

THE COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF ORGANIZATIONAL FORMS: CONSIDERING FIELD AND ECOLOGICAL APPROACHES

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1. INTRODUCTION: COMPARISON GOES UNDERGROUND

The “first generation” (Lammers, 1978, p. 486) of comparative analysis of organizations in sociology (e.g., Blau, 1965; Stinchcombe, 1959) focused on the “nuts and bolts” of organizational structure as the key criterion with which to derive organizational typologies (Perrow, 1967; Pugh, Hickson, & Hinings, 1969). This initial cohort of analysts saw the intrinsic features – or “organizational attributes” (Blau, 1965, p. 326) – constitutive of the “technical core” of the organization, such as features related to the organization of the production process (Perrow, 1967) or the structure of allocation of discretion and authority (e.g., Etzioni, 1961), as the royal road to the development of a cogent approach to comparative analysis of organizations.

As has been noted by most observers of the field, organizational theory moved from a focus on the “innards” of the organization and from a

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concern with either establishing concomitant variation across generically defined organizational attributes (Blau, 1965) or toward the development of typologies based on the co-occurrence of certain typical structures across industries and institutional locations (Perrow, 1967) and toward a study of the crucial role played by the organizational environment during the 1970s and 1980s (Scott, 2001).¹ This paradigmatic shift had the effect of negating what was the key conceptual innovation that united the intellectual project the first generation of comparativists, which was their conception of organizations “as a class of *generic* phenomena, apart from their institutional environment” (Lammers, 1978, p. 487). This led to the waning of an exclusive focus on features of internal organizational structure as definitional of organizational “types.” This also resulted in a relative abandonment of the explicit comparative projects characteristic of this first generation of organizational analysis in favor of population or field-level studies in which the comparative focus became secondary.

The emergence of institutional (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977) and ecological (Hannan & Freeman, 1977) theories took either the institutional field or the organizational population as the unit of analysis. Although this shift of focus does not in principle dictate a defocalizing of comparison,² in practice it means that most research done under this umbrella can only focus on the dynamics of a single population or institutional field at a time. Thus, more implicit types of comparative analysis of the same population or field across time replace the cross-sectional comparison of organizational types at a single moment in time.³ This resulted in the replacement of static variance-explained cross-sectional models for dynamic process models designed to explain change or the genesis of systematic phenomena that recur across time, such as episodes of organizational founding and disbanding (Tuma & Hannan, 1984).

In addition, the key mechanism isolated by institutional theory – the diffusion of organizational forms and practices through “mimetic isomorphism” – explicitly discourages a comparative focus. The key phenomenon to be explained becomes the *lack* of observed diversity among organizations in institutional fields (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Powell, 1991). Without a direct focus on diversity there can be no basis for comparative analysis (Hannan & Freeman, 1986). In this respect, organizational ecology remains somewhat unique among the second-generation theories of organization that took the environment as their focus. Although influenced by institutional concerns with the cognitive legitimation of organizational forms organizational ecology (Hannan & Freeman, 1989), it also retained an interest in the first-generation concern with explaining

the origins and reproduction of diversity in organizational populations (Hannan & Freeman, 1986).

The ecological concern with the origins and reproduction of distinct organizational forms led to the development of “field-level” theories not only of “isomorphism” but also of the social, technological (Tushman & Anderson, 1986), and cultural segregation mechanisms that systematically produce and reproduce enduring form diversity in organizational populations (Hannan & Freeman, 1986). Out of the various theory fragments of organizational ecology, the most successful empirical program of research that emerged from this concern with form-segregation processes is Carroll’s (1985) location-based model of resource-partitioning (Swaminathan, 1998). In this model, mature industries are conceptualized as embedded in a dual resource-space. Part of the resources space consists of a resource-rich region (the “market center”) conducive to large-scale production and economies of scale (Peli & Nooteboom, 1999). The market center is separated from a relatively less resource-rich region more conducive to small-scale production and the development of organizational forms that differ in identity, technology, and the routine arrangement of tasks from those that occupy the market center. In this regard, theories of form-segregation necessarily retain the analytic requirement to engage in some form of typologizing of organizational structures and are thus conducive to comparative analysis.

More recent theoretical developments in organizational ecology (e.g., Hannan, Pólos, & Carroll, 2007) have brought a renewed concern with the development of a more rigorous conceptualization of organizational forms in particular and “social forms” in general (Hannan et al., 2002). These newly reformulated theoretical strands are also distinctive in focusing on the dynamics of origin and transformation of the “social codes” that define those forms. This line of thinking can be thought of as having recovered the relevance of the first generation’s concern with establishing the organization-level features that can best serve to ground the comparative analysis (e.g., social codes and feature values definitional of form-identities).⁴ A particular advantage of moving the discussion toward codes and the audiences that define and enforce them, is the fact that in this respect recent ecological thinking has moved beyond the somewhat static “realism” of the first generation of comparativists who sought to delineate typologies based on what was perceived as enduring, non-negotiable features of organizations. Ecological theories of social forms, instead define the features that make organizations distinct from another as social constructed cognitive schemes used by interested audiences to categorize and thus draw distinctions in the organizational landscape. This means that there is now

an opportunity to integrate the comparative analysis of organizational forms with cognate lines of thinking in the sociology of culture.

I would argue that the project comparative analysis of organizations is now inseparable from the overall project of developing a general theory of the genesis and dynamics of social forms (Pólos, Hannan, & Carroll, 2002). Accordingly, a comparative, “social constructionist” analysis of organizational forms – and the processes through which form-diversity is created and sustained – replaces the earlier project based on developing organizational types based on “realist” (and usually taken as exogenous) criteria associated with technology, production processes, and authority structures. The “social codes” that serve to define form-identities in the eyes a given set of interested audience members are conceived as purely “intensional” (i.e., semantically constituted) entities.⁵

The key implication of this analytical shift is that the material, technological, and power-laden aspects of organizations are not of a different fundamental character as the cultural constructed external “formal structures” that organizations present to interested constituencies in the environment. This transcends the problematic distinction of early institutional theory between an exogenous, functionally determined “technical core,” and a culturally constituted “formal structure” (Baron, 2004; Dobbin, 1994). This project also becomes tightly linked to recent theory and research on the role of “audiences” in defining, selecting, and enforcing allegiance to those codes (Zuckerman, 1999). This break with the residual allegiance to a view of technology and task structure as exogenous non-cultural material prevalent in first-generation styles of analysis carries important analytical implications (Dobbin, 1994). Thus, the attempt to develop a coherent comparative analysis of organizational forms becomes coextensive with the broader project of the sociology of culture in general and the production of meanings within and about organizations in organizational fields.

This theoretical reorientation of the field carries with it many opportunities as well as its possible share of pitfalls. In this chapter, I attempt to examine how recent developments in the conceptualization of social forms organizational theory can be informed by a long-standing tradition in cultural sociology (which draws from both French and American influences) concerned with the study of “fields of cultural production,” and which served as one of the primary inspirations for early statements of the institutional approach (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). I argue that there has been an unacknowledged convergence in terms of interests and analytical constructs in cultural sociology and organizational theory that deserves to be evaluated and developed. I will argue that this convergence has occurred

on four primary registers: (1) proposals as to what the primary unit of analysis and comparison should be; (2) the conceptualization of the broad types of organizational structures and production strategies that we should expect to observe as a result of location-based processes of form-segregation; (3) the significance of alternative regimes of valuation fostered and sustaining by interested constituencies in sharpening divisions in the organizational landscape; and (4) conceptual models of the relationship of social position and patterns of taste among consumer-audiences.

In what follows, I will note that though there has certainly been a great share of common ground developed independently (once the job of conceptual translation is done), field and production approaches in the sociology of culture have a distinctive set of emphases that I believe can provide some analytical structure to outstanding limitations in the developing ecological approach to the study of social forms.

2. FIELDS AND WORLDS AS THE BASIC UNIT OF ANALYSIS

Probably the most clear (and so far under-appreciated) source of convergence between production and field strategies and ecological approaches is in considering the “field,” “world,” or “domains” as a common unit of analysis. This is a somewhat remarkable development, since these lines of research have proceeded somewhat independently from one another, and yet have largely come to an agreement as to what the adequate unit of observation is, and more importantly have come to be defined in largely similar ways. Hannan et al. (2007, p. 34) defined a domain as “culturally bounded slices of the social world, such as agriculture, art, finance, medicine and sport” keyed around a focal type of product and an associated collection of producers. They note the clear family resemblance between this definition of domain and Howard Becker’s definition of a world as “... all of those people and organizations whose activity is necessary to produce the kind of events and objects which that world characteristically produces” (Becker, 1976, p. 703). Bourdieu construct of fields is essentially convergent with that of “domain” and “world.” As Benson (1999, p. 464) notes, “Bourdieu sees society as differentiated into a number of semiautonomous fields (e.g., fields of politics, economics, religion, and cultural production) governed by their own “rules of the game” and offering their own particular economy of exchange and reward.”

The field construct has of course always been part of second-generation institutional theories, which were inspired by Bourdieu's work from the start (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Martin, 2003).

Settling on the world or the field as the unit of analysis carries many analytic advantages. The most important of which is the reconceptualization of the organizational environment as primarily composed of audiences of which consumers of the products of organizational activity are only one subset. This puts the analytical focus on the actors that claim *membership* within the field and which are also in charge of setting its boundaries (e.g., sorting outsiders from insiders). This boundary setting process is important because it is precisely these largely symbolic demarcations that are responsible for producing the discontinuities in the social structure that lead to form-segregation, and thus to the development of alternative ways to organize the production of material and symbolic goods. This is because audiences not only participate in organizational worlds as consumers, but are also in charge of "policing" and monitoring conformity of producers with the relevant social-codes definitional of organizational forms (Zuckerman, 1999). They are the agents in charge in reproducing differences and of producing discontinuities in the organizational landscape. I will argue below that ecological analyses of social forms and field theories of cultural production provide complementary ways to theorize the role of "audiences" (e.g., critics, gatekeepers, enthusiasts, and consumers) as key players in producing cultural innovation and institutional change.

The concern with the specific role of audiences as "gatekeepers" of the social codes organizational forms has been a recent development in organizational theory (Carroll & Swaminathan, 2000; Hannan et al., 2007; Hsu & Hannan, 2005; Pólos et al., 2002). This has been spurred by Zuckerman's (1999) demonstration of the interdependence between producers, audiences and specialized evaluation mechanisms. Zuckerman shows that producers who crossed categorical boundaries and thus violated audience expectations were punished with devaluation by the relevant gatekeepers. As we will see later, a focus on the interaction between producers and audiences has always been a part of both the production of culture and the field perspectives especially in the crucial role that "production for producers and critics" versus "production for non-producer consumers" across organizational form types and the difference in incentive, monitoring, and evaluation systems that follow from that (Bourdieu, 1993; Crane, 1976; Hirsch, 1972). This analytical distinction is essentially the same as the one between "insider versus outsider" audience members in the most recent formulation of the ecological approach (Hannan et al., 2007).

3. FIELD THEORY VERSUS ECOLOGICAL ACCOUNT OF FORM-SEGREGATION

Theory fragments in organizational ecology concerned with the emergence of form-segregation in organizational populations usually point to some process of niche-based segregation or “partitioning” (Carroll, 1985; Carroll & Swaminathan, 2000). Most organizational populations are seen as tending toward a “generalist-specialist” (Carroll, 1985) or more recently “center-periphery” (Hannan et al., 2007) differentiation. Center organizations tend to be large, technology-intensive, mass-production organizations, which put out products designed to reach as broad of an audience as possible (thus targeting the “modal” consumer). Organizations near the periphery of the niche on the other hand specialize in reaching smaller (but sometimes more upscale and thus exclusive audiences) which come to expect a product that is customized to their localized tastes and expectations. Partitioning in mature industries is sustained by the inability of center and near-center producers to capture peripheral niches, as these producers lack the skill, credibility, and perceived “authenticity” to craft a product that can appeal to expert and “insider” audiences that usually occupy the periphery of the niche (Carroll & Swaminathan, 2000).

Surprisingly, Pierre Bourdieu’s (1980, 1983, 1985, 1993) field theory of culture production and Crane’s (1976) production-inspired analysis of the commonalities and differences of the reward systems prevalent in science, art, and religion rely on an account of form-segregation and partitioning dynamics that is very similar to that deployed by organizational theorists of social forms (Pólos et al., 2002). In essence, Bourdieu argues that participants within mature symbol-production fields are forced to differentiate themselves largely by adopting either of two divergent output strategies: restricted and large-scale production. This classification is essentially the same as Crane’s differentiation between independent and hetero-cultural reward systems, and converges nicely with the characteristics and orientations of center and peripheral producers (Carroll & Swaminathan, 2000; Swaminathan, 2001).

The field and production formulation of this distinction, however, offers a more self-conscious attempt to develop this difference as a framework for the comparative analysis of organizational forms (Crane, 1976).⁶ It is also concerned with explicitly outlining the social and symbolic *mechanisms* that produce segregation and boundaries in the organizational landscape. Attention to these more meso-level mechanisms is sometimes obscured by the propensity to take a top-down view of the process on the part of

ecologists, in spite of the fact that recent attempts to introduce the role of interested audiences into the theory have done much to mitigate this limitation.

According to Bourdieu (1983), “restricted” production is characterized by the fact that the intended audience is primarily composed of other producers and expert insider audiences. Producers presume that the potential receivers of the cultural object are equipped with the necessary – usually socially scarce and ritually policed – interpretative skills and cognitive dispositions to properly “decode” the object (Bourdieu, 1983). This type of production is characterized by institutional conditions that encourage little or no symbolic demarcation between producers and their audiences. This is mostly because members of the audience are expected to (primarily) be fellow producers-peers. However, the symbolic demarcations between members of the social world and all outsiders tend to be strong, and constantly renewed and demarcated.

The dominant “reward system” among producers in restricted production worlds is best characterized – following Crane as independent with cultural innovations being produced “... for an audience of fellow innovators. Innovators themselves set cognitive and technical norms and allocated symbolic and material rewards” (Crane, 1976, p. 721). In Bourdieu’s (1993) terms restricted production fields enjoy relative autonomy. Members of restricted production subfields draw robust ritual boundaries between themselves and members of subfields that engage a broader swath of consumers in ways that are more consonant with production for the market (DiMaggio, 1987). Fields of restricted production – such as “avant garde” artworlds (Crane, 1989) or traditional scientific communities (Crane, 1976) are distinguished by their high degrees of theorization (Strang & Meyer, 1993) and symbolic elaboration regarding the technique, process, and the resulting features of the cultural objects produced. In fields of restricted production, there exist pressing concerns regarding how that cultural object “fits in” with the extant historical network of valued cultural objects within the audience segment composed mainly of other producers, evaluators, and committed enthusiasts. Bourdieu is in this respect in complete agreement with Becker, who notes that a core concern of artworlds is precisely to constantly determine who fits in as an artist (or what fits in as “art”) and what is to be excluded from this definition (Becker, 1974).

In terms of the routine evaluation of products and producers and in terms of the allocation of status, restricted production field represent an “inversion” (Bourdieu, 1983) of the logic dominant in fields governed by “mass production” standards. These fields are invariably characterized by

the devaluing of material and economic capital (and economic indicators of success, such as mass appeal) in favor of more ethereal forms of cultural and symbolic (reputational) capital – “the economic world reversed” in Bourdieu’s (1983) terms. Restricted production fields are thus concerned mainly with “authenticity” and symbolic worth over economic profitability (Baron, 2004; Carroll & Swaminathan, 2000; Peterson, 2004). For those organizations embedded in the restricted production field, the objects and performances that are produced therein come to be primarily valued due to their “uniqueness” as defined by insider audiences and specialized gatekeepers along with conformity to the internally generated (i.e., producer-devised and producer-controlled) criteria of value within the field in question. Cultural products emanating from restricted production subfields are in this manner protected from being judged in terms of more generalized and field-exogenous criteria such as profitability or “practical” usefulness (Benson, 1999). This serves to segregate standards of value and categorical distinctions used in restricted production fields from those used in the society at large, thus increasing their “resonance” and “distinctiveness” (Baron, 2004; Hsu & Hannan, 2005).

The standards of value, which reign in large-scale production fields are more likely to be isomorphic with the exogenous environment (where principles of “usefulness,” practicality and profitability make objects valuable). The predominant reward system in large-scale production is heterocultural, displaying “the supremacy of economic rewards over symbolic rewards” (Crane, 1976, p. 722). Large-scale producers are concerned instead with the manufacturing of cultural objects for general consumption by audiences who are expected to be external to the field and not for restricted consumption by a relatively small cadre of “insiders.” In this sense, large-scale production is mass production for the market and is thus dominated by the logic of profitability, scale advantages in production, and increasing market share. This is what Bourdieu (1993) refers to as the “heteronomy” which chronically confronts those cultural producers who are oriented toward the market.

In large-scale production, we find more bureaucratic and managerial restriction on artistic autonomy and thus relatively less emphasis on innovation for innovation’s sake (DiMaggio, 1977). Rather than creators controlling production and reward standards, “entrepreneurs and bureaucrats set norms for innovative work, consumers allocate material rewards and entrepreneurs of bureaucrats allocate material rewards” (Crane, 1976, p. 722). The most important way in which large-scale production differs from restricted production is connected to the differing stances that

producers in the former production regime take with respect to audiences (Hannan et al., 2007; Hsu & Hannan, 2005). In particular, I refer to the fact that in large-scale production primarily non-producers and non-enthusiasts become the primary intended audiences for the product and not the fact that the logic of mass-market production for profit is dominant (Bourdieu, 1983).

In the substantive context of artworlds and fields of cultural production, this is an important distinction, insofar as artists who engage in restricted production gain field-specific reputational capital allocated by fellow producers and high-status evaluators according to standards that are defined by recognized peers and other insider-audience members and gatekeepers. Both Becker and Bourdieu agree that it is the relative autonomy of actors in the particular field of activity in question to develop standards that determine the value of their activity that signals the key difference between autonomous “art” and other forms of cultural production. In Becker’s view, non-artistic forms of production – which he refers to as “craft” – whether it takes place in the economic or private (not for profit) realm, is characterized by the fact that for the activity in question – in Becker’s example the case of the serving of meals at a restaurant or a private gathering,

[u]tility is measured by a standard which lies *outside* the world that is or might have been constructed around the activity itself. For there is a world of haute cuisine and etiquette which treats enjoyment of food and its service as *ends in themselves*, the measurement of utility referring to standards developed and accepted by knowledgeable participants in that world. (Becker, 1978, p. 864, italics added)

Thus, large-scale production is closer to the “craft” (although most large-scale production is of course technology intensive and favors mechanization and economies of scale) pole of the Becker’s (1978) art/craft continuum, whereas restricted production is closer to the “art” end of the dimension. In large-scale production, there is no expectation that the potential consumer has specialized (or socially scarce) dispositions and abilities to decode the cultural object in question. This feeds back into the cultural production process, resulting in producers being pressured and coaxed into by patrons and industry managers (DiMaggio, 1977) into crafting cultural objects devoid of hard-to-decode features. These are products capable of being appreciated and consumed by the “modal” individual (Carroll, 1985; Carroll & Swaminathan, 2000). This is consonant with the ecological observation that organizations which are able to gain control of the “market center” are able to reap advantages from economies of scale by

producing largely homogenous products (Carroll, 1985; Hannan et al., 2007, p. 211).

Because restricted production is production primarily for other producers and select audience enthusiasts, the social distance between producers and consumers is smaller. This explains why specialist organizations appear to have an informational (i.e., “learning”) advantage in crafting products that most effectively conform to the taste expectations of their (smaller) audiences (Bourdieu, 1993; Swaminathan, 2001). In field and production theories, this “learning” and “informational” advantage is not seen as paramount in explaining the advantages that peripheral organizations have over center and near-center organizations. Instead, the analytic focus is on the fact that cultural objects assembled under a large-scale production regime are subject to criteria of evaluation that are external to those devised by members of the subfield composed of those producers whose primary orientation is toward other producers.⁷ These standards tend to be centered on such “universal” criteria of success as sales volume and profitability and not on “insiders” standards related to autonomously derived measures of aesthetic worth and merit.

This has repercussions whenever there is an attempt to compare cultural goods or performances produced within these two contrasting regimes. When the distinction has been symbolically elaborated, the products produced in these diverging circumstances may in fact be “incommensurable.” Products crafted under a large-scale production regime have more difficulty being acknowledged as valuable or worthy of consideration by members of the field of restricted production. The reason for this is that such commonly used commensuration rods and criteria of success as sales volume or market share are rejected within the restricted production field by default. This means that products crafted by center and near-center organization lack a coherent place within the internal symbolic reputation system generated by restricted producers and allocated by selected gatekeepers and specialized judges of quality within the restricted production field (Bourdieu, 1993). That is, they are “worthless” given internally generated standards of value. By the same token, given their relatively modest success according to market-based criteria products crafted in the restricted production subfield may be judged as “failures” even if they are “critical darlings” within the restricted production subfield.

Thus, from within the autonomous standards set by restricted producers mass produced products are invariably subject to devaluation ritual degradation (Garfinkel, 1956). This devaluation is in many cases orthogonal to the objective “quality” of the product. For instance, Carroll and

Swaminathan (2000) find that large beer mass producers find trouble entering the restricted field of microbrew production, even when their products are objectively difficult to distinguish from established microbrews. This suggests that symbolic boundaries drawn from the periphery toward the market center may be hard to eradicate and are not reducible to technological discontinuities or learning differences among different organizations. When the partition between large-scale and restricted production is consolidated, the mere fact of having been crafted with an eye toward mass distribution and having been intended (as perceived by critical evaluators) to appeal to the market center is sufficient grounds for devaluation and rejection by peripheral actors.

However, even though the boundaries between large-scale and restricted production are usually of considerable ritual strength and symbolic import there is always intercourse and some degree of leakage between the two subfields. This can happen due to the fact that producers originating in restricted production move into large-scale production (being tempted by the “siren’s song” of commercial success). We may also observe large-scale producers attempting to engage in some form of restricted production (e.g., major movie studios entering the independent film market). Sometimes producers may engage in both production strategies simultaneously, a clear case of what has recently been referred to as “category-spanning” (Hsu & Hannan, 2005). This sets off an implicit need for specialized agents in charge of determining which products are worthy of consideration among insider audiences and experts and which ones should be rejected outright. To deal with this structurally induced demand for symbolic demarcation, restricted production fields open the opportunity for insiders in charge of ascertaining the “place” of certain cultural objects within the historical accounts relevant to the field, and gatekeepers in charge of policing boundaries (usually recruited from the pool of non-producer audience enthusiasts).

These gatekeepers and specialized evaluators are in charge of rationing access to the reputational resources that are desired by members of the field (i.e., journal editors, gallery curators; see White and White (1993) and Bourdieu (1987) for historical accounts of the emergence of this institutionalized valuation system in 19th century art). They attempt to make sure that “commercial” producers are not able to usurp the symbolic rewards that should be exclusively set aside for those producers dedicated to the non-commercial values of the restricted production subfield. Critical gatekeepers and other expert insider audience members are decisive in sustaining discontinuities in the organizational landscape, both by ensuring that restricted producers are punished with ritual devaluation when they

attempt to enter the market center, and by making it difficult for center organizations to gain acceptance within the restricted production artworld.

Music historian William Weber (1977) sees the entire division between serious and popular music which emerged in mid-19th century Europe (and which is fully institutionalized today) as being largely due to the action of a set of insider audience members which advocated for the erection of this boundary where little previous differentiation had existed:

A key element in the public was particularly responsible for the change. During the late eighteenth century there had emerged . . . a corps of highly trained, sometimes semi-professional listeners who poured their energies into advocating the music they regarded as the bastion of serious music culture. They learned the entire classical repertoire, wrote about it for magazines and newspapers, and went unfailingly to orchestral and chamber-music concerts, often in leadership capacities. While during the early decades of the century their activities had an old-fashioned and rather esoteric air, at mid-century a new generation of accomplished listeners arrived which knew how to speak persuasively to the larger public. Most important of all, they respected true professional standards of performance as their predecessors had not. After 1850 they became the dominant force among musical amateurs and shaped concert life to their model. These connoisseurs did not put up with any chatter in the concert hall . . . Two new worlds of present-oriented popular music now appeared as a counterpoise against the hardening conservatism of classical concert life. Operetta halls were one leading scene; the song fests at Parisian cafes and London music halls were another. The latter two, in fact, constituted early forms of the modern nightclub. By 1870 one can indeed say that the modern categories of popular and classical music had come into place. (Weber, 1977, pp. 19–20)

4. AUDIENCES AND OPPOSITIONAL STANDARDS OF EVALUATION

4.1. Hedonic and Transcendent Conceptions of Value

It is clear from the discussion so far, that field theories of production require a theory of divergent conceptions of the value and worth. Podolny and Hill-Popper (2004) have noted how the concept of value has played a rather attenuated role in the scientific study of organizations in particular and social theory in general. They introduce a very useful distinction between what they call “hedonic” and “transcendent” conceptions of value. Hedonic conceptions of value are those that have “the strongest affinity with the prevailing view of markets.” That is they are keyed toward monetary and pecuniary ideas of worth, easily translatable into “liquid” monetary equivalents (Carruthers & Stinchcombe, 1999). Transcendent conceptions of value on the other hand are purposefully defined as different (and sometimes superior to)

the crass reduction of worth into commensurable market terms. Instead “objects enter into consumer’s assessment . . . primarily for the purpose of enhancing the understanding of the meaning of the focal work and not for the purpose of developing a common standard against which multiple works may be compared” (Podolny & Hill-Popper, 2004, p. 95).

Podolny and Hill-Popper conceive of the hedonic-transcendent binary as organizing consumer choices in a wide variety of organizational fields, and thus as having a potentially critical impact in our understanding of the dynamic of organizational populations. I argue that culture production and field approaches are distinctive because just as Podolny and Hill-Popper (2004) they make conception of values – and in Bourdieu’s (1993) rendering, conflict over the dominant value definition – in symbol-producing “worlds” central to our understanding of key processes of organizational form genesis and segregation.

4.2. Clashing Codes versus Clashing Valuation Standards

According to field and production approaches, product “appeal” for both “insider” and “outsider” audiences in mature industries is largely driven by the extent to which products and producer intentions can be positioned on some sort of evaluative dimension (e.g., in the arts this would be “commercial” versus “for its own sake”). This is in contrast with the largely cognitive account given in recent ecological of the origins of product appeal (e.g., Hsu & Hannan, 2005). In terms of Parsons and Shils’ (1951) original analytical differentiation, although the account of the origins of product appeal in organizational ecology concentrates on the cognitive orientations of actors toward products, field approaches emphasize the normative (and sometimes expressive) orientation.

For instance, Hannan et al. (2007) propose that the appeal of a product decreases when a producer is perceived to have (fuzzy) membership more than one category. The reason for this is that “membership in multiple (nonnested) categories likely confuses the audience and makes a producer appear to fit poorly to any of the schemata that an agent applies to the categories” (Hannan et al., 2007, p. 108).⁸ The field perspective offers a different (and more specific) account of the devaluation process, which acknowledges that some form of cognitive boundary spanning is necessary but not sufficient for devaluation to occur.

The ecological approach relies on a purely cognitive mechanism linked to *disagreement* or *dissensus* generated by inability to attach unambiguous

feature values to the category labels associated with a given producer (Hannan et al., 2007). Both field and ecological approaches agree that devaluation happens as a result of category straddling, but differ in their detailed conceptualizations as to the underlying mechanism. From the field perspective, disagreement brought about as a result of an inability to place a given producer securely in a categorical slot is necessary but not sufficient to produce devaluation. Instead, devaluation is likely to occur when gate-keeping audiences perceive an attempt by a producer to claim simultaneous membership in two *already oppositionally evaluated* production styles (e.g., the large-scale and restricted production fields). This ambiguous placement has to be interpreted as an attempt to appeal to both expert-insiders and outsider mass audiences.

This means that empirically, devaluation will be more likely to be observed either when (1) mass producers attempt to claim features values that have been developed in restricted production subfields (e.g., commercial art claiming “avant garde” credibility); or (2) when small-scale, peripheral producers violate the expectations of other peer producers or critical gatekeepers *within the restricted-production segment* of the artworld by crafting products that are perceived by those insider evaluators as clearly designed for commercial gain. This could be done, for instance, by suppressing or attenuating those product features that require socially scarce and ritually policed aptitudes (Bourdieu, 1984) – more likely to be found among insider audiences – to be appropriated by consumers. This signals to internal gatekeepers that the producer is attempting to appeal to external constituencies with the expectations of economic (hedonic) rewards rather than being produced with an eye toward gaining internal (transcendent) symbolic rewards bestowed by peers and expert critics (Bourdieu, 1993; Crane, 1976).

The field account shares with the recent ecological account an emphasis on the negative consequences of boundary spanning for product reception. However, notice that in contrast with the *undirected* expectations of the ecological account, the field approach offers a more specific prediction: it is not the crossing of any categorical boundary that produces devaluation. Instead, devaluation happens only in fields that have experienced some form of partitioning, and in which there has been an opportunity to develop alternative and strictly oppositional valuation orders (usually keyed to the transcendent hedonic distinction) with transcendent values dominating in the periphery and hedonic values dominating at the center.⁹ Furthermore, the field account acknowledges that these valuation dynamics already presuppose the existence of specialized gatekeeper groups in charge of developing, elaborating, and ascertaining the value of cultural products, but

also in charge of establishing the criteria of membership within the circle of objects recognized by expert audiences. That is, field theory specifies that valuation and devaluation always occur according to the autonomous standards set in the (peripheral) field of restricted production by expert audiences who command largely symbolic forms of authority and resources. Lay (non-expert) audiences, especially those located near the market center, are instead dependent on expert gatekeepers for guidance in terms of forming their own valuation standards (Holbrook, 1999); their opinions (or purchasing power) carry little weight within the restricted production field.

4.3. Value and the Emergence of Organizational Forms

Thus, one way in which culture production and field approaches can inform ecological and institutional understandings of the organizational dynamics is precisely by putting the issue of value conflict squarely at the forefront of the analysis. This is consistent with the recent emphasis of “competing logics” in the organizational literature, and with the dual definition of logics as involving both cognitive components as well as “[competing] *valuation orders* that structure the decision-making and the practices of the players in a product market” (Thornton & Ocasio, 1999, p. 805, italics added). In Bourdieu’s field analysis, standards of evaluation are thus constitutive of audience expectations and structure the perception of producer categories. Therefore, one of the primary “segregating mechanisms” across organizational forms in symbol-producing worlds will be keyed to different conceptions of value, such that when one organizational form violates the social codes associated with a particular conception of value, it will be subject to devaluation and rejection by insider audiences.

In this regard, field and culture production approaches can begin to reconnect such “internal” and “structural” features of organizations as reward systems (Crane, 1976), as an important indicator of form and therefore a possible clue to establishing discontinuities in the organizational landscape (Baron, 2004). For instance, it is clear that the “commercial” versus “non-commercial” or “market” versus “authenticity” dichotomy reappears in various organizational populations with a frequency that suggests that it is not an accidental feature, but which appears to be constitutive of organizational domains that have achieved some level of maturity and partitioning in market-dominated societies.¹⁰ This division even appears in certain organizational fields that were not even initially conceived as product or service markets in the first place. Invariably,

however, producer oriented to non-market values come to segregate themselves from those perceived as adopting organizational identities closer to the market pole.

Lounsbury (2005) provides an apt instance of this last dynamic. He finds two “competing logics” in the U.S. recycling advocacy field since the 1960s – better thought of as two alternative social codes defining the “recycling advocacy group” form – which clearly fit the peripheral-transcendent-versus center-hedonic partition characteristic of artworlds and mature industries. On the one hand, there is the initial group of social-movement-like organizations that conform to a “holistic logic” in which recycling is conceived as inherently tied to the transcendent goals of restructuring society and the economy and which favor not-for-profit structures – that is, the “drop-off” center – staffed by volunteers organically connected to the local community. On the other hand, there are the late-coming organizations that obey a “technocratic logic” in which recycling is conceived as a profit opportunity and recyclables are thought of as commodities like anything else. These organizations relied on paid professional staff with a focus on profit and a search for efficient solutions to growing demand for waste disposal thus taking advantage of economies of scale (Lounsbury, 2005, p. 77). Consistent with the notion that social forms come to be “partitioned” along the hedonic-transcendent binary as fields mature, the emergence of the for-profit technocratic model did not completely replace the original “holistic” one, but instead a consolidation of the split between the different forms with “many grassroots recyclers, such as those from California, Oregon, and Washington, celebrate the proliferation of recycling practices, while simultaneously lamenting its contemporary social organization as a ‘market’” (Lounsbury, 2005, p. 80).

The question then becomes, why does this division reappears everywhere? If technological and relational discontinuities in the social structure were the primary relevant factor in generating diversity in organizational forms (Hannan & Freeman, 1986; Tushman & Anderson, 1986), then we should not expect such a recurrent distinction as that between transcendent “art” and “authenticity” versus hedonic “commerce” and “profitability” to emerge with such recurrent consistency. Not only that, but the fact that certain technologies themselves become symbolically charged as emblematic of this value-laden differentiation – that is, the association between authenticity and “craft”-like production methods against “modern” technology-intensive methods in such apparently disparate arenas as cuisine (Johnston & Baumann, 2007), beer (Carroll & Swaminathan, 2000), wine (Swaminathan, 1998), and country music (Peterson, 2004) – suggests that technological (and social network)

discontinuities maybe (under certain specifiable conditions) be a *result* and not a precondition of form-segregation in certain organizational fields generated by orientation toward antithetical conceptions of value.

This means that in practice, the emergence of a specific discontinuity in the social structure (e.g., network relations) or technologies of production cannot be taken as “exogenous” to the field in question, with form-segregation as the dependent outcome. Instead, it is important to establish whether these discontinuities are themselves generated by the previous development of competing valuation orders that prescribe or proscribe association with other actors in the field or which recommend or condemn the use of certain production technologies. William Weber’s (1977) analysis of the development of the “popular” versus “serious” music divide suggests that competing valuation standards that extolled the transcendent virtues of serious music over the hedonic triviality of popular music were *first* developed by quasi-expert enthusiasts, and *then* relational (keyed to socio-economic differences in the audiences for different types of performances) and organizational discontinuities followed. In this respect, the approach followed by Ruef (2000) in which the analyst first constructs and defines a cultural space defined through discourse generated by field insiders, and then ascertains the emergence of specific bundles of organizational forms and technological systems consistent with these emergent definitions is to be recommended over approaches that define either social or economic factors as “exogenous” to the field in question and as facilitating the emergence of new forms without much in the way of symbolic mediation (e.g., Delacroix & Solt, 1988).

4.4. Conceptions of Value and Resource Partitioning

As we have seen, location-based arguments of form differentiation converge with field approaches in distinguishing between two ideal-typical production strategies. Only recently however, has there been a concern with connecting the process of how the standards of valuation presupposed by large-scale mass production characteristic of center organization come to be oppositionally associated to those favored by peripheral organizations (Carroll & Swaminathan, 2000; see also Hannan et al.’s (2007) brief discussion of “code clash” (pp. 109–110)). In particular, very little attention has been paid to the fact that (as we saw earlier) mass production implies some form of generalized or “hedonic” value standard, whereas specialist production can more readily create localized or internally generated

standards of value that in many ways are designed to deny any attempt at commensuration with standards imposed by outsiders. This “value dynamic” implicating producers, audiences, and select insiders can serve as a key criterion with which to differentiate producers located in different niche locations within an industry.

The closest approximation to a general value standard in contemporary market societies is that associated with profitability and sales volume. Institutional entrepreneurs inevitably realize the leveling power of market criteria of value – what Podolny and Hill-Popper refer to as “hedonic” standards – and attempt to apply them to all organizations within an industry. This leads those organizations in the periphery who engage in restricted production to attempt to “defend” themselves against audiences external to the insider circle to impose such generalized criteria of value within the field of restricted production. Most of the concern with such “post-materialist” value standards espoused by restricted-production organizations such as “authenticity” can be explained by this defense through symbolic demarcation mechanism. In contrast with the “transcendent” conception of value dominant in subfields of restricted production, large-scale production is characterized by the dominance of the hedonic form (Podolny & Hill-Popper, 2004). Thus, the type of cultural innovation (or lack thereof) observed in large-scale production fields is “parasitic, borrowing from . . . other types if the gatekeepers think that these innovations will be of interest to a larger audience” (Crane, 1976, p. 722).

In addition, recruitment of producers from the periphery to the center is a constant threat to the internally generated value standards of the restricted production field. This means that there is a constant need to deploy internally generated mechanisms of social control to prevent this sort of migration from restricted to large-scale production to threaten the integrity of oppositionally defined communities of producers in the periphery. These include punishing those producers who “defect” from the restricted production field and begin to engage in large-scale production through the withdrawal of “insider” reputational capital. Threats of defection also lead to a renewed emphasis to demarcate symbolic boundaries that separate restricted from large-scale production strategies through processes of ritual degradation and reclassification of selected large-scale producers as “sell-outs” or “hacks.” These social control mechanisms are likely to figure prominently in the perpetuation of social, technological, and symbolic discontinuities in the organizational landscape.

Gilmore (1988), for instance, analyzed the relational, organizational, and symbolic discontinuities that organize the contemporary “serious” music

artworld in New York. He finds a tripartite division separating a mainstream “midtown” world dedicated to “repertory programming” (the established canonical set of classical music composers born before the 20th century) and depending on resources from patronage on the part of mostly consumer elites. This “market center” is separated from two distinct peripheral sites in which composition is created by performers *for* other peer producers not for ticket-buying lay audiences: one an “academic subworld,” which “supports gradual aesthetic change and emphasizes monolithic forms of culture activity (i.e., dominant paradigms)” and the other a downtown “avant-garde subworld,” which “supports radical aesthetic change and emphasizes pluralistic forms of cultural activity.”

Both of the peripheral subworlds operate according to the logic specified by field-theory as applying to the field of restricted production: reputation is distributed internally by other peer-producers or specialized gatekeepers, and is keyed to transcendent value that denigrate more mainstream (economic) signals of success (especially in the downtown subworld). In particular, the downtown avant-gardist subworld is organized around an aesthetic logic of “permanent revolution” in which producers distinguish themselves from one another by favoring radical departures from accepted practice (Bourdieu, 1993). This subworld is therefore the site of more vigorous attempts at innovation in social and cultural forms. Thus, though the midtown subworld is mostly a *performer* oriented and keyed to the “virtuoso” instrumental skills of reproducing compositions from the dead masters, the downtown and uptown peripheral subworlds are *composer*-oriented worlds keyed to 20th century classical musical codes that require years of specialized training to even begin to appropriate (meaning that the “audience” is almost entirely made up of expert insiders). This means that barriers to entry into the academic (and specially) the downtown subworlds are stronger, and require a total rejection of the mainstream – repertory oriented – values that govern the midtown subworld. Consistent with the field and ecological accounts, Gilmore (1988) finds that any kind of “straddling” between the boundaries that separate each subworld is highly penalized, with producers unable to sustain such “incoherent identities”:

The alternative concert identities represented by different subworlds need not be mutually exclusive, but in practice they are. Composers are clearly differentiated in the New York concert world by Uptown and Downtown designations and performers are differentiated by Repertory and Contemporary designations. The significance of these associations is clear when performers and composers try to change subworlds or to integrate activities in the two subworlds simultaneously. Such “cross-over” participants experience problems in recognition and acceptance with established participants. (Gilmore, 1988, pp. 214–215)

The reasons why these symbolic social control mechanisms must be recurrently activated are tied to the very processes that link different structural locations within worlds. If they meet with some measure of commercial success members of restricted-production fields are likely to be induced to enter into large-scale production and thus move closer to what Bourdieu (1993) refers to as the “heteronomy” of the market. The market – and the mass public located at the center of the niche – thus serves as a constant symbolic menace to the existence of small-scale production fields and to the identity codes created by producers therein (Holbrook & Addis, 2007). As Crane (1976, p. 729) argued, “the dominant trend in modern societies is for independent . . . systems to turn into heterocultural systems rather than vice versa.” Owing to this contrast “threat” of defection (and thus blurring of the boundaries between the different production styles), members of restricted production fields react quickly with symbolic devaluation directed at any potential overture to larger outsider audiences.

Empirical evidence for the existence of this insider-devaluation social control mechanism in fields of restricted production is extensive. For instance, Bourdieu (1996, p. 129) notes that in the late 19th century French literary field, the reputation of Emile Zola among Parisian literary cognoscenti and critics suffered just as his novels began to reach a wide audience. Crane (1989) shows that as the market for the initially esoteric modernist styles of art grew among upwardly mobile segments of the upper-middle class during the 1960s and 1970s, critical devaluation of the styles that enjoyed currency among these segments – minimalism, pop-art – swiftly followed. Those artistic styles that remained inaccessible to insider class fractions (i.e., conceptual art) retained critical appeal. In the Parisian fashion world, the Pierre Cardin house quickly lost symbolic standing and was ultimately stripped of its *haute couture* status by gatekeepers of the Parisian fashion artworld when it began to attach its brand name to a broader range of commercial products beyond luxury apparel (i.e., perfumes, handbags, jewelry). The design house Hermes in contrast continues to derive high symbolic profits and retain its standing as a “luxury” company because of the fact that “never in its history did it give in to the *temptation* of outsourcing or licensing” (Djelic & Ainamo, 1999, p. 629, italics added). Carroll and Swaminathan (2000) note the legitimacy cost that specialist microbrewers pay in the eyes of gatekeepers and controllers of symbolic rewards within the microbrewery community as they achieve success and begin to grow in size.

This is similar to the dynamic of audience devaluation following violation of default identity codes emphasized in the more recent ecological account (Hannan et al., 2007), except that it ties what counts as “default” to an

explicit theory of evaluation rather than to a purely cognitive theory in which default simply means “consistent with past expectations.” According to field and production theory, because reputation is more tightly connected to conformity with identity codes for specialist producers, and because audiences in these subfields are composed of relatively more influential producer-peers and gatekeeper-critics, this devaluation following an identity-code process should be more salient for peripheral than for “center” organizations. This is consistent with Hsu and Hannan’s (2005, p. 482) proposal that in cultural domains where “resonance and authenticity” are primary concerns (as in fields of restricted production), audiences are more likely to strengthen the expected “defaults” (i.e., taken for granted expectations of conformity with established identity categories and the social codes that pertain to them). Consistent with this argument, Swaminathan (2001) finds that small-scale “farm wineries” that attempt to increase sales by adopting the characteristics of mass production wineries increase their mortality hazard. These are precisely the same type of wineries that are more dependent on critical evaluation and word-of-mouth reputation for sales.

5. PRODUCERS, APPEAL, AND CONSUMER DYNAMICS

5.1. Sociological Determinism in the Space of Positions

Both field and ecological approaches share a heuristic “sociological determinism” in conceptualizing the relationship of social position and patterns of taste among consumer-audiences. This is a feature of Bourdieu’s (1984) field theory of consumer behavior in distinction, which is now shared with the ecological conceptualization of the audience space (Mark, 2003). According to the latest ecological conception of the audience

the members of the audience differ somewhat in tastes in a way that makes the offerings of category members more or less intrinsically attractive. Extensive sociological research reveals that social-demographic position influences tastes. Nonetheless, the audience members at a social position also generally differ somewhat in tastes. We build a simplified model in which each social position possesses a prototypical taste, but the tastes of individual members at the position match the proto-typical taste to varying degrees. (Hannan et al., 2007, pp. 174–175)

In this formulation, each cultural product has a projected audience; the expected probability that an audience member located in a specific position

in social space will engage the product increases whenever producers attempt to craft products that correspond to the tastes and expectations of the typical audience member for that region of social space. In this respect, both field and ecological approaches do away with conceptions of the relationship between producers and audiences that rely on either the “creation” of demand for symbolic goods by way of audience manipulation – for example, the Frankfurt School model (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1979) – or the “rational” response of producers to some sort of perceived demand for specific goods – the standard neo-classical model of the market summarily rejected by White (1981). Instead, “The producers are led by the logic of competition with other producers . . . to produce distinct products which meet the different cultural interests which the consumers owe to their class conditions and [social] position” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 231).

The ecological and field theories converge in various ways in their conceptualization of the relationship of producers and audiences. Both reject one-directional models that focus either on the producer side or the consumer side, in favor of a dynamic model that pays attention to the interaction between producers and audiences. Ecological approaches highlight the process through which producers adopt category labels and social codes definitional of form-identities. These identities are expected to conform to audience’s expectations and to the role that the symbolic goods produced in these fields play in defining consumer identities. These consumer identities are conceptualized as being linked to definite social positions (Bourdieu, 1984; Hannan et al., 2007). In spite of these points of commonality, there are essential differences in emphasis in the processes and mechanisms that are deemed as central.

In the ecological formulation, the producer space is defined in terms of the socio-demographic audience space (i.e., the position of a focal producer in the space of producers is literally defined as a fuzzy set of social positions in which that producers’ product is expected to have “intrinsic appeal”). The socio-demographic audience space on the other hand is treated as “primitive” and therefore is not symmetrically defined according to features of the products produced in the producer space. Instead, tastes are taken to be somehow distributed over the audience space so that particular tastes can be mapped to particular locations in that space. This leads to the undesirable consequence that even though organizational identities and category labels corresponding to products are treated as falling under the general theory of “social forms,” the social positions of the audience that define the organizational and category niches are not themselves treated as social forms. Yet, field analysis maintains that “highly educated,” “young,” “old,”

“male,” or “female” are as much social forms as anything else. In fact the basic field insight is that the meaning (and consensually defined identity labels) of social positions and social forms derive from the array of symbolic goods and products that are consumed by individuals that occupy those social positions (Holt, 1998).

5.2. Audiences and Producers One Space or Two?

Field theory suggests a more symmetric treatment of the audience space. Instead of taking as a given that “audience members can be characterized by values on some features” (Hannan et al., 2007, p. 175) and thus taking the meaning of those feature values as exogenous, a field approach proposes that those socio-demographic positions acquire meaning by way of how they are mapped into a space of product characteristics. Accordingly, the relevant categorical schemas that define what it is to be an occupant of a social position (i.e., a given vector of socio-demographic characteristics) are defined by the established labels associated with the multidimensional space of the features of symbolic goods that correspond to the typical consumption profile (and indicator of the Weberian notion of a “style of life”) of members of that position (Bourdieu, 1984).

It also follows that just as there are dynamics of competition and niche segregation in the producer space, similar competitive dynamics should be observed in the audience space (Mark, 2003). That is, the “meaning” of what it is to occupy a particular social position should change with the shifting consumption habits of occupants of the typical occupants of that position. The motivation to change consumption patterns is itself explainable by attempts of audience members to keep their consumption profiles distinct from members of positions that are nearby in social space (Bourdieu, 1984). For instance, the schematic “label” associated with what it means to be a member of the audience which occupies a position associated with “college education” has shifted overtime from one that primarily associated this position with the exclusive consumption of products that used to be labeled as “fine art” to one that associates this position in social space with the inclusive consumption of all kinds of aesthetically defined objects from both the for-profit and non-profit culture production fields. This is the group of high-status audiences for the arts that have been labeled as “omnivores” (Bryson, 1996; Peterson, 1992).

Changing definitions of the identity labels associated with being an occupant of a social position can then feedback into competitive struggles in

the producer space, so that arts-dissemination organizations interested in capturing this slice of the younger highly educated audience must now come up with offerings concordant with this “multicultural” logic, rather than remaining tied to the exclusive promotion of Euro-American artistic products (Fridman & Ollivier, 2002; Rawlings, 2001). Furthermore, the emergence of “intrinsic appeal” for “commercial art” among highly educated persons – previously derided as “mass culture” by older elites (Macdonald, 1953) – has opened up an opportunity for a set of producers to be able to engage this audience segment (i.e., Hollywood film studios; Baumann, 2007), which did not exist when the definition of the “highly educated” position was premised on the rejection of commercially produced art (DiMaggio, 2000; Peterson, 1997).

The field approach thus differs from the ecological one in endogenizing the demand for symbolic goods and providing a theory of the emergence of intrinsic appeal for different goods among members of different socio-demographic positions. It does this by postulating a set of competitive dynamics among members of audiences who occupy different social positions for exclusive ways to define what it is to be a member of that position through unique consumption profiles that become definitional of the meaning of that position (Bourdieu, 1984, pp. 230–235). This may serve to address a weakness of the ecological account of taste as currently formulated: the fact that the “appeal” of a product to a position is defined as being largely exogenous to the theory of producer competition. The current ecological formulation follows a *de gustibus non est disputandum* logic, with intrinsic appeal simply defined as “a function that maps triples of producers, audience-segment members and time points to the [0,1] interval” (Hannan et al., 2007, p. 72). None of the postulates of the current formulation take the intrinsic appeal of an offering to a position as itself a function of the dynamics of competition in organizational domain in question.

The field approach also goes beyond simply proposing a generic mechanism of “competition” among audiences as an engine of differentiation (Mark, 2003), because it also offers a theory that predicts the expected direction of this differentiation. It does this by drawing on the same mechanism of value differentiation discussed above. From the field-theoretic perspective, there are positions in social space that are biased toward products produced under a “transcendent” conception of value logic, whereas other social positions are friendlier to the market considerations usually favored by generalist producers. This approach can bring specificity to recent theoretical considerations of the role of audiences in processes of form-emergence.

For instance in discussing Carroll and Swaminathan's (2000) research on American breweries, Hsu and Hannan (2005, p. 482) noted that the success of the microbrewery movement was due partly to the fact that "*some* American consumers found the appeal of the authentic quality and values of craft beer compelling (*italics added*)." However, the question becomes: *which* social positions were more likely to find appeals to authenticity compelling? Although it is possible to think of the answer to this question as being something that can be left to empirical adjudication on a study-by-study basis, field theory suggests that a more systematic and generalizable formulation is feasible. Recent research suggests that across a wide variety of products and industries, the type of audience that is attracted to appeal of "authenticity," "originality," and "craft" values is essentially the same: young, highly educated members of symbol and culture production occupations (Bourdieu, 1984; Holt, 1998, 2002; Johnston & Baumann, 2007; Thompson & Arsel, 2004).

What is the explanation for this recurrent phenomenon? The field approach conceives of certain social positions as being attracted to the products produced by specialist, transcendent-value-oriented organizations, and repelled by the commercialized products produced by center and near-center organizations precisely due to the (perceived) social distance between audience members as occupiers of certain positions and producers as occupiers of a certain position in the production space. In addition, the intrinsic appeal of the product of an organization for a given social position may change not because of any action that can be associated with those organizations, but simply because members of a different social position come to be perceived as being interested in the product by members of a focal social position.

Bourdieu (1984) argues that members of certain occupations that have high educational requirement but relatively little access to economic and political power (i.e., intellectuals, artists) will be more likely to be attracted to peripheral "craft" offerings and be repelled by "commercial" (center or near-center) offerings, because "craft" organizations occupy a position in the field of production (peripheral) that is similar to the one that they occupy in socio-demographic space in relation to more economically and politically powerful groups (Bourdieu, 1984, pp. 223–224). From this point of view, the "intrinsic appeal" of an organization's offering depends on more than "engagement" and other informational factors (e.g., whether the consumer is "aware" of the offer), but is also a function of the way that that organization's category label is perceived as being consistent or concordant with the category labels that occupants of a given social position associate with their position in social space (hence, the importance of considering

social positions as themselves social forms subject to processes of categorization and codification).

In this way, the field approach predicts that rather than being arbitrary or simply “intrinsic,” (which clearly begs the question) the appeal of particular symbolic goods to certain social positions will be predictable *ex ante*, because members of specific social positions will, under specifiable circumstances (e.g., a partition in socio-demographic space between two competing sources of status, such as economic (hedonic) versus cultural (transcendent) resources) be positively oriented to the same broadly defined set of producer category labels. This positive orientation is itself recoverable from the logic of valuation that governs the field of social positions.

For instance, members of certain professions – symbolic producers – see themselves as being driven by transcendent standards of value and cast others as being driven purely by hedonic standards (Bourdieu, 1984; Lamont, 1992). Field theory predicts that members of these types of occupations find themselves more likely to be attracted to goods produced by organizations that emphasize comparably transcendent production values (e.g., “authenticity”) over those that emphasize technical prowess or more commercially defined standards (e.g., “over one billion sold”; “America’s number one Network”). As DiMaggio (1996, p. 162) notes in summarizing the field hypothesis, members of culture and symbol-producing occupations tend to

adopt an aesthetic that permits them to use their cultural resources to the full and, at the same time, by justifying the rejection of the most lavishly expensive cultural forms, makes a virtue of economic necessity. Thus academics and other highly educated professionals tend to prize affordable but arcane avant-garde and oppositional forms, whereas managers and owners of capital may prefer costly but accessible canonical high-culture art and Broadway plays.

These considerations can be used to build a sharper account of the “ecology of the overall audience” which can be used to gain a better conceptualization of the “coevolution of populations of producers and audiences” (Hsu, Hannan, & Kocak, 2007, p. 28).

6. CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have argued that recent formulations of organizational ecology around the notions of social codes, identity, and audiences represents the latest in a striking process of convergence with cognate approaches to the study of symbol-production worlds in the sociology of

culture. The emerging conversation between these approaches can be furthered and be taken beyond the selective appropriation of certain ideas and concepts from the “production” paradigm on the part of organizational scholars (e.g., Greve, Pozner, & Rao, 2006). In addition, we can begin to use the insights from field and production perspectives to inform the sophisticated framework for the analysis of social forms recently systematized by ecological theorists (e.g., Hannan et al., 2007). The interaction between featured-based definitions of form-identities, standards of value, social-movement-like processes in the creation of new forms, and audience dynamics can be improved through a consideration of production of culture and field formulations of these processes.

Because standards of value elaborated and developed by interested insiders come to partially influence what some actors within the field find worth striving for (and therefore the strategic and organizational decisions that are relevant for attaining those goals), the field perspective provides an analytically useful approach for the comparative analysis of forms of valuation (some of which may be antithetical to market definitions of worth; Bourdieu, 1983) across organizational forms. The same also applies to recent connections in organizational theory between departure from accepted “social codes” definitional of organizational form-identities and social control processes of devaluation and enforcement of established identity codes (i.e., devaluation processes). The field approach is thus largely consonant with recent calls for a more nuanced treatment of value and identity in organizational studies (Baron, 2004; Podolny & Hill-Popper, 2004), as well as a somewhat limiting cognitive focus of the ecological theory of social forms.

The field approach also provides a useful take on the dynamics of partitioning as not only involving niche segregation in an exclusively resource-based sense, but also by bringing back a concern with what has been called the “identity value” of extant organizational forms within a symbolic *hierarchy* of forms of evaluation. From the field perspective, some forms come to acquire certain cultural connotations as desirable or undesirable precisely due to their connection with either hegemonic or insurgent strategies of framing and definition of product categories and organizational form-identities. This converges with recent ecological treatments of similar phenomena (Hannan et al., 2007; Pólos et al., 2002; Carroll & Swaminathan, 2000). In this sense, the center/periphery distinction maps neatly to the field distinction between dominant (large-scale) and dominated (restricted) production strategies, and the temporal dynamics of change whereby previously dominated strategies become dominant as newly inducted actors enter the field (Bourdieu, 1993). This can provide a more satisfactory explanation of

how exactly is it that certain organizational fields putatively structured around a market logic come to acquire modes of functioning and discourse usually associated with social movements (and organizational fields structured around movement-like logics may come to later acquire market-like characteristics; Lounsbury, 2005). Furthermore, it allows us to better understand how innovation at the level of organizational process, technology, and structure (e.g., form-identities) come to be tied to oppositional (and thus expressive) meanings of these codes (e.g., craft versus technology-intensive production).

Most importantly, the ecological and field accounts provide complementary versions of a viable strategy for the comparative study of organizations. Recall that the first generation typological and attribute-based analysis of covariation floundered precisely when more systematic attention began to be paid to the institutional environment. Institutional studies lost the comparative edge, but brought a concern with tracing more detailed, richer accounts of process that took the historical, and cultural constitution of organizational fields seriously. However, institutional analyses have the disadvantage of having to focus on one institutional field (or organizational population) at a time and thus lose the *cross-institutional* comparative edge keyed to recurrent organizational structures and dynamics that was the signature of early comparative approaches. They thus fail to cash in on the key insight of the first generation of comparativists: that there might be “generic” features common to organizations that cut across institutional location. The main analytical weakness of for first generation attempts resulted from the fact that they were ambiguous in their conceptualization of what these generic “feature-bundles” were, invariably deciding to concentrate on those parts of the organization that were seen as “objective” and “real” and thus exempt from cultural constitution. This is precisely the kind of distinction that has been deconstructed in recent attempts to develop a cultural sociology of organizations (Dobbin, 1994).

Both field and ecological analyses bring back a concern with organizational features, but this time reconceived as socially generated cognitive constructions created and enforced by interested agents within organizational fields. They thus combine the strengths of the first generation of comparative analysis with the analytical gains garnered from the cultural and institutional turns in organizational theory. Organizations are thus social forms, and are defined as bundles of specific conceptions of how to organize. Field theory conceives of these conceptions as the object of symbolic struggle (and not just cognitive ordering), because they serve to define the identity of given organizational actors and also serve to give them

a place (or location) in the field. This location is defined *relative* to that occupied by other actors with a differential set of features, and thus invariably comes to be organized along some sort of oppositional evaluative dimension. Authoritative insider audiences within fields are key, because they serve to define, elaborate, and most importantly to *bestow differential value* on certain feature bundles and to devalue others. The fate of organizational actors and producers within fields is thus tied to these evaluation contests, and by implication to struggles for control over those positions that are in charge of establishing the standards of classification and valuation.

This overall framework thus provides a basis for comparison across organizational worlds, not only in terms of the relative degree of *consolidation* and *elaboration* of producer categories, but also in terms of the relative degree of *symbolic potency* and overall reach of different standards of evaluation. For instance, fields and worlds may differ in the extent to which there are explicitly defined role-positions within the insider-audience space (e.g., full-time critics) that are in charge of defining and ascertaining compliance with the social forms that are prevalent within as well as linking this compliance to the value standards with which they are associated. Other fields for instance may have a more diffuse, informal gatekeeping system in which the labor of cognitive definition and evaluation is more evenly distributed among a set of producer-peers (as in science). Fields may also differ in the strength of the boundary separating organizations in the center of the market from peripheral producers, and thus in the extent of intercourse and exchange between producers associated with the two ideal-typical styles of production identified earlier obtains. Finally, fields may differ in the extent to which devaluation is resorted to as a social control strategy, and in the extent to which peripheral producers depend on symbolic rewards to establish position and membership.

NOTES

1. This observation, however, is not meant to obscure the fact that early comparativists (such as Crozier (1964) and Udy (1970)) took special care to place their typological analyses in a larger historical and societal context.

2. It is possible for instance to think of a comparative analysis of two or more populations or institutional fields.

3. Models incorporating some form of temporal heterogeneity have become the bread and butter of institutional analysis (Schneiberg & Clemens, 2006).

4. Recent ecological thinking also retains the more institutionalist concern with the key role played by the organizational environment. It also preserves the

methodological strategy of taking the organizational population as the unit of analysis.

5. That is, social codes are essentially meaningful entities and not “brute” (i.e., “extensional”) material facts; for analytical clarification on this distinction, see Searle (1995).

6. The analytic differentiation between restricted and large-scale production fields was initially developed for the study of cultural production. However, the general characterization of the dynamics that create this partition in symbol-production industries appears to carry more general applicability beyond the study of artworlds, as any field of production appears to have the capability to acquire the characteristic dynamics of an “artworld” (Baumann, 2001; Johnston & Baumann, 2007; Rao, Monin, & Durand, 2003).

7. These are the “insider” audiences composed of “enthusiasts” and “activists” in Hannan, Polos, and Carroll’s (2007, p. 38) terms.

8. Hannan, Polos, and Carroll also refer to a more normative process when they note that “interesting possibilities arise when categories come in opposing pairs, as in the case of ‘microbrewer’ and ‘(industrial) brewer’ . . . When the schemata for categories class, attempts at spanning them will confuse identities and likely lead to devaluation” (p. 111). Field theory suggests that this oppositional arrangement with binary categorical classifications being mapped into different ends of a normative value continuum is the norm rather than the exception.

9. This obtains as long as the market is dominant institution in society as a whole.

10. As Bourdieu (1993, p. 82) notes, “[t]he opposition between the ‘commercial’ and the ‘non-commercial’ reappears everywhere. It is the generative principle of most of the judgments which, in the theatre cinema, painting or literature, claim to establish the frontier between what is and what is not art, i.e. in practice between ‘bourgeois’ art and ‘intellectual’ art, between ‘traditional’ and ‘avant-garde’ art.”

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