideology and the substitution of "cultural capital" for direct inheritance in the mobility strategies of the upper middle class (Bourdieu 1977).

In advanced societies, the arts (high and popular) occupy a privileged position among identity-defining conversational currencies for several reasons, not least of which is their availability. Television provides a stock of common symbols for nearly everyone, and youth-oriented cultural forms pass easily across class and geographic boundaries. The high arts have become important status markers, for they are subject to few barriers of age, region, or gender, and are consecrated in school curricula. Consumption of high culture is associated with status throughout the industrialized world, in socialist societies as well as in the West (Gordon and Klopov 1975; DiMaggio and Useem 1978a). If there is a common cultural currency, the arts (supplemented by fashion, cuisine, and sport) constitute it.[7]

Implications for Findings of Studies of Taste

Viewing taste as an identity marker that facilitates interaction has consequences for the patterns of taste we expect to find in surveys of people's artistic interests and consumption. I suggest five propositions that follow from this view.

PROPOSITION 1. *High-cultural tastes or "cultural capital" assist in developing or reinforcing relations with high-status persons.*

Moreover, because weak ties to persons of

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[5] The social quality of the use of art in American society is reflected in the findings of Czikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981, p. 178), who report that "the most surprising feature of people's comments on the significance of paintings and sculpture was that intrinsic qualities of such objects were rarely mentioned. Instead, art was valued primarily because it recalled memories of events, family, and friendship."

[6] It is no accident that the emergence of rock and roll as the ritual language of adolescence coincided with increases in teenagers' access to automobiles, which brought them face to face with peers from beyond their schools and immediate communities.

[7] For a more detailed argument in support of this position, see DiMaggio and Mohr (1985, pp. 1236–37). Goods continue to play an important status-defining role, but I suspect that their role is weaker than that of taste because the social meanings adhering to specific goods may be more variable and less legitimate.

higher status lead to individual mobility (Lin et al. 1981), it follows that

> PROPOSITION 2. *Possession of "cultural capital" is related to positive outcomes in the status-achievement process.*

Indeed, a small but growing empirical literature supports these expectations. American high school students' interest in, and familiarity with, the high-culture arts is positively related to grades, to the number of conversations they have with adults about their futures, to educational attainment, and to the status of their future spouses (DiMaggio 1982c; DiMaggio and Mohr 1985). Roe (1984) found similar associations in Sweden betweeen taste for high culture and academic success.

If high culture facilitates mobility, popular culture provides the stuff of everyday sociability. Marsden and Reed (1983) analyzed a wide range of leisure activities and found that listening to popular music was linked closely to visiting friends, while high-cultural activities were associated with one another rather than with purely social activities.

Notably, research on cultural capital is not consistent with alternative accounts of the origin of taste. DiMaggio (1982c) found interest and participation in, but not knowledge about, high culture to be related to high grades, even with measured ability controlled. Studies in the United States (ibid.) and the Netherlands (Ganzeboom 1982) found that taste and participation cluster by genre prestige (high versus popular) rather than by artistic medium (visual arts, drama, literature), as they would if taste represented media-specific aptitudes or trained capacities. Finally, if participation in high culture reflects conspicuous consumption rather than social membership, we would expect it to be primarily a function of income. But studies have found that most effects of income on high-culture consumption disappear when educational attainment and occupational prestige are controlled (see, e.g., Ganzeboom 1982; Marsden and Reed 1983; Gruenberg 1983; Robinson 1985).

If taste were simply inherited or traditional, we might expect minorities to evince less interest in the European high-culture arts than whites. But with socioeconomic status controlled, interracial differences in high-art consumption are minimal (Robinson 1985). Hughes and Peterson (1983) identified an urban, middle-class black pattern of intense high-arts consumption and populist attitudes towards high culture, precisely what we would expect of an upwardly mobile group with few ties to elites through kinship or residential proximity, for whom cultural resources are correspondingly more important in the construction of social networks.

Similarly, DiMaggio and Mohr (1985) found particularly high levels of high-culture interest among white, working-class, high school boys who would become upwardly mobile; Ganzeboom (1982) reports unexpectedly high arts consumption among status-inconsistent Dutch respondents with high occupational prestige relative to their educational attainment.

A second empirical expectation deriving from the view that artistic tastes represent a form of social communication is that involvement with art is highest among those with the greatest need to convey cultural information.

> PROPOSITION 3. *Persons with wide-ranging networks develop "tastes" for the widest variety of cultural forms.*

Research on social networks has shown that socioeconomic status is positively related to their size, complexity, and diversity, and negatively related to their density and average tie strength (Fischer 1982; Campbell et al. 1986; Marsden 1987).

> PROPOSITION 4. *The number of genres that a person consumes is a function of his or her socioeconomic status.*

Indeed, a robust finding of studies of taste and cultural participation (Wilensky 1964; Robinson 1985) is the absence of sharp taste segmentation among socioeconomic strata, and the positive association of high social status not just with consumption of high culture but with nearly every kind of artistic participation. Other tastes (for movies, popular music, middlebrow art) are distributed similarly to tastes for high culture, but plateau at lower SES levels (DiMaggio and Useem 1978a). In other words, the well educated and persons of high occupational prestige do and like more of almost everything. The reason for this finding, so at odds with conventional notions about the isomorphism of taste and class (e.g., Gans 1975; Bourdieu 1984), is that wide-ranging networks require broad repertoires of taste.

By the same token, consumption studies invariably reveal sizable groups of cultural isolates who report enjoying, participating in, or consuming no cultural goods or activities besides television. Such respondents are predominantly low-income, blue-collar or unemployed, or aged: precisely those groups with a limited range of social contacts, for whom investments in culture are least likely to pay off (DiMaggio et al. 1978; Hughes and Peterson 1983).

It follows from this argument that cultural participation varies with changes in the salience of social information over the life course.

> PROPOSITION 5. *Other things being equal, persons involved in major life changes*

participate in more cultural forms than persons not so involved.

Swidler (1986) notes that culture is particularly vital for persons with "unsettled lives," as they create new networks after old ones are disrupted by marital separation or similar events.

Tastes and Role Structure

The puzzle remains that our cultural stereotypes of different social strata (the facility with which we make assumptions about the tastes of an Archie Bunker or a matron at a symphony matinee) are more vivid than the images portrayed by survey data on consumption. This discrepancy is partly artifactual: survey questions make fewer distinctions among cultural forms than do users of culture. Furthermore, cultural stereotypes achieve lives of their own in popular media, the "central bulletin boards on which the looks of social types get posted" (Gitlin 1984, p. 64). Nonetheless, tastes cluster less in reality than they do in our imaginations.

To understand this phenomenon, we must consider social-structural change. I have argued elsewhere (DiMaggio and Mohr 1985) that expansion of social range (technological advances in communications, the nationalization of elites, increased physical mobility) has altered the nature of status. Instead of residing in clearly bounded status groups (Weber 1968, pp. 926–40), most status cultures are located in diffuse networks, membership in which stems less from residence or kinship than from the ability to manipulate cultural symbols. Being a successful member of the middle class requires some mastery of prestigious status cultures; but it is abetted by an easy familiarity with cultures of occupation, of region, and of ethnicity as well. Just as bilingual students code-switch when they move from street to classroom (Gumperz 1982, pp. 38–99), so middle-class adults learn how to "culture-switch" as they move from milieu to milieu. Such individuals command a variety of tastes, as the surveys suggest, but—and here is the key to the puzzle—they deploy them selectively in different interactions and different contexts. (An upper-working-class father with a white-collar wife must know about sports and rock music at work, discuss politics and natural foods with his wife's friends, and instill an admiration of Brahms and Picasso in his daughter or son.)

Under such circumstances, social roles replace persons as the bearers of status cultures. When individuals occupy many roles and participate in several status cultures, consumption surveys portray little pattern but for the ubiquitous associations between SES and, first, taste for high culture and, second, the number of kinds of culture in which persons participate. Such findings are not inconsistent with much taste clustering within institutionalized roles, however. Where role systems are highly complex, variation in tastes may occur more within persons, as they perform diverse roles, than between them.

THE SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF GENRES AS RITUAL CLASSIFICATION

What does this view of the uses to which people put culture imply for a theory of artistic classification? Just as populations of persons can be partitioned into groups on the basis of the works of art they like, so populations of artworks can be partitioned into groups, or genres, on the basis of the persons who choose them. Genre classifications let consumers invest in specialized knowledge and permit artists to do their work. As Becker (1982) has demonstrated, artists working in kindred areas (and their audiences and the trades that serve them) form institutionalized "art worlds" with conventions that make production possible. The cost of developing conventions and maintaining support systems exceeds the resources of any one practitioner. Genre classifications socialize the infrastructure costs of artistic production.

Creating artistic genres requires substantial investments. Rarely do artists even collectively possess the necessary wherewithal to organize the genre's potential constituencies (both artists and audiences) into a self-conscious, institutionalized art world.

A familiar and powerful ritual classification is the distinction between high and popular culture.[8] In mid-nineteenth-century America, preachers, educators, and critics discerned important differences between the better and the baser kinds of art. But essays from this period possess an abstract flavor. Either the precise nature of the higher art is left to the reader's imagination, or quality criteria are said to reside in media (as when instrumental music is proclaimed intrinsically superior to song) or are imported from other discourses (as when good art is defined as that which embodies religious values and themes). The high/popular distinction lacked a social constituency with a collective project of bounding itself from other groups and an institutional means of segregating artists and audiences from practitioners and audiences of other cultural forms. Before the Civil War, serious art and entertainment mingled promiscuously (DiMaggio 1982a; Levine

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[8] On the contestable nature of this distinction, see Lowenthal (1961) and Gans (1975). For a more detailed account of the Boston case, see DiMaggio (1982a, 1982b).

1984). Not until they were separated in practice could they be distinguished clearly in theory.

During the two decades following the Civil War, the distinction between high and popular culture advanced further and faster in Boston than in any of its sister cities. A commercial elite, sons and daughters of merchant traders, were forming a social class with its own institutions. Threatened from without by upstate populists who sought to wrest control of Harvard and other patrician institutions, and from within, so they thought, by Irish immigrants and urban disorder (Story 1980), elements of this class created institutions that would give life to the classification high/popular. The process took forty years, beginning with the creation of stable nonprofit institutions (above all the Museum of Fine Art and the Boston Symphony Orchestra) and culminating in purges of "impure" art from the museum's collection and the orchestra's repertoire and in the construction of ritual and organizational boundaries separating artist from audience, culture from commerce, the tasteful from the tasteless.

The classification of art into the categories "high" and "popular" was carried out in other American cities as well. Where elites were fragmented, artistic genres remained more highly differentiated and weakly bounded for a longer time. New York elites, for example, were less successful than Boston's in reproducing their status intergenerationally and in controlling positions of influence (Jaher 1982, chaps. 2, 3).[9] Although New York's population was larger, wealthier, and included more artists than Boston's, the greater cohesion of Boston's upper class facilitated cultural entrepreneurship, while the size and fragmentation of New York's elite impeded it. New York's elite failed to unite around a single symphony orchestra until the merger of the New York Philharmonic Society with the New York Symphony in 1928—almost fifty years after financier Henry Lee Higginson's Boston Symphony Orchestra established control of Boston's musical life. Different elite segments backed different conductors, diluting the patrons' collective power relative to that of the city's professional musicians. (The Philharmonic, for example, remained a workers' cooperative until 1909.) Just as the old Knickerbocker elite, the Wall Street elite, and the emergent Jewish elite of the early twentieth century competed socially, so their favored orchestras competed financially for public favor. This competition led to product differentiation through distinctive repertoires, deflecting con-

sensus on the "classical" canon in New York musical circles, and to the watering of the "fine-arts" classification, as orchestras offered mixed programs to boost box-office receipts. Moreover, the segmentation of musical labor markets between "classical" and "popular" sectors, which Boston's Higginson effected when he offered extended contracts but forbid players to work in other ensembles, was delayed in New York, where competing patrons could neither offer sufficient security nor wield enough power to deter players from succumbing to the lure of the summer garden and the theater pit. Thus the cohesion of Boston's upper class was reflected in the early consolidation of its musical enterprise into high and popular segments, while the fragmentation of New York's elite was reproduced in the greater differentiation and weaker genre boundaries of that city's musical culture.

The high/popular classification is of special interest because of its enduring potency and because it was forged by the direct efforts of the status groups that employed it. More commonly, commercial interests serve as midwives of ritual classifications, helping to organize genres' social constituencies: art dealers and the French bourgeoisie in the Impressionist era (White and White 1965); publishers and middle-class women in the case of the novel (Watt 1957; Douglas 1977); record companies with age/class/race strata in early rock and new wave music. The organizing role has also been played by artists (e.g., the Beat Movement in literature, and some movements in modern art), or the state (e.g., public murals or military music).

Although the auspices under which genres are organized have important implications, the underlying dynamic in the creation of ritual classifications is the relationship between sets of artworks and the social groups who put them to use. In the next section, we consider this relationship at the societal level.

WHY ARTISTIC CLASSIFICATION SYSTEMS VARY

This section focuses on social-structural factors that influence demand for cultural information, the manner in which this demand is organized, and the way in which artistic works are classified into ritually meaningful genres. For each dimension of artistic classification (differentiation, hierarchy, universality, and boundary strength) I present several propositions (all ceteris paribus) that follow from the theory of taste and genre formation I have described. These propositions link the dimensions of ACSs to formal aspects of social structure (Blau 1977), to characteristics of formal educational systems, and to one another.

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[9] This and the next two paragraphs summarize DiMaggio (1985).

Differentiation

Cultural differentiation refers to the number of genres into which an ACS is divided. Ritually classified genres emerge from the interaction of producers with social constituencies that demand new forms of symbolic information. Blau (1986) found the number of orchestras, dance companies, and theatre groups, which tend to differentiate themselves by repertoire when they compete, to be linked to indices of SMSA population diversity. Similarly, Blau et al. (1985) suggest that a strong relationship between SMSA social inequality and the prevalence of artists in the labor force reflects an underlying association between social and cultural heterogeneity.

PROPOSITION A-1. *The greater the degree of social heterogeneity and status diversity in a social system, the more differentiated its ACS.*

Recall that the salience of taste as a symbol of group membership increases with the ratio of social contacts with strangers to social contacts with intimates.

PROPOSITION A-2. *The greater the range of social networks, the greater the level of genre differentiation.*

As noted in the second section, tastes cohere around roles as well as around persons.

PROPOSITION A-3. *The more complex a social system's role structure, the more differentiated its ACS.*

Because salient attributes of persons channel their social relations, role structures are less complex when such attributes are congruent, that is, where structural parameters are highly correlated (Blau 1977).

PROPOSITION A-4. *The greater the degree of structural consolidation, the less differentiated the ACS.*

Expanded access to higher education increases the extent to which persons are trained in artistic classification systems and the ease with which they appropriate new artistic genres (Bourdieu 1984). Educational expansion increases the pools of potential cultural entrepreneurs, mobilizable tastes (Collins 1979), and available artists.[10]

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[10] In the United States, the unprecedented expansion of higher education in the 1960s was followed by an 81 percent increase in the number of self-reported artists— from .75 to 1.04 percent of the civilian labor force— between 1970 and 1980 (Ziegler 1986). Over 80 percent of a census-based random sample of New England visual, performing, and literary artists possessed at least four years of college, and more than half in every artistic

PROPOSITION A-5. *The greater the degree of access to higher education, the more differentiated the ACS.*

Hierarchy

Systems of ritual classification vary in the degree to which genres are ordered hierarchically by prestige as opposed to perceived as different but of equal value. Vertical classifications convey a moral content that reflects credit onto the social constituencies of highly ranked genres (Schwartz 1981, chap. 4). The degree of hierarchy determines the value of cultural capital (command of culturally prestigious goods) and is related to the degree of concentration of cultural authority.

Cultural authority is more likely to be concentrated when distinct tastes map onto natural persons rather than onto social roles and when the taste structure is isomorphic with the structure of inequality. Such isomorphism is more likely to exist when status attributes are highly rather than weakly correlated.

PROPOSITION B-1. *The more consolidated are status parameters, the more hierarchical are ACSs.*

Hierarchical genre distinctions are most stable when resources are disproportiontely controlled by producers and distributors in the more prestigious genres. Such skewing of resources is most likely when levels of social inequality are high.

PROPOSITION B-2. *The greater the degree of social inequality the more hierarchical the ACS.*

Where status parameters are consolidated, social inequality is high and intergroup social interaction low (Blau 1977). To the extent that interaction requires the mutual validation of the legitimacy of differing tastes, high levels of intergroup social interaction tend to erode prestige differences among genres.

PROPOSITION B-3. *The more intergroup sociable interaction, the less hierarchical are classification systems.*

Formal educational systems vary in the degree to which they are technical as opposed to humanistic in focus. Humanistically oriented systems tend to emphasize transmission of familiarity with artistic canons regarded as

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discipline had at least some graduate education (Wassall et al. 1983). In a random sample of nonperforming artists who applied for fellowships in New York State, 95 percent had attended college and just under 60 percent had graduate training (Jeffri et al. 1987).

important for the socialization of persons into the status of citizen (Bourdieu 1977).

> PROPOSITION B-4. *The more humanistic and less technical the system of education, the more hierarchical the ACS.*

At the same time, the transmission of prestigious canons to many persons through formal education reduces the value of cultural capital by making it more readily available, and by endowing more persons with cultural authority.

> PROPOSITION B-5. *The greater the access to higher education, the less hierarchical the ACS.*

Educational systems, however, vary in the extent to which they are hierarchically differentiated (Karabel 1972), thus reinforcing rather than moderating inequalities in the possession of cultural capital.

> PROPOSITION B-6. *The more internally stratified the formal educational system, the more hierarchical the ACS.*

Cultural authority is more concentrated when there are fewer artistic categories among which it is dispersed and less competition among competing genres for resources and prestige.

> PROPOSITION B-7. *The more differentiated an ACS, the less hierarchical.*

Universality

Ritual classifications may be universally meaningful or restricted in salience to certain groups. The U.S. cultural classification system appears to be relatively universal. Hughes and Peterson (1983) found similar factor structures in separate analyses of the tastes of different demographically defined subsamples. A classification need not be widely cultivated to be universally understood. Although the audience for the high arts is primarily high status, such genres have a much broader ritual significance. Similarly, countercultural musical forms (acid rock in the 1960s, punk rock in the 1980s) evoke strong responses from detractors as well as aficionados.[11]

I have argued that social groups use distinctive forms of cultural expertise to define themselves and to recognize members and

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[11] The universality of classification systems is a function, first, of the degree to which proximity to a cultural domain is associated with finer discriminations among works in that domain, and second, of the extent to which different persons' classifications are overlapping (i.e., similar at higher levels of abstraction, whatever the degree of differentiation within less inclusive categories).

outsiders. The fewer the social groups in a system, the more simple and widely comprehended will be the ACS.

> PROPOSITION C-1. *The greater the social heterogeneity, the less universal any single system of artistic classification.*

Genre classifications are more likely to be universally salient if there is significant intergroup social contact. The less isolated are social groups, the greater the likelihood that key elements of status cultures will evoke wide response.

> PROPOSITION C-2. *The less consolidated the status parameters and the greater the degree of interaction among social groups, the greater the universality of a classification system.*

> PROPOSITION C-3. *The less social inequality, the greater the universality of a classification system.*

The extent to which a genre classification system is widely shared is related to the extent to which tastes are segmented among roles rather than among persons. Where individuals play roles that evoke different tastes, persons are more likely to be familiar with a wide range of genres.

> PROPOSITION C-4. *The more complex the role structure, the more universal the dominant system of classification.*

Genre classification systems are incorporated in the formal curricula of schools and universities, which also facilitate informal exchange of information about artistic genres.

> PROPOSITION C-5. *The more universal the access to formal education and the less differentiated the educational system, the more universal the system of cultural classification.*

The complexity of a genre classification system influences the degree to which it is widely understood. Where genres are few and strongly bounded, the classification system is more widely shared than where genres are more numerous and weakly bounded.

> PROPOSITION C-6. *The more differentiated the system of genre classification, the less universal.*

> PROPOSITION C-7: *The greater the ritual strength of cultural classifications, the more universal.*

Ritual Strength

Ritual classifications vary in the intensity with which boundaries are defended both in production (e.g., in the extent to which artists who cross boundaries are rejected by their audiences and peers) and in consumption (e.g., the degree of outrage evoked by the juxtaposition of distinct genres). Boundary strength of genre classifications is primarily a function of structural consolidation. Where persons occupy similar positions on all dimensions of status, genres are strongly classified. Thus, urban elites institutionalized the high/popular classification during a period in which family standing, wealth, occupational success, educational attainment, ethnicity, and political influence were uniquely congruent. Rock and roll emerged as the expressive form of poor, uneducated, rural white Southerners. Similarly, urban ghettoes have spawned a rich array of strongly classified genres, from electric blues to disco, from bebop to hip-hop. To cite another example, Laumann and House (1970, pp. 334–35) found that individuals who were of mixed ethnic/religious background and lacked strong political identifications were significantly less likely than others to respect stylistic boundaries in their choice of living room decor.

> PROPOSITION D-1. *The greater the structural consolidation, the stronger the boundary strength of ritual classifications.*

Although inequality is related to the degree of hierarchy in cultural classifications, inequality per se is not associated with boundary strength. Instead, boundary strength is related to "status diversity" (Blau 1977); the extent to which individuals are dispersed evenly over graduated status parameters, rather than clustering at separate points on those dimensions. Where status diversity is high, cultural status competition is likely to be individually oriented and based on a calculus of small differences; where inequality is substantial but status diversity low, cultural competition is more likely to entail collective mobilization around strongly bounded genres (DiMaggio 1985).

> PROPOSITION D-2. *The greater the status diversity (controlling for inequality), the more weakly bounded are genres.*

Boundaries among genres are also stronger when they represent boundaries among persons, that is, when cultural preferences vary between persons rather than within persons between roles.

> PROPOSITION D-3. *The more complex the role structure, the weaker the boundary strength of ritual classifications.*

Where genres are ordered by prestige, persons who have invested in information about prestigious styles have more at stake in the preservation of the cultural classification system.

> PROPOSITION D-4. *The more hierarchical the genre classification systems, the greater their ritual strength.*

For genre boundaries to be strongly defended, it is necessary that they be widely understood.

> PROPOSITION D-5. *The more universally classification systems are shared, the greater their ritual strength.*

From the propositions that differentiated systems are less universal and less hierarchical and that more universal and hierarchical classifications are more strongly bounded, Proposition D-6 follows.

> PROPOSITION D-6. *The more differentiated the classification system, the weaker the ritual strength of classification.*[12]

INDUSTRY-SPECIFIC PRINCIPLES OF CLASSIFICATION

Implicit in the propositions set out above is the simplifying assumption that ACSs reflect perfectly the demand for ritual classifications generated by social structure. But it would be misleading to stop here, for the impact of ritual classification on the organization of artwork is mediated by characteristics of the production systems within which art is produced and distributed. This section focuses on three mediating principles of classification that operate at the level of the cultural industry system (Hirsch 1972). One of these, *commercial classification,* is driven by efforts of culture producers in market systems to sell art for a profit, and tends to yield broader, more weakly framed genres than does ritual classification. A second, *professional classification,* results from artists' attempts to develop reputations and, under conditions common to Western democracies, produces narrower, less universal distinctions among genres. A third, *administrative classification,* stems from governmental regula-

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[12] Although these propositions have focused upon effects of social structure on ACSs, the relationship between them is probably reciprocal. Collins (1979, pp. 65–71) has argued that increased availability of cultural resources generates increases in the extent to which groups mobilize. Because symbolic resources permit individuals to communicate more easily, increases in the availability of symbolic goods (e.g., through greater access to formal education) fuel processes of group formation that boost demand for differentiated cultural forms.

tory activities and is variable in its consequences.

Commercial, professional, and bureaucratic processes differ from ritual processes in two fundamental ways. First, ritual classification responds to social-structurally generated consumer demand, whereas the other processes reflect factors that influence production. Second, ritual processes operate on the societal level, whereas the other processes vary in importance across art worlds and culture-producing industries. (For example, popular music producers depend upon commercial success more than do modern dance companies; visual artists are more autonomous than television script writers; radio programming is influenced more by government than is folk dance.) Thus, commercial, professional, and administrative classifications are subordinate to ritual processes and mediate the latter at the cultural-industry level.

Because new genres require the matching of social constituencies with systems of production, most bear the mark of two or more principles of classification. Ballet, for example, is at once a ritual classification for ballet-omanes, a commercial classification for performing-arts promoters, and an administrative classification for public agencies that fund the arts. Commercial classifications may be usurped by social groups for their own ritual purposes (as in the use of Western consumer goods as sacred objects in some simple societies or in the expropriation of advertising symbols as sacred objects by pop art in the 1960s). And proprietary culture industries usurp, defuse, and diffuse oppositional ritual classifications for commercial ends (Hebdige 1979, pp. 92–99).[13]

The discussion that follows is necessarily schematic and speculative. Propositions are testable at the level of industry systems or art worlds and can be generalized only by aggregation to the societal level (DiMaggio 1977).

Commercial Classification

Commercial classifications are boundaries imposed upon artworks by profit-seeking entrepreneurs and firms in market societies. Commercial classifications emerge out of processes by which producers segment markets for distinct clusters of artistic work and, with the aid of advertising and specialized market channels, create differing degrees of awareness of and access to genres

among different segments of the public (DiMaggio 1977). Under some circumstances, commercial classifications reinforce ritual classifications, as when entrepreneurs match genres to distinct status groups (for example, in the case of the ethnic press [Janowitz 1967] or musical presentations at neighborhood taverns [LeMaster 1975]) or when status groups appropriate a form of commercial culture as their own.

More often, however, commercial processes erode ritual classifications. Commercial producers seek large markets and economies of scale. By contrast, status groups try to monopolize symbolic goods for use in rituals of inclusion and differentiation (Bernstein 1973). Because artworks that sell to small percentages of large publics usually net more profit than art that appeals strongly to small sets of aficionados, commercial producers try to expand markets even at the risk of reducing the ritual value of the products they sell. The discrepancy between commercial and symbolic value creates an opposition between ritual and commercial principles of classification (see [Bourdieu 1983] and Weber [1968, p. 936] on competition between markets and status cultures).

This opposition is nicely illustrated by Peterson (1978) in his study of the urbanization of country music during the 1960s and early 1970s. Supporters of the ritual classification country/urban resisted the profanation of the genre's boundaries by the introduction of drums, brass, and reed instruments. But commercial considerations drove producers to seek "crossover" artists (performers and songwriters whose work could cross segmented audiences and market channels), weakening the classification "country music" in several respects. First, the audience broadened to include individuals with a wide range of musical tastes and social attributes. Second, the "sound" grew less easily distinguishable from that of such other genres as pop, middle of the road, rock, and easy listening. Third, country artists began to perform in a variety of genres (rock and pop as well as country). Finally, the music came to be distributed through broader, less exclusive market channels. The effect of such change was to reduce the information value of taste for country music, that is, to limit the inferences a listener can make about the social location of a speaker who is familiar with country music.[14]

In general, then, the stronger the influence of commercial classification, the less differentiated the ACS and the weaker the boundary strength

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[13] New wave rock, a professional classification of New York visual artists, was transplanted to England as a ritual classification of British working-class elements and resurfaced in the United States as a commercially classified genre for middle-class teenagers (Hebdige 1979, p. 27).

[14] Commercial influences reduce differentiation within high-culture industries, as well. DiMaggio and Stenberg (1985) report that increased dependence upon earned income reduced the heterogeneity of repertoires of U.S. resident theatres in the 1970s.

of genre classifications. The extent of such effects, however, depends upon three interacting factors. First, particularly strong ritual classifications may deter commercial entrepreneurs from attempting amalgamation. Second, material technologies of production may dictate broad classifications (Willis and Malm 1984) or, as in the case of small-batch production, permit more differentiated ones (Reitlinger 1961). Third, the structure of commercial cultural industries, especially the degree to which they are competitive or oligopolistic, may influence the degree of differentiation (Peterson and Berger 1975; Wakshlag and Adams 1983; Carroll 1985; Powell 1985; Gans 1986).

Professional Classification

Professional classifications emerge out of struggles among artists for status and material success. Professional classification is most prevalent where the artistic field is relatively autonomous: where artistic work is patronized outside the market by individuals and organizations that delegate monitoring and control to artists or functionaries in the artistic field (e.g., curators or critics).

Artists, like audiences, divide artistic work into meaningful categories, which assume a ritual significance within the artistic field that is all the more intense because the acceptance of artists' work is tied so closely to the success of the genres in which they work (Bourdieu 1983, p. 321). Competition leads artists to develop new styles to differentiate themselves from previous generations. Consequently, professional classification tends to generate highly differentiated but poorly institutionalized ACSs of modest boundary strength. The extent to which this occurs, however, depends upon the availability of the status of artist, the availability of markets for artwork, and the complexity and heterogeneity of social structure.

Where the status of artist is restricted and becoming an artist requires lengthy training (informal socialization in a master's atelier or formal schooling in university art departments) that few can obtain, artists are well socialized, competition among them is relatively weak, and professional classifications reflect or even lag behind ritual classifications. (Thus Becker [1982, chap. 9] notes the conservative effects of apprenticeships on traditional craft artists; and White and White [1965] describe the rigid genres of the French academic system.)

By contrast, where the status of artist is claimed by more persons than can occupy it successfully (as in the United States, where the number of artists has risen sharply as average salaries have declined [Ziegler 1986]), professional classifications multiply. Where elites are

highly differentiated and artistic production articulated to a market system, competition among artists yields highly differentiated classifications of only moderate ritual strength (see, e.g., Crane 1985). Where elites are cohesive and lay cultural competition weak, professional classification takes the form of rebellion against artistic institutions, as it did in the West during much of this century. Where elites are differentiated but markets weak, competition among artists yields highly differentiated classifications of little universality or ritual strength outside the artistic field, as seems to be the case for modern fine-arts music (Pleasants 1955).

This discussion has focused on the high arts because they are more strongly insulated from market processes than the popular arts and from ritual processes than the folk arts. Nonetheless, professional artistic conventions constrain innovation and differentiation in popular as well as high-art forms (Becker 1982, chap. 2). And when cultural markets are turbulent (e.g., popular music in the 1960s), commercial producers may delegate discretion to artists, who graft professional classifications onto commercial ones (Peterson and Berger 1971).

Administrative Classification

Administrative classifications are distinctions among genres created by the state. Such classification has three forms: classification of art ancillary to the performance of routine state functions, regulatory policies that influence artistic classification indirectly, and explicit classification in the administration of cultural policy.

Ancillary administrative classifications include distinctions between art and nonart, as when a state court (later reversed) ruled that trustees of an art museum could turn its resources to other uses because the collection was of too poor quality to be "real art" (Thompson 1986). For a time, the U.S. Supreme Court used a "redeeming-social-importance" standard to identify pornography, rendering the distinction between literature and smut a matter of judicial review (Davis 1983). When lofts in New York's Soho district were legally reserved for artists, city housing officials were required (in theory at least) to distinguish between artists and nonartists (Zukin 1982). Census officials make the same discrimination.

Regulatory classification occurs when regulatory policies affect ACSs in unanticipated ways. Griswold (1981) found that U.S. failure to sign the international copyright convention influenced the thematic breadth of nineteenth-century American novels. Federal Communications Commission regulations that impede the development of new media technologies constrain

cultural differentiation. Common-carrier regulations guaranteeing access to communication channels encourage it.

Public agencies that make grants to artists and art organizations set out *explicit* classifications of artistic work. Such programs are affected by political struggles among constituencies favoring different classification systems. When elites monopolize state power, administrative classifications reflect ritual classifications. Where, as in the United States, power is shared, administrative and ritual classifications diverge. The National Endowment for the Arts, for example, has reproduced both ritual classifications (in the distinction between serious art and entertainment) and professional classifications (in its discipline structure and panel system). The way the agency divides up the art world does not simply mirror ritual and professional classifications, however. For example, jazz and folk art appear among the serious arts that are the agency's concern; and industry lobbying won a new classification, "American musical theatre," recognized with its own program.[15] Administrative classification also occurs in arts curriculum development in public schools.

Does administrative classification have any intrinsic effect on ACSs? Two aspects of public bureaucracies are salient: administrators' preference for unambiguous "brightline" standards that permit documentable adherence to norms of procedural equity (Mashaw 1983), and the alleged resistance of bureaucratic regulations to change (Meyer 1982).[16] Slowly changing classifications based on brightline standards should generate strongly bounded genres that respond slowly to social-structural change.

In practice, administrative classification does not exert such effects where state control of culture is weak. First, most classification is ancillary or regulatory and thus inconsistent in its influence. Moreover, distinctions among artistic genres are not conducive to brightline standards unless they are embedded in preexisting ritual or professional classifications and in the physical or organizational segregation of producers. (An example from another cultural field is the division of university scientists into discipline-based departments, which encourages

government agencies that support science to reinforce strong discipline classifications [Useem 1976]).

CONCLUSIONS

Although this paper diverges from the traditional concern of the sociology of art with the social determinants of thematic content, its framework is relevant to those concerns and productively reframes some classical debates. Rather than ask whether artistic content "reflects" ideological change, we consider the structural conditions under which reflection is likely. (Hypothesis: Reflection is strongest when tastes cluster in groups of persons rather than in intersecting statuses or in roles.) Similarly, this perspective permits us to recast discussions of hegemony by considering the social-structural conditions under which resistance to hegemony is likely to be widespread. (Hypothesis: the reinterpretation of popular culture for oppositional ends [Gottdiener 1985] is likely to occur when commercial classification processes characteristic of oligopolistic production systems run up against consolidated status parameters, which generate pressures towards strongly bounded ritual classifications.)

As concern for the structure of taste pushes the sociology of culture toward questions of social organization, concern for the structure of genre classifications enables sociologists to join debates about contemporary cultural change. Much of the Western world has entered a period of cultural declassification—the unraveling and weakening of ritual classifications. Artistic classification systems are becoming more differentiated and less hierarchical, classifications weaker and less universal.[17] Artists revel in assaulting the limits of their forms, and critics in as disparate fields as pop music, painting, and literature bemoan aesthetic malaise and rampant eclecticism. Critics and sociologists alike have ascribed this perceived malaise to the cultural realm alone. As perceptive an observer as Daniel Bell (1976) has attributed the erosion of cultural boundaries to a "disjuncture of culture and social structure."

I suggest that the current situation, far from representing the disjuncture of culture and social structure, is a predictable result of their intimate relationship (see also Gans 1986). The erosion of cultural boundaries in the United States stems from a combination of factors: the transformation of local American upper classes into a national elite, anchored in organization rather

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[15] Where conflict is intense, administrative classification may crosscut ritual classification. Thus the Arts Endowment has classified all but the most prominent minority artists and presenters under "Expansion Arts," a quarantine status that permits funding but avoids explicit evaluation of the genres that disparate minority arts activities represent.

[16] Kay (1983) has argued that in nonmarket societies cost-push inflation yields explosive growth in subsidies, driving the state to use available ideological criteria to disqualify much artwork as ineligible for support.

[17] When Frank Zappa's compositions are performed or recorded by symphony orchestras in the United States, England, and France (Mantell 1984), can boundaries be more in question?

than community; increased influence of commercial principles of classification with the rise of the popular-culture industries; the emergence of relatively autonomous and highly competitive high-culture art worlds; and the growth of mass higher education and the modern state.

Although this paper does not offer an analysis of American culture or predict its future, its framework may be useful in that task. By focusing on the uses to which people put art, the organizational systems in which art is produced, and the systems of artistic classification that emerge out of the interaction of taste and production, we may rediscover the centrality of sociology to the study of art and of the study of culture to the central problems of sociology.

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