

# **Bourdieu's Theory of Cultural Change: Explication, Application, Critique**

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*Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural change is more powerful and comprehensive than other recent theories, which neglect one or another of the important dimensions of cultural markets. Bourdieu's theory conceptualizes both the supply and demand sides of the market, as well as specifying their interaction with external social factors. Two cases from American culture are developed to demonstrate the explanatory power of Bourdieu's theory of cultural change: the demise of tail fins in automobile design and the fall of modernism in architecture. These cases reveal, however, that Bourdieu's theory fails to account for the leveling of cultural hierarchies and the emergence of pluralized cultural fields. The general conditions for such leveling and pluralization are developed from a comparison of the two cases.*

Sociology has recently experienced a “cultural turn” that has profoundly changed our conceptualization of the cultural realm of society, its organization and changes. Influenced by developments in the humanities like semiotics, structuralism, and poststructuralism, as well as by reassessments of classical sociological thinkers such as Weber, Durkheim, and Parsons, sociologists have abandoned the older reflection model, which explains culture as a simple reflection of external social structures and changes. Increasingly we emphasize culture as a realm at least partially autonomous from other social institutions, with its own internal organization and dynamics.

One model that has been influential in grasping the internal organization of culture has been that of the market. For many at the forefront of the new cultural sociology, this realm of symbols, beliefs, and ideas operates like a market, similar to but autonomous from the economic market. In the realm of culture, people also compete for scarce rewards and mobilize strategic resources in order to best their opponents. The concept of culture as a market competition was initiated by Max Weber, who long ago depicted the cultural realm as an often separate realm of competition for the scarce resources of status or honor. But once sociologists conceive of culture as a competition at least partially autonomous from the economy, with its own internal dynamics of development, the question of the impact of social forces external to culture still remains. Do societal institutions outside of culture exert any influence on its internal dynamics of competition, and if so, how? In his famous passage on class, status, and party, Weber himself had no sooner declared the normally “sharp opposition” between class situation and status (cultural) situation than he began to qualify the autonomy of the cultural realm by showing the impact of the economy on it (Weber 1968:932–38).

## **DIMENSIONS OF CULTURAL CHANGE: INTERNAL VS. EXTERNAL, SUPPLY VS. DEMAND**

There is a tendency among recent sociologists of culture to assert the radical autonomy of the cultural realm from other institutional spheres, especially the economy and politics. In his *Sociology of Philosophies*, for example, Randall Collins (1998) argues that the intel-

lectual world is, like economics and politics, a conflict over scarce resources among factions and individuals with different resources. But he adamantly asserts that the intellectual game is autonomous, with its own rewards, strategies, and resources, which show little overlap with the political and economic games. "Economic and political macrostructures do not explain much about abstract ideas because such ideas exist only where there is a network of intellectuals focused on their own arguments and accumulating their own conceptual baggage train. It is the inner structure of these intellectual networks which shape ideas . . ." (Collins 1998:2). Consequently, he explains thousands of years of philosophical change with very few references to economic or political changes. Collins focuses on the internal structure of intellectual networks and laws specific to them, like the law of small numbers, to account for all philosophical changes.

Another recent sociological contribution on cultural change, Stanley Lieberman's (2000) *A Matter of Taste*, is similarly focused almost exclusively on mechanisms of change internal to cultural markets. Using a sophisticated analysis of the frequency of first names, he argues that most changes can be explained by a few simple mechanisms specific to taste and fashion, such as class imitation, the ratchet effect, and incremental replacement. Lieberman does recognize the influence of some external factors on names, such as the Civil Rights movement, feminism, and the names of presidents and actors. However, these external influences are not conceptually incorporated into his theory but merely conceived as arbitrary inputs into his internal taste mechanisms. In general, he sees their impact as less important than the latter, which operate with law-like, formal regularity despite their contents.

The recent emphasis of sociologists like Collins and Lieberman on mechanisms of change internal to cultural markets is surely a welcome corrective to the often simplistic and unmediated use of external factors like politics and economics to explain cultural change. But to substitute a unilateral internalist approach for a unilateral externalist approach is not helpful. Both internal and external factors must be incorporated into a theoretical framework that precisely conceptualizes the nature and types of their interactions in the process of cultural change.

Some recent internalist approaches to cultural change ignore not only the importance of external factors but also the influence of one or the other sides of the cultural market itself. Markets have both a demand or consumption side and a supply or production side. In capitalist societies, in which much of culture has become a commodity, the production and consumption of cultural goods are separate and have independent dynamics. In his study Lieberman is concerned only with internal taste mechanisms specific to the demand side of the market. This is largely because his chosen empirical case, first names, has no separation of supply and demand. Those producing and consuming first names are the same people—the parents of the children named. Thus, he implicitly assumes that demand directly and unproblematically creates its own supply. But this is an unrealistic assumption for most cultural goods, in which producers and consumers are separate. Unlike names, automobiles, for example, are manufactured by people different from their consumers, under a set of production costs and constraints that exert an effect on the product independent of consumer demand.

There is an important school of cultural analysis that focuses specifically on these internal market mechanisms of supply, known as the production of culture perspective. Pioneered largely by Richard Peterson (1976; 1994), this school reveals that the structure of organizations producing culture exerts important influences on the type of artifacts produced and their propensity to change. One of the important findings of the school is that in markets for large-scale, commercial production, the number of producers and their competitive relations are important influences on both the rate of change and the diversity of cultural goods. Oligopolistic firms, which emerge in markets with few producers and

little competition, tend to produce homogeneous goods that change slowly, if at all. Peterson and Berger (1975:159) argue that this is because oligarches compete for the largest share of a single mass market. Thus, they seek to find the one product that pleases the most people and offends the least. Innovative and heterogeneous goods emerge mainly when markets are more competitive, that is, when a larger number of firms compete with one another for consumers. Such competition forces firms to meet consumer demand for a variety of cultural goods that change often.

Yet, in its emphasis on the production side of cultural markets, the production of culture school neglects the demand side. It has no good explanation for the observed fact that, when forced by competition to cater closely to consumer demand, firms produce a greater variety of changing products. Why do consumers generally want variety and change in cultural goods?

There is, however, one account that weaves together all these dimensions of cultural markets in a powerful and sophisticated theory of culture. This is the theory of Pierre Bourdieu. Elaborated in a series of important empirical studies and theoretical works, Bourdieu's theory details the intricate interweaving of mechanisms of cultural production with the vicissitudes of consumer demand for cultural goods. And he reveals that although these internal mechanisms render it relatively autonomous, culture is also intricately interconnected to the organization and struggles of the rest of society, which provide external resources and demands that impact both the production and consumption of cultural goods. In the next section I offer an explication of the basic points of Bourdieu's theory of cultural change, as well as a few of its intricacies. Then I will demonstrate its explanatory power by applying it to two cases of aesthetic change—the disappearance of the automobile tail fin in the 1950s and the decline of modern architecture in the 1960s. These two cases drawn from American culture are not, however, unconnected illustrations. The demise of the tail fin within popular culture is an index of a larger trend that in the next decade brought down the modern style in the high art of architecture. This trend is the leveling or pluralization of American culture. Although the internal and external dynamics postulated by Bourdieu help to account for this large-scale cultural change, it ultimately points to a cultural structure at odds with his model of hierarchical distinction.

## BOURDIEU'S THEORY OF THE DYNAMICS OF CULTURAL DISTINCTION

With Weber, Bourdieu founds his theory on the assumption that culture is a field of contest like the economic world, in which interested actors compete to accumulate various types of resources or "capital." While in the economy actors struggle over economic capital, in culture they compete to appropriate cultural capital goods and practices that are socially defined as distinctive and hence lend individuals an aura of superiority. But Bourdieu makes it clear that the cultural struggle for distinction is intricately connected to the economic distribution of material goods, which it both legitimates and reproduces. An individual's material conditions of existence, determined by her economic capital, ingrain a habitus or set of dispositions, which in turn generates cultural tastes. The "right" tastes facilitate the accumulation of cultural capital, which makes the individual look distinctive and hence justifies the economic capital that determined her cultural tastes to begin with. So closely intertwined is culture with the economy that Bourdieu conceives society as a social field or space formed by the intersection of the economic and cultural fields. The positions in the social field are classes, each defined by its relative balance of economic and cultural capital and its overall volume of the two kinds of capital combined (Bourdieu 1984:169–75).

The cultural field is the site of production of the cultural goods that the different classes appropriate and employ in their struggles for legitimating distinction. There is “something for everyone” here, that is, each class is able to find a supply of goods (literature, art, movies, newspapers, food, furniture, etc.) that precisely matches its demands. This is not just because cultural producers are attuned to the different needs of their competing consumers but also because these producers have different interests engendered by their own field of cultural competition. Bourdieu divides the cultural field into two competing subfields, each with its distinct, structurally defined producers and consumers. The subfield of small-scale or restricted production is composed of the high arts, or art for art’s sake. Here the stakes are not economic profits but symbolic profits, that is, recognition by other artists on the basis of the internal, autonomous standards of art. These cultural producers have more cultural capital (taste, knowledge, education) than economic capital (money); consequently their works match the dispositions of consumers in the social field who similarly have more culture than money. Bourdieu calls these consumers of high art the dominated fraction of the dominant class, or the intellectual bourgeoisie, which includes all professions that rely on knowledge and education for a living. Lacking the money of the dominant fraction or economic bourgeoisie, these people prefer culture that is more cerebral than expensive, more ascetic than self-indulgent—just the kind of art that innovative, avant-garde artists struggling for symbolic profits in the restricted subfield are motivated to produce. The subfield of restricted production itself is split between those artists who have successfully accumulated symbolic profits and those who have yet to do so. Successful high artists, or the consecrated avant-garde, gain recognition outside of the restricted subfield as well, cashing in some of their symbolic profits for the economic kind. This stimulates the less successful high artists, or the bohemian avant-garde, to vehemently reject the consecrated artists as “sell-outs” and to pioneer art that is pure and free of monetary taint in order to distinguish themselves (Bourdieu 1996; 1993).

The other subfield of the cultural field is that of large-scale or mass production. Here are located the producers motivated by the heteronomous logic of the marketplace, that is, the accumulation of economic profits. They have more economic capital than cultural capital, so consequently their works match the dispositions of consumers in the social field who also have more money than culture. These consumers are the economic bourgeoisie, composed of professions and occupations that rely more on their wealth than their knowledge and education for a living. This class prefers culture that is more luxurious and sedately hedonistic, which conspicuously but tastefully displays its economic resources—just the kind of goods that cultural producers struggling for economic profits in the large-scale subfield are motivated to produce. Yet, like the restricted subfield, this subfield is also divided into two parts: bourgeois art and commercial art. Producers of the former cater to the high economic bourgeoisie and, like their consumers, have considerable cultural capital, although it is outweighed by their wealth. Because they are in the same position in the cultural field that their consumers are in the social field, they intuitively understand that their well-heeled customers want cultural goods that are tasteful and formal, that conspicuously display their cultural knowledge as well as their wealth. In fact, this high economic bourgeoisie needs this cultural distinction to legitimate its economic resources. To satisfy this need of their clients, as well as distinguish themselves from their competitors in the subfield of large-scale production, bourgeois-art producers borrow and distribute the work of the consecrated artists in the restricted subfield, leading the latter to “sell out.” The producers of commercial art in the large-scale subfield have less cultural capital, and thus cater to consumers who are similarly “culturally deprived,” that is, the petty bourgeoisie and the working class. Their goods are mass-produced “kitsch,” profitable but crass, catering to unmitigated self-indulgence and simple hedonism (Bourdieu 1984; 1996).

Into this rather static, structuralist model of the cultural field and its class consumers, Bourdieu introduces the dynamic element of class imitation, which is also found in Veblen (1934) and Simmel (1957). It begins with the idea that the dominant class or bourgeoisie attempts to distinguish itself and legitimate its economic capital by borrowing the pure, disinterested aura of art from the restricted subfield. By demonstrating a taste for pure culture, members of this class prove their personal superiority against the crass and materialistic lower classes. However, members of the petty bourgeoisie, seeking to distinguish themselves from the working class, borrow the specific goods of the bourgeoisie, although they lack the cultural capital to appropriate them in their authentic form. For Bourdieu, however, class imitation stops here, for there is no element of pretension or distinction in the consumption of the working class, which, due to economic deprivation, is driven simply by material necessity and function. However, petty-bourgeois imitation is sufficient to taint the specific goods of the bourgeoisie with commonality and commercial greed, undermining the rarity and purity that lend them distinction. Then the dominant class adopts from the restricted subfield new cultural goods, more distinctive and unsullied by the taint of widespread commercialism. Thus, Bourdieu writes (1984:251–52), imitation “helps to maintain constant tension in the symbolic goods market, forcing the possessors of distinctive properties threatened with popularization to engage in an endless pursuit of new properties through which to assert their rarity. The demand which is generated by this dialectic is by definition inexhaustible since the dominated needs which constitute it must endlessly redefine themselves in terms of a distinction which always defines itself negatively in relation to them.”

This petty-bourgeois imitation of the cultural goods of the dominant class, however, disrupts and changes the contest for distinction within the dominant class between the intellectual and economic fractions. These dominant-class fractions compete for power, each seeking to define its specific form of capital as the “principle of hierarchization” (Bourdieu 1993:37–43), that is, the basis on which power and wealth are distributed. The intellectual bourgeoisie displays its pure, disinterested taste and knowledge through the high arts, which are governed by rules removed from the crass logic of the marketplace. The economic bourgeoisie borrows some of this cultural capital by adopting the works of the consecrated avant-garde from the restricted subfield dominated by the intellectual bourgeoisie. Yet, petty-bourgeois imitation of these bourgeois-art works lowers them to the status of commercial art in the large-scale subfield. The economic bourgeoisie must then go back to the restricted subfield to select more distinctive forms of high art from those exclusively consumed by the intellectual bourgeoisie. This, in turn, leaves the latter to scramble to adopt new cultural goods from less recognized or bohemian avant-garde artists that set them off from the now redefined bourgeois art. In effect, then, cultural innovations follow the path of an inverted U-curve. They start at the bottom of the restricted subfield among unknown avant-garde artists, rise to the top of this subfield as works of the consecrated avant-garde, and then migrate laterally to the top of the large-scale subfield as bourgeois art, until imitation by the petty bourgeoisie lowers them to the status of commercial art (Bourdieu 1996:121–28, 146–61, 253–56).

For Bourdieu, however, it is not this struggle of *consumers* for distinctive goods that is responsible for the constant generation of new cultural goods within the subfield of restricted production. Rather, it is the struggle among *producers* for distinction in this subfield that creates the supply for this demand.

Thus, the case of fashion, which might seem to justify a model which locates the motor of changing sartorial styles in the intentional pursuit of distinction (the “trickle-down effect”) is an almost perfect example of the meeting of two spaces and two

relatively autonomous histories. The endless changes in fashion result from the objective orchestration between, on the one hand, the logic of the struggles internal to the field of production, which are organized in terms of the opposition old/new . . . and, on the other hand, the logic of struggles internal to the field of the dominant class, which, as we have seen, oppose the dominant and the dominated fractions, or, more precisely, the established and the challengers . . . (Bourdieu 1984:233)

The constant stream of new and different cultural products is generated by the struggle for symbolic profits between the old or consecrated artists and the new or bohemian artists in the restricted subfield of production. New entrants to the subfield must struggle for distinction or recognition against those already recognized. But they usually do so within the logic of the subfield, producing innovations that are pure and disinterested, and that stand out among the older forms that have been tainted with the commercial profits of the subfield of large-scale production. Inevitably then, the consecrated are overthrown by the upstarts, creating a cycle of innovation that generates the new products to meet the demand for distinction of the battling fractions of the dominant class (Bourdieu 1996:146–61, 253–56).

Bourdieu argues, however, that these cycles of artistic innovation endemic to the cultural field do not produce deep and lasting changes in its structure unless they draw upon and incorporate external changes in the larger social field. The most important of these external changes is the growth in the educated population, which increases the number of both cultural producers and cultural consumers. A more educated populace increases the number of producers in the cultural field, thus heightening the competition between them and stimulating greater innovation in order to stand out in a crowded field. At the same time, increases in general levels of education also provide more consumers for cultural goods, since more people possess the cultural capital necessary to appreciate them (Bourdieu 1996:127, 225). New cultural producers not only stimulate the quantity of distinctive innovations but also determine the qualitative directions of the changes. The newcomers, who often come from different class positions due to broadening opportunities, bring with them habitus that are new to the field and thus incline them to new cultural forms. For example, in his study of the French literary field of the nineteenth century, Bourdieu argues that the growth in the number of educated readers created opportunities for upwardly mobile writers from petty-bourgeois and working-class backgrounds. These newcomers, the most prominent of which was Emile Zola, distinguished themselves from the established bourgeois literature in the field by pioneering realism or social art, whose aesthetic was determined by their lower-class disposition for the functional and the politically engaged (Bourdieu 1996:71–76, 85–86). The aesthetic upstarts in the cultural field very often draw support for their internal struggles against the established producers from those externally struggling in the social field against established classes. This external support is due not only to the fact that these new artists often come from the same class as those struggling in the social field. Even when they come from different classes, external support is often forthcoming because the struggling artists occupy a position in the cultural field homologous to that occupied by the struggling classes in the social field; that is, both are outsiders seeking to depose an established power. Thus, in his analysis of the French academic field in *Homo Academicus* (1988:165–66), Bourdieu argues that the radical students and teachers of the May 1968 revolt, struggling against established authority in an increasingly crowded and competitive academic field, found sympathetic support among young industrial workers, who were subordinated by this same academic authority in the social field by their exclusion from the university.



Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural dynamics is more sophisticated and multidimensional than that of sociologists who recognize competition on only one side of cultural markets. It reveals that cultural change results from the struggle for distinction by both cultural producers and consumers. And the theory also conceptualizes the external social forces that intervene *through* these internal competitive struggles to fundamentally transform the cultural field. To illustrate the power of Bourdieu's multidimensional theory of cultural distinction, I choose two cases: automobile design, an instance of popular culture, and modern architecture, an example of a high-cultural subfield. The automobile market is, in Bourdieu's terminology, part of the subfield of large-scale production, in which producers are motivated by economic profits. In this symbolic good there is no subfield of restricted production, in which production is strictly for other cultural producers and motivated by symbolic profits defined by autonomous rules. Consequently, the major dynamic driving cultural change in automobiles is competition for distinction of producers and consumers at the high end of the mass market (bourgeois art) with producers and consumers at the low end of the same market (commercial art). The art of architecture, however, is the restricted subfield of the larger building market, which also contains a subfield of large-scale production. In contrast to the strictly pecuniary motives of builders in the latter subfield, architects in the restricted subfield are artists struggling for symbolic profits in a game with relatively autonomous rules. Consequently, the major dynamic driving cultural change in architecture is the competition of producers and consumers of the consecrated avant-garde with those of the bohemian avant-garde in the restricted subfield, as well as the competition of this entire subfield with the subfield of large-scale or mass building.

Both cases, however, reveal the limited applicability of Bourdieu's model of class imitation within a clearly marked cultural hierarchy. Under specific social conditions revealed by both autos and architecture, hierarchies of cultural tastes and products that testify to class position break down, producing a leveled and pluralized culture that obscures rather than reveals real class differences in power and wealth. But as a comparison of the two cases demonstrates, this cultural leveling seems to impact cultural fields differently, such that in most modern societies leveled and pluralized cultural fields coexist with cultural hierarchies that symbolize class position. These cases thus demonstrate that the basic dynamics of Bourdieu's theory of cultural change often point beyond his specific conclusions about the configuration of cultures in modern society.

### THE RISE AND FALL OF THE TAIL FIN

The meteoric rise and precipitous fall of the automotive tail fin in the 1950s reveal both the strengths and weaknesses of Bourdieu's model of imitation in a hierarchy of popular culture testifying to class position. Before exploring the complexities of this particular episode of automotive design, I must first explain the genesis of this cultural hierarchy in the social struggles at the end of the nineteenth century. To do so, I draw on my book on the social history of American automobile design (Gartman 1994), this time viewing the empirical evidence through the lens of Bourdieu's theory of cultural change.

The auto entered American culture in the late nineteenth century and quickly came to symbolize the increasingly contentious industrial conflicts and class divisions of this period. The high prices of the first automobiles (\$600 to \$7500) put ownership beyond the reach of all but the wealthiest Americans. This upper class used the vehicle not as a practical machine of transportation but as an instrument of leisure, employed mainly for racing, touring, and parading. Thus, these early cars fit Bourdieu's model of the conspicuous symbols of the grand bourgeoisie, communicating the removal from practical necessities bought only with great wealth (Bourdieu 1984:270, 293). The reactions of the lower classes

to this symbolism were marked by hostility and resentment. By 1906 Woodrow Wilson took note of this divisive symbolism when, as president of Princeton University, he warned that: "Nothing has spread Socialistic feeling in this country more than the use of automobiles. To the countryman they are a picture of arrogance of wealth with all its independence and carelessness" ("Motorists" 1906:12).

By the middle of the first decade of the twentieth century, however, the saturation of the high-bourgeois luxury market motivated many manufacturers to target upper-middle class professionals and managers with less expensive cars. This class was anxious to mark its own prosperity by borrowing from the high bourgeoisie a symbol of prosperity, leisure, and freedom. So, as Bourdieu predicts, this symbol of distinction spread down the class hierarchy through imitation, as rising incomes combined with the falling auto prices due to mass production to bring ownership within the reach of the petty bourgeoisie and even the upper reaches of the working class. However, within this broadened field of mass production, there remained differences that correspond to Bourdieu's distinction between bourgeois art and commercial art. At the top of the market were the grand luxury makes like Cadillac and Lincoln, which were distinguished from the low-end Fords and Chevrolets in both price and aesthetics. The luxury cars were produced in small numbers by a time-consuming process of craft production. Consequently, these cars were distinctive not only in their greater size and power but also in their appearance. The different components of the car were integrated by careful hand-fitting into an aesthetic whole. The bodies were works of art in themselves, crafted by coachbuilders into sleek, unified forms based on centuries-old traditions. The elegant appearance of these luxury cars testified to hundreds of hours of unhurried skilled labor commanded by great wealth and, consequently, to their owners' distance from the hurried concerns of costs and efficiency. On the other hand, the mass-produced cars of the commercial market symbolized the lower-class position of their owners with obvious concerns for cost-cutting efficiency. They were not only smaller and less powerful but also possessed an aesthetic of functionality determined by quick production. The speed and unskilled nature of labor on production lines prevented careful assembly, so these cars had a fragmented, unintegrated appearance. They were also rigidly rectilinear, because curved body panels presented problems for machines. Everything about these cars communicated efficiency, standardization, and cost-cutting, thus symbolizing the conditions and concerns of the lower classes, as Bourdieu argues.

By the mid-1920s, however, a development emerged that defies Bourdieu's model of differential class taste. All consumers, even those of the working class, began to demand mass-produced cars that imitated the style of the grand-bourgeois luxury makes. Bourdieu (1984:372-84) argues that lack of economic resources prevents workers from entering the market for symbolically marked goods and inclines their tastes to simple and functional goods, with no cultural pretensions. This is clearly mistaken, especially with respect to products of material culture like the automobile. Although members of the working class may be prevented from imitating the nonmaterial culture of the higher classes (music, art, literature) by the lack of the necessary cultural capital (especially education) to appropriate it, they are able to emulate the material culture of the higher classes as soon as their incomes rise to the necessary level. Mass-produced cars like the Model T embodied an unpretentious, functional aesthetic, the type that Bourdieu argues appeals to the working-class habitus. Yet they were increasingly rejected during the 1920s by workers with rising incomes, who demanded in their cheaper cars the look of the expensive, craftbuilt cars. But why?

One could argue, only minimally altering Bourdieu's general theory, that workers were, like the petty bourgeoisie, merely imitating the aesthetics of the grand bourgeoisie, motivated by a similar desire to appear distinctive and superior to others. I argue, however,



following the Frankfurt School (Horkheimer and Adorno 1972; Adorno 1978) that another motive may be more salient for the working class, a desire not for superiority but for individuality, in compensation for their standardized work. In this model, the working class seeks in their consumer goods compensation for the needs denied them in the mass-production process, especially a sense of efficacy and individuality in the face of its standardized and fragmented work. Mass-produced autos, with their standardized, fragmented, thrown-together look, were constant reminders in workers' leisure time of the characteristics of their work. Consequently, they preferred and demanded in mass-produced cars the unified and individual *look* of the craftbuilt cars, since this aesthetic obscured the degraded work process that produced them. Bourdieu comes close to a recognition of this motive of consumption in his assertion that the bourgeoisie seeks in their aesthetic of temperate hedonism and restrained luxury to display their distance from economic necessity and practical urgencies, their freedom from the practical concerns of making a living and staying alive (Bourdieu 1984:53–56). He does not recognize, however, the inherent appeal of this same aesthetic for those whose class position forces them to submit to economic necessity, not as a display of their superior economic position but as an attempt to forget at leisure their inferior position at work. It was this working-class demand for compensation, not merely class imitation, that combined with competitive pressure on the supply side of the market to cause a transfer of the aesthetic features of luxury cars to the lower-priced, mass-produced cars.

In the mid-1920s General Motors was in desperate competition with Ford, whose cheap, functional Model T dominated half of the automotive market. Instead of engaging Ford in direct price competition, GM's Alfred Sloan decided to offer consumers more aesthetically refined cars, which borrowed styling features from the luxury classics. The success of this strategy led GM to institutionalize a trickle-down styling policy that manipulated the consumer desire for distinction and individuality. The head of its styling department, Harley Earl, introduced a style feature, often borrowed from craftbuilt cars, in the top make of GM's product hierarchy, Cadillac. In the following year, he transferred it to the next lower make, thus lending it some of Cadillac's distinction. He continued this trickle-down styling in successive years until the feature reached the cheapest make, Chevrolet, and became commonplace, at which time he introduced a new feature at the top.

This successful styling strategy was determined in part by the consumer demand for individuality among all classes in an increasingly prosperous mass-production society. But it was the production requirements and the market structure of the large-scale firms that determined the type of individuality that consumers got. Here the insights of the production of culture perspective can be a useful supplement to Bourdieu's model, which overlooks the detailed constraints on the production side of large-scale markets. Mass-production firms like these automakers require long runs of standardized goods to justify investments in specialized machinery and processes. Thus, they tend to avoid product innovations. Further, these large-scale firms are at least partially sheltered from consumer demand by the lack of competition. Large capital investment in machinery drives small competitors out of business and leaves an oligopolistic industry structure. In the American auto industry, the top three firms in 1927 already accounted for 72 percent of auto output. This type of market control allowed firms to avoid costly and risky competition through price cuts and technological innovations. Yet, there was still competition between the large automakers, especially in this period of the mid-1920s, when the market of first-time buyers became saturated. The oligopolistic firms competed in an increasingly tight market without jeopardizing either the price structure or product standardization through superficial styling (Baran and Sweezy 1966:112–41). The appearance of the auto body and accessories was differentiated and changed slightly every year in the annual model change,

while the major technical components remained unchanged for decades, allowing long runs on specialized machines. Even the costs of body changes were minimized by merely changing the inexpensive components, such as headlights and grilles, on standardized, mass-produced body shells. So consumers got the distinctive, ever-changing cars they demanded, but in superficial forms dictated by the production constraints of the supply side of the oligopolistic auto market.

These style policies pioneered by GM were slowly adopted by other mass producers, but no other company challenged GM's preeminence in style until the 1950s. Due to lower production volumes, other companies could not afford as large a design staff as GM. So they did not try to innovate but merely followed the aesthetic lead of Earl, who could dictate style for the entire industry through the sheer volume of GM's production. This lack of real competition in style combined with the industry's oligarchical structure to produce a stable, predictable cycle of incremental style changes providing consumers with small but steady doses of trickle-down distinction. This style structure was altered slightly by the Great Depression of the 1930s, which largely eliminated the craftbuilt luxury cars at the top of the market. The grand luxury makes either went out of business or moved down to compete in the larger middle-priced market, so the only style distinctions remaining were those between the makes in the hierarchies of mass producers. But the unique developments of the postwar era in the United States reduced even these style distinctions and revolutionized the stable system of style changes created previously.

As Bourdieu suggests, this revolutionary change in the culture of auto design was the result of a conjuncture of forces both external and internal to the field. The most important of the external changes was a sharp increase in and more equal sharing of family income, which brought millions of new consumers—most of them working-class—into the market for new cars (Harrison and Bluestone 1988). By 1953, however, this new demand had been met, and the seller's auto market of the immediate postwar years turned into a highly competitive buyer's market. But this market was still a highly concentrated oligarchy, which steered renewed competition largely into superficial styling and away from disruptive and risky price-cutting and technological innovation. To capture a larger share of consumer income in this market in which unit demand was falling but discretionary income was rising, automakers followed a two-pronged strategy focused on styling and quantitative dimensions. First, to raise the unit price they increased the size, power, and accessories on each car. These developments were more pronounced in the lower-priced models in each corporate hierarchy, for the more equitable income distribution made this the largest market. As a result, corporations concentrated their upgrading efforts there, where the biggest gains were to be had. The result was a decrease in ostensible quantitative differences between lower- and higher-priced models that had served as class markers.

The qualitative aesthetic differences between models also lessened as a result of the second prong of the automakers' strategy. They sought to stimulate consumers to buy a new car more often by accelerating the cycle of novelty focused on style. In the mid-1950s the usual three-year interval between major body changes was shortened to two on many models, and the off-year cosmetic changes became more drastic. The accelerated style cycle might still have been controlled and orderly if GM had maintained its style leadership. But in the 1950s increasing style competition between the Big Three prevented this, and the accelerated style cycle quickly spun out of control. It was this internal competition for distinction on the supply side among automobile stylists that combined with the growth on the demand side to cause the incredible rise and spectacular fall of the tail fin within a few years.

The tail fin began its shortlife in 1948 as another one of Harley Earl's carefully controlled, trickle-down style devices. Inspired by the vertical stabilizers of the P-38 fighter

plane, Earl placed little bumps of sheet metal on the rear fenders of the first postwar Cadillac, hoping to borrow for the car the national pride and technological superiority the public associated with wartime aviation. Over the next several years he spread this prestige marker down GM's model hierarchy, in his usual trickle-down, class-imitation manner. As in the past, Ford and Chrysler slavishly followed Earl's lead, incorporating small fins in 1952. Starting in 1953, however, internal supply competition converged with external demand competition to propel the game out of control. The more competitive auto market compelled Ford and Chrysler, both now flush with postwar profits, to greatly increase their styling staffs and give them more power and resources. As a result, auto styling became really competitive for the first time. To stimulate trailing sales, Chrysler decided in 1955 to make a bold styling move, introducing tail fins on all its cars. Then in 1957 the company raised the fins dramatically, introducing in one year a change that Earl would have trickled out over three or four. At this point, the stylists abandoned incremental changes and, driven by desperate efforts to make their cars stand out in a competitive market, vied with one another to make the boldest changes. Tail fins soared, bodies lengthened, and chassis lowered in an unprecedented succession of automotive change. All semblance of aesthetic differences between the makes in automakers' hierarchies was lost.

Thus, increased producer competition in a relatively oligarchic market constrained by mass-production costs led to an aesthetic convergence of automobile models, undermining the distinction that consumers sought in their cultural goods. In 1959 *Business Week* argued that there was not enough newness and difference in Detroit cars to fuel the program of planned obsolescence ("Detroit" 1959). The aesthetic and structural convergence of American automobiles provided consumers so little individuality that a growing number began to buy imported cars, opening the oligarchical market to real competition for the first time in decades. This move seems to have begun with the intellectual bourgeoisie, which Bourdieu argues is often the instigator of cultural change. The late 1940s and the early 1950s saw a rising chorus of complaints from artists and design professionals in the restricted subfield of cultural production, who seemed to resent the fact that middle- and working-class people were encroaching on their automotive distinction (Ehrenreich 1989:37-38). *Fortune* magazine ("Jukeboxes" 1947:184) called American cars "jukeboxes," and argued that their "balloon-like chromium-encrusted bodies are designed so that middle-class wives may impress each other with their opulence." Thus did the intellectual bourgeoisie criticize the masses for imitating the economic bourgeoisie and its taste for ostentation and luxury. To distinguish themselves, these people with an excess of cultural capital asserted their taste for "aristocratic asceticism" (Bourdieu 1984:214), which in the automotive field translated into lithe little foreign makes like the MG roadster and the Volkswagen. By 1959 this rejection of Detroit's homogenized opulence had increased sales of import cars to 700,000, 10 percent of the American market. Many of these buyers were more concerned with distinction than economy, as revealed by one study that found that two-thirds of Volkswagen owners had incomes at least 40 percent higher than average new-car buyers (Cray 1980:402). The intellectual bourgeois were not the only car buyers, however, to seek greater distinction outside the increasingly homogenized market of American-made autos. To distinguish themselves from the middle and working classes, many members of the economic bourgeoisie turned to luxurious and ostentatious European makes like Jaguar and Mercedes-Benz. Even working-class youth, whom prosperity had brought into the auto market, rejected homogenized American cars and sought difference and individuality by modifying stock cars, touching off the hot-rod and customizing subcultures.

By the early 1960s, consumer demand for greater automotive distinction had combined with genuine competition from foreign producers to force American automakers to abandon their long-established policies of superficial styling symbolized by the tail fin. After

reaching their outrageous zenith in 1959, fins declined precipitously in subsequent years and were gone from most models by 1962. In the place of such superficially distinctive style features, automakers offered consumers an increasing variety of cars that differed not merely in aesthetics but also in structure and engineering. Between 1960 and 1970 the number of models offered by American automakers increased 50 percent, to 370. During this decade the Big Three introduced a vast variety of new vehicle types: compacts, sub-compacts, intermediate-sized cars, muscle cars (powerful performance cars), pony cars (sporty, youth-oriented vehicles), sports cars, and personal luxury cars. Each type was targeted not, as previously, to a broad income class but to a smaller, more specific market niche, with no hierarchical connotations. Further, to meet consumer demands for difference, each model was offered with an array of optional components that buyers could order to individualize their cars. Consequently, Bourdieu's hierarchical distinction model collapsed in the automotive field, under the pressures of a prosperous society in which all consumers demanded individuality and distinction, and style innovations spread too rapidly to maintain an orderly class trickle down. What succeeded the hierarchical market was a pluralistic automotive culture, in which aesthetic differences proliferated on a flattened playing field, spreading not from high to low, but from periphery to center.

Joan Annett and Randall Collins (1975; also Collins 2000) present an analysis of American society that validates this collapse of the hierarchical culture (or deference culture, as they call it) postulated by Bourdieu. They argue that the growth in absolute incomes of the working and lower-middle classes in the postwar period allowed them to emulate the culture of the traditional upper class, with big, luxurious cars, respectable clothing, tea parties, piano lessons, and concert attendance spreading down the class hierarchy. But, they hold, it was not only higher incomes but also greater class segregation that made the cultural differences in the classes less visible. The working class moved to the low-priced suburbs in the 1950s, allowing its members to create their own worlds of private leisure and removing them from the constant surveillance of their class betters, who supervised them at work. Consequently, the different classes directly encountered each other less often, reducing their chances to study and distinguish one another. Further, the commercialization of more and more cultural fields in this period eroded the monopoly of the upper class over culture, as profit-making corporations lowered offerings to cater to the biggest market. When so many could attain at least the external trappings of the old elite culture, it ceased being distinctive, and a new, more pluralistic and segmented culture emerged, especially among the youth of the 1960s.

Annett and Collins recognize, of course, that differences in power and income between the classes persist, as do differences in private beliefs and attitudes. Their argument is merely that these differences are not expressed in visible, commonly recognized cultural demarcations between classes. This does not mean, however, that the legitimacy of class stratification breaks down, as Bourdieu's analysis might imply. This new, leveled, and pluralized culture continues to legitimate class inequalities, but in a different way than Bourdieu's model of class cultures. Instead of clearly marking out class differences and asserting the superiority of some over others, the new pluralized culture legitimates class inequalities by hiding them behind a superficial equality of consumption (Gartman 1991). It is this latter model of a mass culture, which obscures real class power, that was extensively developed by the Frankfurt School in the 1940s and 1950s (Horkheimer and Adorno 1972; Marcuse 1964; Adorno 1978).

Both Annett and Collins and the Frankfurt School fail to address directly, however, the sources of difference in this new, leveled, and pluralistic culture. The automotive case seems to recommend that people continue to be motivated in cultural competition by attempts to achieve the individuality that is often denied them at work. But where does

individuating difference come from when the visible markings of upper-class culture have become widely dispersed in a homogenized culture? I contend that cultural difference increasingly comes not from above but from outside, from marginal groups and subcultures not fully integrated into the mass culture. The auto industry in the 1960s, for example, drew on the emerging youth subculture, in both its working-class and middle-class variants, as inspiration for the muscle car and pony car, respectively. The popular music of the 1960s drew its innovations from marginalized ethnic minorities, in the cases of rock and roll, blues, and rhythm and blues, and from the rural poor, in the cases of folk and country. There continues to exist a cultural cycle of innovation and imitation, whereby rare culture spreads until it becomes so popular as to lose its individuality. But now the cycle moves from the margins of society to the center, not from higher to lower classes. It is just this cycle of marginality and popularity within a fragmented and leveled culture that the postmodernists seek to capture in their theories (Jameson 1991; Featherstone 1991). This epochal cultural transition, along with its requisite internal and external determinants, is also evident in my second case study, the architectural field, which gave rise to the concept of postmodernism.

#### THE CONTENTIOUS COLLAPSE OF MODERN ARCHITECTURE IN AMERICA

During the 1950s, while the popular art of automobile design was soaring to the heights of self-indulgent decoration and hedonistic luxury, American architecture was dominated by the severe, antidecorative, ascetic style of modernism. Pioneered mainly in Central Europe in the interwar period, the United States adopted the style relatively late, after World War II. Modern architecture was geographically segregated in the corporate, government, and institutional buildings of urban cores, while a commercial aesthetic of entertainment reminiscent of automobile styling reigned in the suburban buildings dedicated to consumer culture. By the 1960s, however, modernism was coming under criticism from outside the architecture field for reasons directly related to the late 1950s crisis in consumer culture exemplified by automobiles. But these external forces alone would not have caused the rapid downfall of this widespread style in the subfield of restricted production had they not converged with changes internal to architecture itself, especially the increased competition between producers during this period. The combination of these forces caused the restrictive subfield of architecture to be transformed in a way similar to the large-scale field of auto design, that is, a leveling of class-based aesthetic differences and a proliferation of a plurality of popular forms.

I have argued elsewhere (Gartman 1998; 2000) that the modern style in architecture expressed the interests and ideology of the intellectual bourgeoisie, those who have more cultural than economic capital. The simple machine forms, smooth surfaces, exposed structural supports, and industrial materials used by this style testified to the importance of the technical knowledge and skills of the engineers, managers, and technicians who were central to the new process of mass production. Modern architecture arose mainly in Central Europe, not America, because of the differential strengths of the technocratic movement of this intellectual bourgeoisie in each region. In the United States the independent technocratic movement was relatively weak, for in the first years of the twentieth century modernizing capitalists incorporated these technical professions into the new production process. Consequently, they had no need for a separate ideological justification of their ambitions. Further, employed by the mass-production corporations catering to the working masses, these professions, which included industrial designers and architects, were forced to abandon their preferred aesthetic of functionalism and "aristocratic asceticism" and yield to the masses' demand for hedonistic decoration and entertainment. In interwar Cen-



tral Europe, however, the technocratic movement was stronger and more independent. Blocked in their ambitions by an industrial class that was reluctant to modernize, the technical professions, including architects and designers, launched an independent movement for modernization and mass production, the wonders of which modern architecture exalted. They eventually entered an alliance with social-democratic state managers, not capitalists, to deliver state-subsidized housing to the masses in the modern style.

Ironically, however, after World War II the modern architecture that was designed for workers' housing in Central Europe was adopted as the preferred aesthetic for prosperous American corporations and government bureaucracies headquartered in the cores of major cities. This sudden aesthetic transformation of American architecture in the 1950s is explained in large part by the external changes in the American economy and society. World War II fundamentally changed the governance of the economy. The planning and control of the war economy shifted the balance of corporate power from the old-line entrepreneur/owners to the new technocratic elite of educated managers, engineers, and professionals (Galbraith 1967; Whyte 1956). Government technocrats cooperated with their corporate counterparts to regularize and stabilize both production and consumer demand in the post-war economy. This newly empowered technocratic elite symbolized its triumph with modern architecture, which testified to its instrumental rationality, technology, and bureaucratic power. The government and corporate skyscrapers in the modern style symbolized an efficient and rational administration of society's resources.

Even though the technocrats now controlling major corporations preferred modern architecture, it would not have triumphed had it not been for a general tolerance among the working public for this style. What had changed since earlier in the century, when public disdain for modernism had forced mass-production corporations to adopt a more decorative Art Deco style for their headquarters? The answer is found in the increasing segregation of work and consumption during this period. In the early period American workers lived in the urban centers where they worked, and the modern style testifying to rationalized production was constantly visible in their leisure time as a symbol of the class subordination they experienced at work. So they demanded through the marketplace, and got from consumer-sensitive corporations, an architectural style that concealed the rigors of mass-production work under exciting and decorative surfaces, just like the newly styled, mass-produced autos of the day. But as Randall Collins (2000; and Annett and Collins 1975:210–16) argues, the postwar period brought the geographic segregation of work and consumption, as the working class moved to the new suburban developments. There, in their leisure hours they constructed a life and identity based on private consumption, free of reminders of their subordinate class status at work. Consequently, they were more tolerant of technocracy-symbolizing modernism in their workplaces, since they could escape this symbolism into an ostensibly egalitarian consumerism in leisure hours. Such escape was assisted by the aesthetics that dominated the large-scale subfield of building, which was located mainly in the suburban realm of consumption. Here decoration and diversity, often in pseudohistorical styles nostalgically invoking preindustrial America, obscured the uniformity and subordination of mass-produced work. So the two architectural styles entered into an ideological symbiosis. The pleasure of consumption, symbolized by suburban architecture, was the justification and motivation for rationalized, bureaucratic production, symbolized by modernism. And rationalized work was the price one had to pay for self-indulgent consumption.

But this ideological trade-off began to come apart starting in the 1960s due to changes in the popular consumer culture explored in the automobile case, changes that ultimately impacted the high art of architecture. As we saw above, the increasing homogenization of goods in the subfield of large-scale cultural production forced producers to offer a greater



variety of fundamentally differentiated goods to satisfy consumers' demand for greater distinction and individuality. But such product diversity began to undermine the requirements of mass production, especially product standardization. This is especially clear in the automobile industry, in which the number of models and optional equipment on each model exploded during the 1960s. Product diversity lowered production runs, and optional equipment slowed assembly lines. Consequently, this consumer-driven diversity increased unit production costs (Gartman 1999). To contain costs, automakers and other manufacturers increased the speed of machines and lines, forcing workers to work faster. But these new production demands fell upon a workforce well-insulated from the threat of firing by Keynesian methods of demand management, such as unemployment insurance and social wage programs. Thus protected, workers revolted against new demands, sending rates of absenteeism, turnover, and work stoppages soaring by the late 1960s (Rothschild 1974; Bowles, Gordon, and Weisskopf 1984:84–91). Other signs of discontent with the postwar bargain appeared in the realm of mass consumption, as consumers began to question the real benefits of a society built on ever-escalating levels of consumption. The environmental movement arose to question the impact of consumerism on the landscape. The emerging consumer movement questioned the safety of products engineered for quick production and planned obsolescence. Among the young, the Vietnam War raised deeper questions about the costs of America's privileged access to third-world raw materials sustained by military dominance. And among inner-city, black Americans, discontent arose against the discrimination that excluded them from the mass prosperity of the period. Put briefly, in the eyes of many Americans the pleasures of mass consumption declined and the hardships of mass production arose to the point where the former no longer seemed an adequate legitimization of the latter (Gartman 1994:203–11).

These external social forces impacted the restricted subfield of architecture directly, since it was dominated for over a decade by a modernist aesthetic that symbolized and celebrated the system of standardized mass production and its technocratic elite, both of which an increasing number of Americans were questioning (Ehrenreich 1989:121–43). Young architects in particular began to attack the modernist establishment in architecture as complicit with the technocratic corporate and government elite, especially in the controversial area of urban renewal, where modernists helped developers and government bureaucrats “renew” urban areas by replacing low-cost housing and its poor residents with profitable, upscale housing and amenities for the upper classes (Green and Cheney 1968). Modern architecture came to symbolize for many an undemocratic system imposed on the majority by an insulated and venal elite unconcerned with the interests and needs of average citizens. But the impact of these external forces on architecture was heightened by being filtered through internal forces, which were exacerbating the usual competition between artistic generations. This convergence of internal and external forces explains the ultimate demise of modern architecture.

In the restricted subfield of architecture, just as in the commercial art of automobile design, the major internal force responsible for revolutionizing the field was increased competition among producers. During the 1950s and 1960s there was a general increase in enrollments in higher education, due largely to government subsidy of educational costs through programs such as the GI Bill. As Diana Crane (1978:4–9) has argued, this increase in education, combined with growing government and corporate support of the arts during this period, led to a rapid increase in the number of artists competing in the restricted subfield of cultural production, or high art. This was also true of the high-art subfield of architecture. The number of architects in the United States rose from 25,000 in 1950 to 31,000 in 1960, a 24 percent increase, then to 57,000 in 1970, an 84 percent increase over 1960 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1975:140). Most of these new architects were trained in

modern architecture, especially those attending the more prestigious schools of architecture, where European modernist emigres were in great demand as teachers and directors. Although the general prosperity caused a building boom in the postwar period, the peculiarities of the architectural market prevented it from fully absorbing all of the new architects being trained.

First, in most states the law required licensed architects only on large buildings and public structures, allowing many builders, especially suburban developers, to hire less expensive engineers and designers to lay out houses and communities (Crawford 1991:30). Second, modern architects excluded themselves from the design of suburban housing with aesthetic and ethical convictions. They were convinced that the most efficient method to house people was multifamily apartment buildings, and believed single-family houses to be enormously wasteful (Blake 1964). Further, modernists knew that most people preferred housing in more decorative, historic styles, which they refused to design. For these reasons, American modern architects generally confined their efforts to large-scale urban buildings for corporations and government agencies, where their services and aesthetic were welcome.

A peculiarity of modern architecture, however, ensured that a small number of firms was able to meet this expanding demand. From the beginning, modernists had promoted the industrialization and standardization of building, using in their designs industrial materials manufactured to standard dimensions and assembled into repeated units. But this standardization of design and construction made it possible for large, bureaucratic firms, employing a few name designers and hundreds of specialized architects, to design a large portion of all buildings demanded by the market. Younger architects with small firms were left with little business, and many were forced to work for the big firms in specialized and subordinate positions. Such positions, however, frustrated their aspirations to artistic creativity, which were cultivated in architecture schools of the day (Blau 1984:49–50).

The crowding of young architects in a subfield where a few established modernists dominated design heightened the normal competition that Bourdieu postulates between the consecrated and newcomers in artistic fields. Hostility between the architectural generations increased substantially, and one of the major charges of youth against their elders was, as Bourdieu anticipates, venality or “selling out.” In the postwar period modernism was transferred from the consecrated avant-garde in the restricted subfield to bourgeois art in the large-scale subfield of architecture, as large corporations adopted it as the distinctive legitimation of their growing economic capital. When this transfer greatly enriched a few famous modernists, the young denounced them for compromising pure art for the sake of money. As early as 1962 Philip Johnson, an older architect who identified with the youthful outsiders, condemned the association of modernism with the business world. Money and profits, he argued, “have precious little to do with the Art of Building. . . . Eating is not as important as art” (Johnson 1979:146). Peter Blake (1977:9) similarly wrote: “The Modern Movement—once dedicated to the ideals of an egalitarian democracy—had suddenly become the symbol of American capitalism at its most exploitative.”

One particularly contentious area of confrontation of the young and the old in architecture was urban renewal. Throughout the 1950s and early 1960s modern architecture was directly associated with the ground-clearing renewal of urban centers that displaced the poor and working class for the benefit of developers and their upper-class clients. Young architects harshly criticized this type of renewal, motivated largely by their own interests within the field of architecture. In nearly all cases, the architecture of renewal projects was controlled by the older modernists, who, in cooperation with their technocratic political allies, froze the young and their new ideas out of these lucrative architectural commissions. In 1968 Yale architectural historian Vincent Scully, an elder champion of younger

upstarts, wrote with anger of the conspiracy between the large, established architectural firms and the "relatively unqualified" architects working on urban renewal and review boards to deny work to creative young architects. "These [problems] call the whole problem of review boards into question, since they seem about to impose upon the nation's capital a pompous rigidity and a jealous authoritarianism which may be appropriate for Lyndon Johnson's Washington but hardly for that of its founders" (Scully 1988:227, 229). This was a classic case of sour grapes—young architects dismissed as tainted and corrupt the fruit that they could not attain due to their peripheral position in the architectural field.

Scully's direct association of young architects' problems with the authoritarianism of the national political establishment, however, reveals the important influence of external social struggles on this internal contest between the old and young in the restricted architectural subfield. Their criticism of modern architecture, especially its role in urban renewal, found external allies among the poor and working-class people displaced by it. Young, white, upper-middle-class architects and architectural students often teamed up with older, often black, poor workers to oppose the destruction of urban neighborhoods by the renewal plans of developers and city politicians. Their cooperative efforts blossomed into a full-blown alternative to technocratic urban renewal called advocacy planning, in which architects worked with neighborhoods targeted for renewal to develop competing plans that expressed the interests of the current residents (Davidoff 1993).

Young architects also sought to enlist other external allies for their fight within the architectural field by developing a broad critique of the newly empowered technocratic elite that would appeal to other Americans questioning its rule. Perhaps most important for this effort were Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown, two architects and professors at Yale University. Scott Brown had been a student of Herbert Gans at the University of Pennsylvania and was heavily influenced by his populist critique of urban renewal in *The Urban Villagers* of 1962. In this study Gans charged the urban planners and politicians who controlled urban renewal with class bigotry, for they judged the lives and aspirations of the working-class people they displaced by the narrow standards of their own upper-middle-class subculture (Gans 1967:305–35). In 1972 Scott Brown, writing with her architectural partners Robert Venturi and Steven Izenour and representing the younger generation of architectural challengers, extended the Gans class-based critique to the consecrated elite of modern architects in *Learning from Las Vegas* (1977). They accused these architects of "class snobbery" (p. 155) for arrogantly denigrating the popular culture of "middle-class Americans." This culture, represented by the large-scale architectural subfield responsible for commercial strips, Las Vegas casinos, and developers' suburbs, addressed and met the real needs and desires of the masses, they claimed, not the overblown monuments to technology erected by the modernist experts. "As Experts with Ideals, who pay lip service to the social sciences, they build for Man rather than for men—this means to suit themselves, that is, to suit their own particular upper-middle-class values, which they assign to all mankind" (p. 154).

This militant denunciation of elitism and class snobbery resonated with and was influenced by the growing questioning by the "silent majority" of the rule by technocratic experts, as the problems with mass production and consumption intensified in the early 1970s (Ehrenreich 1989:57–143). Developments in popular culture helped to render the general populace less tolerant of this elite and the high-art architecture that symbolized its rule. As we saw above, the competition of mass producers for consumer dollars in an increasingly broad and prosperous mass market had leveled aesthetic differences between products and replaced a hierarchical culture with a pluralistic one. Against this background, the surviving hierarchical differences between elite and popular culture in the 1960s must have been a particularly annoying aesthetic reminder of the continued class

differences within the society. This was especially true in architecture. While the continuing gaps between elite and popular culture in areas like painting, music, and dance were not very visible due to the more private nature of their consumption, architecture is a largely public art, so differences between buildings were visible to all. When modern architects and their technocratic patrons asserted the superiority of their architecture to the degraded commercial tastes, this was resented by the classes of Americans who were beginning to question the ability of this elite to rule.

Populist talk about elitism and snobbery may seem puzzling coming from architects such as Scott Brown and Venturi, who were trained at elite universities (University of Pennsylvania and Princeton, respectively) and were themselves certified members of the intellectual bourgeoisie of experts. But there were real affinities of interests between young architects and the working masses of America that can be understood with Bourdieu's concept of homologous positions (1996:251–52). The architectural challengers stood in a position in the restricted architectural subfield homologous (similar in form) to the position occupied by the poor and working class in the larger social field of classes. Both were peripheral and powerless, and shared a common subordination to the technocratic power structure, whose members were dominant in both fields. This homology of positions also helps to explain the external influences on the new aesthetic that young architects pioneered to combat and ultimately displace modernism.

The highly competitive nature of high-art architecture in the 1960s and 1970s caused the young to make revolutionary innovations, since only the boldest departures from modernism would stand out in the crowded subfield. Thus, Robert Stern wrote of one architectural rebel of the period, Stanley Tigerman, that although he was trained as a modernist, he had to abandon this aesthetic in a search for distinction. "Almost all of Stanley's work has been in Chicago, which is full of the ethos of Mies [van der Rohe, a major modern architect]. . . . Stanley had to take the most outrageous counter-position to get even a moment's hearing by the press or public" (Stern interview in Diamonstein 1980:235; see also Larson 1993:247–48). When Stern, Tigerman, and others searched the cultural landscape for signs of aesthetic distinction in the 1960s, one of the most obvious sources was the invigorated and pluralistic mass culture. Pressured by competition to cater to consumers' demands for difference, mass producers of cars, music, movies, and other forms of amusement created a widening array of innovative products to offer people escape from, and individuality within, the technocratic system they were questioning. This popular aesthetic was imported into high-art architecture by architectural rebels such as Stern, Tigerman, and Charles Moore to distinguish their work and undermine the modernist establishment.

One reason for this borrowing was the homology of positions between the working and middle classes and these young architects. Being outsiders in the architectural field, young architects were sympathetic to the culture of outsiders in the social (or class) field of contest. Bourdieu also mentions another external source of aesthetic innovation that may also have been at work here, the changing habitus of producers and consumers. When higher education was expanded in the 1950s and 1960s, more students from working-class and petty-bourgeois backgrounds received the degrees to compete in the restricted subfield of cultural production. Although they had formal training in arts, however, they did not have the deeply ingrained habitus of the upper class, which is acquired in the home and inclines its members to formalization and aestheticization. The larger number of architects competing for distinction in the restricted subfield encompassed many whose habitus were shaped by lower-class positions and hence inclined them toward the more direct and unsublimated forms of pleasure found in popular culture. This was also true in the field of painting, which was revolutionized during this period by Pop artists who similarly drew on

the vitality of popular culture to challenge the dominance of modernism. Many of these artists, including Andy Warhol, began their careers in the commercial arts and carried their petty-bourgeois habitus with them into the restricted subfield of painting (Crane 1987:32–33).

Even though the populists in architecture protested elitist modernism and mobilized elements of popular culture to combat it, they did not seek to destroy the restricted subfield of architecture and reduce it to a commercial art like automobile design. It is clear that the young populists were making a move *within* the restricted subfield, for they appropriated these new elements within its rules, especially that privileging form over content. As Bourdieu (1996:299–300) argues, the defining characteristic of the restricted subfield of cultural production is its emphasis on the cerebral form of expression, which distinguishes it from the emphasis on the function of inducing pleasure found in popular culture. Venturi and other young populists took the expressions of direct hedonism from popular culture and inserted them into the restricted subfield of architecture as forms, stripped of their popular content. The authors of *Learning from Las Vegas* made it clear that they were not seeking to lower their art to commercial culture, writing that “learning from popular culture does not remove the architect from his or her status in high culture” (Venturi, Scott Brown, and Izenour 1977:161). This was still high art, they insisted, because their effort “was a study in method, not content” (p. 6). Venturi and his colleagues brought ordinary commercial symbolism into dialogue with the established traditions of the restricted subfield, in order to speak to the common man on the street as well as the educated aesthetic elite (Jencks 1986:10). So, for example, in his Guild House apartment building in Philadelphia, Venturi used several elements from popular culture: standard double-hung windows, a commercial-type sign over the entrance, and fake television antenna to crown the facade. But the educated viewer also noticed that the windows were out-of-scale—too large, like an Claes Oldenburg Pop Art light bulb—and that the overall layout of the building was modeled on a Renaissance palace (Venturi 1977:116; Venturi, Scott Brown, and Izenour 1977:91–101).

The explanation for this insertion of external popular influences into the high-art subfield of architecture must address the changing habitus of consumers as well as producers. This hybrid architecture found a burgeoning market because the same forces that were transforming architectural producers were also transforming consumers. Increasing college attendance meant that upwardly mobile Americans were gaining formal knowledge of the high arts, while simultaneously retaining sympathy for popular culture, due to their habitus inculcated informally at home. The architectural populists brought the high art of architecture down to meet this rising middle class or petty bourgeoisie. The familiar elements of popular culture treated formally made high-art architecture more friendly and familiar to these cultural neophytes, in addition to wiping out the negative technocratic connotations of modernism.

Despite this meeting of popular and high art, architecture, unlike automobile design, was not leveled to a commercial art devoid of hierarchical distinctions. There remained noticeable hierarchical distinctions between buildings designed for the large-scale, commercial market and buildings designed for the restricted, high-art market by trained architects. These different developments of architecture and auto design are explained by the relative proportions of economic and cultural capital required for their appropriation. As Bourdieu recognizes (1996:147), in commercial culture the reception of products depends mainly on income and is largely independent of cultural capital, while in high-art culture reception depends vitally on cultural capital. What he does not recognize, however, is the implication of this difference for cultural leveling. As Herbert Gans states (1999:11), the leveling of a cultural field is inversely proportional to the amount of education (a form of cultural capital) required for appreciation. Where money alone is required to consume a



cultural product, leveling is likely to occur as general prosperity grows, for producers are motivated by market size to distribute distinctive characteristics widely until hierarchical differences break down. This is especially true of the products of material culture—automobiles, appliances, clothes—that require little knowledge to consume. Where cultural capital figures heavily in consumption, however, hierarchies are likely to remain. Cultural capital—especially as it is defined by Bourdieu, to encompass not merely education but also dispositions acquired in the home—is more unequally distributed in advanced capitalist countries than income. Further, these cultural differences in disposition and taste are less visible than strictly economic differences, because they are more likely to manifest themselves in nonmaterial culture (such as music, dance, or literature), which is consumed in private in class-segregated societies. This lack of visibility makes cultural capital less susceptible to redistributive pressures from below, which routinely affect economic capital and its material manifestations. Consequently, markets for such cultural goods are more differentiated and smaller. The lower classes generally do not demand or seek to imitate the qualities of these goods of the higher classes because they do not perceive them. And even if they did, their lack of cultural capital would prevent them from appropriating or appreciating cultural goods with these distinctive qualities. So the hierarchical differences remain, and in conjunction with the leveling of cultural differences in the realm of material culture, these may be effective in reproducing class inequalities. On the visible, material surface of culture, society seems to be classless, since there are few ostensible differences in the goods people consume, and those that do exist are matters mainly of quantity, not quality. But beneath the surface, in the more private, nonmaterial realms of culture, upper-class individuals can recognize one another by distinctive cultural traits unnoticeable to others. These cultural cues provide the basis for selective association and advantage, thus serving to reproduce the class (Gartman 1991).

Automobiles is clearly a field in which economic capital outweighs cultural capital, and hence shows a tendency to leveling. From the beginning the possession and consumption of this material product was dependent mainly on economic capital, with few ingrained or acquired cultural dispositions necessary. Price largely separated higher-class from lower-class makes, and what aesthetic differences existed as marks of prestige were highly visible in this good consumed in public areas of communication between the classes. Consequently, the lower classes sought to imitate these distinctions, and as they acquired greater income in the postwar years, these demands became effective in the market. Especially in periods of increased competition, auto producers were pressured to give lower-class consumers the largely superficial high-class markers they sought, and the aesthetic hierarchy was flattened and pluralized.

Architecture, however, is a more hybrid cultural field, in which both economic and cultural capital are important in consumption. A building is an expensive material product that requires substantial economic resources to “consume,” whether this is defined by ownership, occupation through rent, or even occasional use (in the form of amusement parks, shopping malls, or theaters). Yet in its restricted subfield, architecture is also an art, which requires for proper appreciation knowledge of an extensive history and cultivated dispositions to detect subtle distinctions. This hybrid nature explains the only partial leveling of this field and the retention of hierarchical differences. The distinction between severe, ascetic modernism and the hedonistic entertainment aesthetic of popular architecture testified to class differences in cultural as well as economic capital. Yet in the 1950s the lower classes did not demand imitations of modernism in their architecture, despite the fact that the aesthetic differences were very visible in public areas. This was due not merely to their lack of cultural capital or taste to appreciate modernism, but also to its symbolic association with the technocratic system, from which they were trying to escape



in their leisure lives. So when internal competition increased in the field, young architects seeking distinction were compelled to bring not high-art architecture to the masses, but mass culture to high-art architecture. They used popular elements within the rules of high art, maintaining the cultural distinctions to cater to a class rising not merely in income but cultural capital as well. This new populist or postmodern architecture presented a public face of egalitarianism and classlessness, appealing to the masses with its popular elements. Yet at the same time, it privately distinguished those privileged in cultural capital with inside references to the subfield of high-art architecture.

## CONCLUSION: PROPOSITIONS ON CULTURAL CHANGE

In conclusion, I summarize the findings from my comparison of these cases by offering several generalizations about cultural change in propositional form. These propositions modify Bourdieu's theory of cultural change by specifying the social conditions giving rise to cultural hierarchies that symbolize class position, as well as the social conditions under which such hierarchies break down to produce leveled and pluralized cultural fields. Thus, these propositions represent an attempt not to refute Bourdieu's theory, but to go beyond it, using his variables to explain a broader range of cultural configurations than he recognizes.

1.0 The lower the relative equality of and absolute average levels of economic and cultural capital in a society, the more cultural markets are differentiated and hierarchical, with cultural products visibly symbolizing class position.

1.1 In such highly stratified societies, culture legitimates inequality by marking members of the higher classes as individually superior to members of the lower classes.

1.2 In highly stratified societies, cultural innovations originate in the higher classes and are gradually diffused to the lower classes through imitation.

1.21 Imitation of the cultural products of the higher classes by the lower classes is motivated by the latter's attempts to achieve both distinction (superiority) and individuality.

1.22 The greater the competition between suppliers of cultural products in highly stratified societies, the shorter is the cycle of innovation, for suppliers are motivated to quickly bring distinctive cultural products to the lower classes.

2.0 The higher the relative equality of and absolute average levels of economic and cultural capital in a society, the more cultural markets are leveled and pluralized, dissociating cultural products from class position.

2.01 The greater the competition between suppliers of cultural products, the greater is the leveling and pluralizing effect of the increase and equalization of economic and cultural capital, due to greater pressure on suppliers to bring distinctive cultural products to the lower classes.

2.02 The increase in the equality of and absolute average level of economic capital results in leveling and pluralization mainly in markets of material culture, by increasing the demand for distinctive and individual material products whose consumption requires mainly income.

2.03 The increase in the equality of and absolute average level of cultural capital results in leveling and pluralization mainly in markets of nonmaterial culture, by increasing the demand for distinctive and individual nonmaterial products whose consumption requires mainly cultural knowledge and training, and by increasing the number of suppliers of nonmaterial products and hence the competition between them.

- 2.1 In such less stratified societies, culture legitimates inequality by obscuring the existing inequalities of capital between the higher classes and the lower classes.
- 2.2 In less stratified societies, cultural innovations originate in marginalized social groups and are gradually diffused to the mass culture.
- 2.21 Imitation of the cultural products of the marginalized by those in the mass culture is motivated by the latter's attempts to achieve individuality alone, not distinction (superiority).
- 2.22 The greater the competition between suppliers of cultural products in less stratified societies, the shorter is the cycle of innovation, for suppliers are motivated to quickly bring the individual products of marginalized groups to the mass market.
- 3.0 Cultural innovation in both types of societies is accelerated by external struggles in the larger social field that challenge the system of stratification.
- 3.1 The stronger the challenge of these external struggles in the social field, the stronger the challenge of cultural producers in peripheral positions in the cultural field to established cultural authorities.
- 3.2 The stronger the challenge of external struggles in the social field, the more likely it is that they will influence the content of cultural innovations by providing both consumers and suppliers with new habitus.

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