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Arts and aesthetics: Marketing and cultural production

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Abstract. Cultural production concerns the creation, diffusion, and consumption of cultural products. In this article, we discuss cultural production as related to the marketing and consumption of aesthetics. The article addresses the following topics: the nature of cultural production, including the roles that producers, cultural intermediaries and consumers play in the process; emerging perspectives and ideas on cultural production; aesthetics and art in cultural production; new epistemologies concerning postmodernism and posthumanism as related to cultural production; and the implications of the cultural production processes for the marketing aspects of cultural industries. This article sets forth marketing as the context and framework for the functioning of the cultural production system. Key Words: aesthetics • art • cultural industries • cultural production • marketing • posthumanism • postmodernism

Introduction

The purpose of this article is to discuss the notion of cultural production within the context of marketing. The position taken is that aesthetic meanings associated with cultural practices are related to the way in which individuals and organizations negotiate commerce and consumer culture. The main contribution of the research is to enlarge our understanding of the cultural production processes as they pertain to marketing and consumption of aesthetics. In this context, we also examine how emerging developments in postmodern aesthetics and posthumanism have augmented new ways of thinking about related issues.

The broad research question underlying the article is: Is it possible to view
marketing as providing both a context and an institutional framework for the cultural production system in the contemporary postmodern world? If so, what does it entail in terms of our conceptualization of the elements of the cultural production system and their specific relationship to the institution of marketing? Specifically, the following research questions will be addressed:

1 What is cultural production and who are the actors involved in it?
2 What are the current approaches within the field of marketing for the study of the cultural production system?
3 What are the significant developments in the area of cultural production that marketing should be concerned with in considering cultural products?
4 What is the role of aesthetics in the cultural production processes?
5 How do the new epistemologies based on postmodernism and posthumanism influence the cultural production processes?
6 What, finally, are the implications of the cultural production processes for individuals, organizations, and consumer culture?

What is cultural production?

Cultural production is the process by which cultural products (including goods, artifacts, visual and experiential objects, services, and art forms) are created, transformed, and diffused in the constitution of consumer culture (Lash and Urry, 1994/2002). In this article we are interested in a specific class of cultural products, those that have artistic and aesthetic appeal. A central premise of the cultural production process is that culture itself is constructed and negotiated by cultural actors (producers, intermediaries, consumers) through an interplay of symbolic and sensory modes of experience and their concomitant meaning systems in which the cultural actors are engaged. According to Adorno and Horkheimer (1944), two key members of the Frankfurt School, the institutional arrangements that produce the cultural order are collectively known as 'culture industries'. Here is an excerpt from their work:

Films, radio and magazines make up a system which is uniform as a whole and in every part. Even the aesthetic activities of political opposites are one in their enthusiastic obedience to the rhythm of the iron system. The decorative industrial management buildings and exhibition centers in authoritarian countries are much the same as anywhere else. The huge gleaming towers that shoot up everywhere are outward signs of the ingenious planning of international concerns, toward which the unleashed entrepreneurial system (whose monuments are a mass of gloomy houses and business premises in grimy, spiritless cities) was already hastening. Even now the older houses just outside the concrete city centres look like slums, and the new bungalows on the outskirts are at one with the flimsy structures of world fairs in their praise of technical progress and their built-in demand to be discarded after a short while like empty food cans. (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1944: 24)

On a less critical note, and reflecting contemporary conditions, Lash and Urry (1994/2002) examine the economic forces that produce and signify a symbolic cultural order, or more specifically, aesthetically oriented consumer culture.
The increased articulation of symbol structures with production and consumption systems is linked with the development of not just utilitarian, but also expressive individualism. Hence we speak of aesthetic reflexivity . . . Expressive individualism is involved in cultural consumption [and] in the design-intensivity of the culture industries . . . (1994/2002: 108)

Lash and Urry go on to show how advertising (and packaging) plays a key role in sustaining and nurturing the culture industry. In the context of marketing, these symbolic processes provide commercially viable opportunities to the producers and distributors while individual consumers shape their identities by engaging in aesthetic-oriented consumption.

The process of cultural production within the so-called ‘cultural industries’ (those industries concerned with cultural products that have artistic and aesthetic appeal), involves the ways in which cultural producers, cultural intermediaries, and consumers of culture interact and collaborate in the production of symbolic meaning. It is through production and consumption processes operating in the cultural industries that aesthetic symbols and meanings are constituted within the consumer culture (Kozinets, 2001, 2002; McCracken, 1988). Since cultural actors operate principally within the domains of art and aesthetic culture, it is important to consider how marketing theory relates to these domains.

**Who is involved in cultural production? Roles of cultural actors**

Cultural actors that participate in the cultural production system can be grouped into three categories (Kozinets, 2001; McCracken, 1988, 1989; Solomon, 2003). The first category consists of producers of cultural products and includes designers, artists, architects, and the like, who are involved in the production of the cultural product, which can be a physical good or something more intangible in nature (e.g. river magic per Arnould and Price, 1993). The second category of participants consists of cultural intermediaries – individuals and organizations that are concerned with the communication and distribution (i.e. meaning transfer) of the cultural product to consumers. The final category of cultural actors is the consumers themselves, who transform the cultural products into objects of meaningful consumption experiences. The traditional view of cultural production locates marketing primarily in the realm of the cultural intermediaries. Marketing is presumed to take the cultural product and imbue it with additional symbolic meaning that is eventually communicated to the consumer (Schroeder, 2002). The consumer then takes the meanings that are transferred from the cultural product as produced and circulated and uses, or transforms, those meanings in the pursuit of consumption and identity construction.

An alternative perspective on the place of marketing in cultural production gives it a much broader role and argues that the production, meaning transfer, and consumption arenas do not operate autonomously, but that marketing as a process and institution acts both as the context and a facilitating framework for cultural production (Meamber and Venkatesh, 1999). Marketing is integral to all phases of the cultural production process, influencing or shaping the production
of the cultural product, its distribution, and its consumption through mediation within the symbolic system. We refer to Stern et al. (2001) for an explication of this approach. This viewpoint will be articulated throughout the remainder of this article. We will begin by examining the relationship between marketing, art, and aesthetics as portrayed in the extant marketing literature.

Current approaches within marketing

Four interrelated, yet distinct, approaches that appear in the literature on the marketing and consumption of arts/aesthetics are outlined in Table 1. Each perspective will be elaborated below; but in brief, the first perspective is managerial in orientation, focusing on the principles of arts marketing. The second perspective develops out of recognition of the limitations of the first, turning attention to the consumption of the arts – in particular, the experiential, symbolic, hedonic, and spectacular aspects of arts/aesthetic consumption. The third perspective builds upon the second, but examines the consumption of arts/aesthetics in everyday life. Finally, the fourth perspective is in essence almost the reverse of the first; that is, it utilizes insights obtained from the content of cultural products themselves to understand marketing and consumer behavior concepts and practices.

Perspective 1: managerial-orientation

The early 1970s saw the emergence of the managerial approach to arts marketing. Beginning with Kotler’s (1972) idea of the generic concept of marketing, much attention in both scholarly and practitioner-oriented research has focused on ways to market the arts and segment arts markets, as well as on marketing mix variables, especially in relationship to performing arts subscription models. As Semenik (1987) points out, arts managers embraced the marketing perspective and began to adopt marketing tools and techniques. Representative academic research that focused on arts marketing issues includes: Bamossy and Semenik’s (1981) study of motivators for performing arts consumption, Andreassen and Belk’s (1980) work on family life cycle and theater and symphony attendance, and Belk and Andreassen’s (1980) research on family life cycle and ‘co-patronage’ patterns. Some recent work that falls under this category, but that accounts for additional social and cultural complexity, includes Caldwell and Woodside’s (2001) comprehensive models of buying and consuming systems for the performing arts, Garbarino and Johnson’s (1999) work on trust and commitment issues in theater patronage, and Askegaard’s (1999) discussion of image marketing for the performing arts.

While the managerial stream of research on the marketing/consumption of art certainly marks a significant direction in marketing thought, various limitations of the perspective have been offered (Hirschman, 1983; Joy and Sherry, 2003a, 2003b; McCracken, 1990). As these authors note, the extension of a ‘product’ marketing stance is of limited use for understanding museum-goers as culture-
Table 1

Approaches to art and aesthetics in the marketing literature that are related to cultural production

**Perspective 1: Managerial-orientation**

**Key Issue:**
Marketing principles are applied to advance arts consumption (e.g. segmentation)

**Exemplars:**
Andreasen and Belk (1980); Askegaard (1999); Bamossy and Semenik (1981); Belk and Andreasen (1980); Caldwell and Woodside (2001); Garbarino and Johnson (1999)

**Perspective 2: Consumption-orientation**

**Key Issue:**
Arts consumption includes experiential, symbolic, and hedonic components

**Exemplars:**
Ger and Belk (1995); Hirschman (1983); Hirschman and Holbrook (1982); Holbrook and Hirschman (1982); Joy (1998, 2000); Peñaloza (1999); Sherry (1998)

**Perspective 3: Everyday life-orientation**

**Key Issue:**
Arts/aesthetic consumption occurs in everyday life situations

**Exemplars:**

**Perspective 4: Cultural product-orientation**

**Key Issue:**
Cultural products (e.g. film plots, artworks, literary texts, advertising) provide insights into consumer culture (e.g. materialism, nostalgia, cultural myths)

**Exemplars:**
Holbrook and Grayson (1986); Schroeder (1992, 1997a, 1997b, 2002); Stern (1989, 1992)

bearers, art objects as cultural artifacts, and the interaction between consumer and object as a complex social and cultural event. Therefore, the second perspective has emerged with the intent of examining the properties of the arts, acknowledging experiential and hedonic dimensions related to the consumption of these objects.

**Perspective 2: consumption-orientation**

Consumption of experiential-type products, according to Holbrook and Hirschman (1982), becomes not so much a need to solve problems, as has been discussed in product market theory, as a need to engage in experiences for pleasure. That is,
the consumption experience is a phenomenon directed toward the pursuit of fantasies, feelings, and fun. Hedonic experience, defined as enjoyment or pleasure, is one type of aesthetic response that activates the multi-sensory, fantasy, and emotive aspects of experience. Taken together, the contribution of Holbrook and Hirschman’s collective work leads to an understanding of the notions of the experiential (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982), symbolic (e.g. Hirschman, 1983), and hedonic properties of artistic (aesthetic) endeavors and products (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982; Holbrook, 1997). For a more recent updated work on consumption experience, we refer to Caru and Cova (2003). Other recent studies that consider arts consumption (and in many cases address arts production issues as well) include Ger and Belk’s (1995) approach to historical and socio-cultural aspects of consumption and arts consumption as a system of consumer embodiment (Joy and Sherry, 2003b).

The study of symbolic and semiotic aspects of consumption (Khanwalkar, 2003; Levy, 1959, 1981; Mick, 1986; Pandya and Venkatesh, 1992; Schouten, 1991) in consumer research is related to this perspective, although it focuses on consumption domains other than the arts. Studies of ritualistic, hedonic, and performative consumption behavior illustrate how individuals collect past meanings, negotiate future meanings, and assemble present meanings of cultural constructs such as family, religion, gender, age, and tradition through their participation in particular consumption behaviors. These and other studies of consumption experiences include an aesthetic component that has yet to be a formal subject of study within consumer research. Recent work on spectacular consumption at the Nike Town retail store comes closest to the point (Peñaloza, 1999; Sherry, 1998). Central to spectacular consumption processes at the Nike site are both consumers’ movement through space and interactions with intertextual displays that include celebrities, products, and corporate narratives. The architecture, sculptural details, photographs, and product design and layouts provide multi-sensorial stimulation that caters to the imagination and creation of cultural meanings of competition, exceptional performance, style, and recreation. The consumption of Nike Town is experiential, sensorial, and spectacular. Above all, it is aesthetic.

Recent work by Stephen Brown, both in his various solo-authored papers and books (Brown, 1995, 1998; Brown and Patterson, 2001; Brown et al., 2001) as well as in edited volumes, has to be acknowledged as a major contribution to the aesthetics of consumption as well as the reorientation of marketing from a critical postmodern literary perspective. In his critique of the Kotlerian approach to managerial marketing, Brown (2002) argues that we can no longer ignore the various forces of cultural production processes that have come into play in the unfolding of marketing and consumption practices.

**Perspective 3: everyday life-orientation**

A third perspective to the study of arts/aesthetics focuses more specifically on the consumption of arts/aesthetics in everyday life. Since the 1980s, the field has seen significant contributions to the understanding of how consumption and culture
interact (Belk, 1986; Brown and Patterson, 2001; Brown et al., 2001; McCracken, 1988). One implication of this research stream relates to the consumption of art/aesthetics in a quotidian situation. Postmodernist thinking has focused on several conditions and features of everyday life that are more prominent today than before. That is, under conditions of postmodernity, the process of democratization (Lipovetsky, 1983, 1994/1987) has rendered aesthetic products/experiences equal to many other activities that constitute the experience of everyday life. In fact, it can be argued that life is becoming more aesthetic; that is, life is becoming more like the arts: ephemeral, experiential, and image or style-based (Baudrillard, 1995; Carroll, 2001; Debord, 1983/1967; Featherstone, 1991; Meamber, 1999). This approach to the study of aesthetics and consumption constitutes the third focus.

**Perspective 4: cultural product-orientation**

The fourth and final perspective emphasizes the substance of cultural products, including: film plots, artworks, literary texts, and advertising (Holbrook, 2004; Scott, 1994; Stern, 1989, 1992). The content of such works provides insights into aspects of consumption and consumer culture such as materialism, nostalgia, and cultural myths (e.g. Holbrook and Grayson, 1986). Schroeder’s recent work (1992, 1997a, 1997b, 2002; Schroeder and Borgerson, 2002) on the artist, the art market, advertising imagery, and representation takes the cultural product framework one step further by linking aesthetic processes and contemporary consumption practices, including an examination of representation as a key process of experiencing the world, and of photography as a vehicle for individual and cultural identity construction. Some recent work by Joy and Sherry (2003a) on arts markets and Guillet de Monthoux (2000, 2004) on aesthetics of organization falls into this category. We also include in this perspective the recent developments in postmodern aesthetics and posthumanism (to be discussed later) as manifestations of contemporary cultural practices.

It is clear that cultural production is implicated in each of these perspectives. The first perspective considers marketing in terms of its role as an important intermediary in the cultural production system. Perspective 2 considers marketing in terms of the production (e.g. servicescape design) and consumption of cultural products. The third perspective provides the rationale for using marketing as a framework for cultural production. It is precisely through marketing that everyday life is becoming more aesthetic (i.e. image-based). Finally, the last perspective speaks to the role that marketing plays in all phases of the cultural production process in the production, circulation, and consumption of cultural products themselves. Our present study is motivated by all of the above perspectives in varying degrees.
Some significant developments

The process of cultural production involves both the creation and consumption of symbols and meanings in addition to physical products. Thus, cultural industries, which are by nature involved in the creation of the symbolic, are integral to the cultural production process. According to the models set forth by Joy (1998, 2000), Kozinets (2001), McCracken (1988), and Solomon (1988), individuals and organizations involved in the production and diffusion of the arts and aesthetics contribute to the creation of symbolic meaning and the transfer of these meanings to cultural products. These symbols attached to the cultural product operate as a code, or language, that contributes to the understanding of meaning. The use of symbols is context dependent. Aesthetics or the style of a cultural product is a particular combination of attributes that constitute its form and meaning. The meaning transferred to cultural products reflects underlying cultural categories that relate to the ways in which we characterize the world (McCracken, 1993).

The relationship between consumption and production of culture was first examined at the turn of the century by Simmel (1971/1903, 1978/1900). It was Simmel's position that consumption allowed consumers to create meaning in their lives. Levy's (1959, 1981) seminal works on the symbolic aspects of products focused on uncovering the structures of symbolic meaning, while McCracken's (1988, 1993) discussion on meaning transfer argues that goods represent tangible forms of meanings that are taken from the abstract world of symbols. According to these scholars and others (e.g. Douglas and Isherwood, 1979), consumers purchase goods as much for their meanings as for their functionality. Symbols - including myths, narratives, feelings, fantasies, and experiences - are what consumers perceive and transform into meaning. Guillet de Monthoux (2004) has provided us with a comprehensive account of how philosophical aesthetics has entered the world of arts management through meaning creation.

Solomon (2003: 558–9) discusses a complementary conceptualization of the cultural production system. According to Solomon (2003), the set of individuals and organizations that create and market a cultural product is a cultural product system. It consists, in turn, of three subsystems: a creative system that creates new symbols and/or products; a managerial subsystem that selects, produces, and distributes the new symbols and/or products; and a communication subsystem that gives (further) meaning and provides the product with a symbolic set of attributes. These meanings are then transferred to consumers via cultural gatekeepers, both formal and informal. Marketing, as a practice and institution, is implicit in all three subsystems – the creative, the managerial, and the communication. The decision to create a cultural product is ultimately a decision based on the market – that is, whether or not consumers accept (need/want) the product. The management of the development of the cultural product involves marketing in the distribution (and pricing) of the product in consumer culture. The communication subsystem involves creating and directing marketing communications to cultural gatekeepers (such as the media, a formal gatekeeper, and opinion leaders, who are informal gatekeepers) and finally to consumers.
In a similar fashion to Solomon, Kozinets presents a model that incorporates the cultural production system in terms of ‘mass media culture of consumption’ (2001: 83). His model has elements that are closer to what we are also proposing in this article. The basic theoretical framework driving his model is subsumed under what he calls ‘articulation theory’, originally expounded by Hall (1980). Transferred to the cultural production process, Kozinets (2001) argues that different cultural actors in the system (e.g. media producers, media subcultures) have different articulations that intersect or converge into individualized negotiation of meanings and construction of identities. As Kozinets argues:

In this model, the articulations of cultural [actors] are conceptualized not only as encoding preferred social meanings into consumption objects and images but also as providing a super-intendence of those meanings that legitimize and moralize a range of consumption practices. (2001: 83)

Culture and meaning transfer

While, according to Applebaum and Jordt (1996), consumers perceive the world in terms of cultural categories of meaning, it is the culture in which individuals are engaged that creates the meaning of everyday products and constitutes the way in which meanings move through society to consumers (McClenk, 1986). The meaning system includes abstract ideas, values and ethics, and material objects and services that are produced or valued by a group of people (Solomon, 2003) and in the ultimate analysis is the sum of shared meanings, rituals, norms, and traditions among people (Geertz, 1973). Culture also determines the priorities a consumer attaches to experiences and products. A cultural product that provides symbolic benefits consistent with cultural priorities is more likely to be accepted than the one that does not.

Meaning is always in transit and consumer rituals play a role in this process. ‘Cultural meaning flows continually between its several locations in the social world, aided by the collective and individual efforts of designers, producers, advertisers, and consumers’ (McClenk, 1986: 71). Meaning transfer involves the infusion of products with symbolism through production and marketing processes by which meanings are passed on to consumers. These culturally constituted products signal their meanings to consumers through consumption rituals (Otne and Lowrey, 2003). ‘Ritual is a kind of social action devoted to the manipulation of cultural meaning for purposes of collective and individual communication and categorization’ (McClenk, 1986: 78). According to McClenk (1986, 1988), these consumption rituals consist of:

1 exchange, the rituals in which one party chooses, purchases, and presents consumer goods to another;
2 possession, the rituals in which consumers take ownership of goods by personalizing them;
3 grooming, the rituals that ensure the special, perishable aspects of goods, such as hair styles, clothes, etc., are captured and made resident in individuals; and
4 divestment rituals, the rituals used to erase the meaning of the good so a new owner can take possession it.

Although McCracken’s work is seminal in the analysis of the meaning system, it does not problematize the meaning-generation process. In other words, he does not question the ideological basis of the meaning system, or why certain meanings are preferred over others or what is the legitimate basis for the meaning-generation process. Such questions are addressed in some other studies, especially under postmodernism (Firat and Venkatesh, 1993, 1995).

Recent thinking on cultural production and meaning transfer views the process as less linear and more interactive, especially in terms of the constitution of meaning. For example, in the realm of advertising, it has been shown that consumers do not merely decode the meaning that cultural producers and intermediaries have signaled to them, but that consumers actively produce the meaning that is garnered from the advertisement (Schroeder, 2002; Scott, 1990, 1993, 1994; Tharp and Scott, 1990). The meaning that consumers produce may be a combination of the ‘intended’ or given meaning and the personal meaning given to the advertising by the consumer based on his/her background and interests. The consumption of a cultural product involves the consumption of aesthetics, both in terms of the properties of the cultural product and the experience of consumption as an aesthetic enterprise. As noted in the third perspective in Table 1, everyday life is becoming more aesthetic, as consumers are surrounded by cultural products – their images and symbolism in consumer culture. In the next section, we will examine the relationship between aesthetics and cultural production.

Aesthetics and the cultural production system

‘Aesthetics’, also known as the philosophies of art and beauty, was first coined by the German philosopher Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten in the 18th century to refer to the concepts of harmony, beauty, and order in the material world (Strati, 1996; White, 1996). Croce’s unification of aesthetics, in other words, the notion of aesthetics as sensory and pertaining to the philosophy of art, allowed aesthetics to develop into its own discipline within philosophy (Barilli, 1993/1989). However, from the time of Plato up to Heidegger in the 20th century (a span of 2400 years), art has been a recurrent topic of western philosophy.

All of these philosophies on art and beauty have in common the idea that aesthetic experience is central to a life of higher order; that is, aesthetic experience is distinguished from the material aspects of life and privileged because of its importance in human development and metaphysical discourse. From Baumgarten’s definition of arts as the production of refined objects directed toward an unproductive end – that is, aesthetic enjoyment – art has been rendered separate from life through the nature of aesthetic experience (Barilli, 1993/1989). An aesthetic experience is based on the senses but is symbolic, and thus the consumer of art responds to it differently when compared to more mundane objects in life. It is
through distancing oneself from the object, that which in real life would be threatening to our safety or health, that aesthetic experience becomes pleasurable. (Barilli, 1993/1989).

Aesthetics in everyday life

The operation of the cultural production process is grounded in the notions of symbolic meaning generation and consumption of aesthetics in everyday life. It is through the generation and transmission of aesthetic symbols and meanings in the realm of everyday life that cultural production occurs.

It is a widely held belief that the arts are essential to life (Carroll, 2001; Townsend, 1997). However, in western cultures, it is not usually accepted that arts and life are one and the same.

The differentiation between the arts and living is not found in some non-western cultures. For example, in Bali, there exists no distinction between art and life; that is, taking part in the rituals of Balinese ‘theater’ or ‘dance’ is part of living (Artaud, 1958; Holt and Bateson, 1970). To quote Holt and Bateson:

A feeling of relaxation and detachment characterizes the movements of the Balinese in daily life, whether they are cutting rice or carving a temple wall, preparing a meal, or arranging fruit in the market place. A similar form of detachment can be detected in some of their ritual dances . . . . The detachment which characterizes Balinese dancing would thus not be a departure from normal life but an extension . . . of everyday Balinese behavior. (1970: 323, 328)

In western cultures such as the United States and Europe, it is generally argued (Carroll, 2001; Dewey, 1934) that aesthetic experience is separated from everyday experiences. In his well-known work, Art as Experience, Dewey laments:

When artistic objects are separated from both conditions of origin and operation in experience, a wall is built around them that renders almost opaque their general significance, with which aesthetic theory deals. (1934: 3)

Thus the participation or partaking of the arts is not perceived as an aspect of one’s everyday life existence, except perhaps when one is a child and takes lessons in art or music at school and/or home, etc. or the regular night out at the symphony or Saturday at the museum for primarily middle- and upper-class adults and their families. In fact, Dewey attempts to correct this division between arts and everyday experiences. Edman echoes such a view:

. . . the realm of art is identical with the realm of man’s deliberate control of that world of material and movements among which he must make his home . . . the building of a hut, a skyscraper, or a cathedral, the use of language for communication, the sowing or harvesting of a crop . . . the digging of a mine— all these are alike examples of art no less than the molding of a relief or the composition of a symphony. (1939/1928:14)

Function of art in everyday life

Cassirer (1944), from which Read’s (1965) perspective follows, wrote that the human being is animal symbolicum; that is, a creative being in constant search of
according to some (Munns, 1988), though the somatic involvement of the body with aesthetic qualities, these aesthetic qualities can be characterized as perception, emotion, and insight through the act. What makes an experience aesthetic is the actual experience with art, and the nature of this engagement has also fostered think-

esthetic experience and everyday life.

arts impact the artwork being produced.

subjects of artworlds, but then the experience (both past and present) of the

complexity, as it is not merely that a part of or a different

However, art is in a sense also a phenomenon to life, as it is part of which secures

according to this, the art of thought is in the service of art, which on the surface

The contrary is the prevailing of the over art is simply that the intellect, art,

captured in form.

once them. However, whatever buttoning Cassirer did not believe art does one is it is

that are no longer sensations — they go beyond the strength of those who are

model, viewer and creator, and what is experienced in art is a block of sensations

The arts, thus, are a phenomenon of perception; they are art in the proper

human universe, art is poses of structures, which inter leaves already and continuous

worlds. Art constructs and organizes human experience through the framing of the

so for Cassirer (1944, 1946), as with Benjamin (1969), it is form that art thinkers to the

symbolic expression of human experience. In the sense

symbolic expression of culture. Breadth of culture with the things it produces may be a sense

cannot be the basis of artworlds which were the symbolic

of contrast: Cassirer (1944, 1946) argue that aesthetic experience is the experience

leaving the view of immediate or abstract from the view of art or

like defense and caution (1661), Cassirer (1944, 1946) viewed art in relation

from other activities by advancing the idea of art as symbolic

and Aristotelian (Phaedrus) provided a basis for the separation of art

problems, but it was Cassirer who rely on the other philosophers of Plato

history, or some other system of human activities.read (1961) took this idea

conditions of this experience through thoughts, language, and rational art. 

one's self a creature who in every moment of existence must examine the
Populär arts, like those that translate mass culture and act as a natural ally of advertising, in an attempt to elevate aesthetic experience to higher levels of consumption, is the way in which advertising becomes a proxy for mass art. It is, like the ads, made more salient through the use of aesthetic simulation, entertainment, and the presence of art advertising, able to reach the residual level of consumer experience. This idea stems from marketing research with consumers who identify an aesthetic experience, according to which various products are marketed as a consumer's creative act. According to this view, whether art can be a lasting force in our box-office box, box-office box, the question becomes not whether art and aesthetic experience can serve as markers of success or failure, but what the role of marketing is in these contexts. New perspectives, as well as new forms of artistic expression, have been introduced to marketing strategies, making advertisements a new medium for aesthetic communication, and thus for marketing as well. The question of whether art can serve as a medium for aesthetic expression, and thus for marketing, is a pressing one. Some may argue that art is distinct from advertising, and other cultural products, and that marketing is not aesthetic, but the rise of后现代 aesthetic expression, and the rise of aesthetic, and aesthetic expression, has shown that art and advertising can be one and the same, aesthetically speaking. 

Marketing of aesthetics

Marketing of aesthetics (and hence cultural production) is multi-faceted. The reach is through the interaction between the consumer and the art that reaches them. It is through the interaction between the consumer and the art, that aesthetic experience (and hence cultural production) is marketed.
Cultural production, postmodern aesthetics, and posthumanism

Postmodernism affects cultural production in two ways: first, by creating...

...and secondly, more recently, by exploring the aesthetics of visual images...

...and the impact of mass-mediated consumer society.

In the following...
and second, by rendering the ‘consumer lifestyle itself as a kind of work of art’ (Solomon et al., 2002: 561, 563). Recent works on postmodernism suggest that the modernistic and mechanistic notions of aesthetics have given way to paradoxical sensibilities in aesthetic experiences, including: hyper-reality, the juxtaposition of opposites, a lack of quest for unity, and a search for hybridity, theatricality, and a mixing of aesthetic objects (Cova and Svanfeldt, 1993).

Artistic production/consumption and postmodernism

Within the broader domain of culture lies the postmodern consumer culture. Consumer culture constructs art/aesthetics, and in turn, art/aesthetics (de)(re)-constructs consumer culture in some sort of mutual serendipity. Consumer culture is also the site of interplay between cultural producers, cultural intermediaries, and the consumer. It is largely through production/consumption systems that these processes become a reality. Production and consumption processes create not only concrete products, but works invested with symbols. It can be argued that it is through the production/consumption of symbols and the creation of meanings that art, culture, artist, cultural intermediary, and consumer are constituted.

In the world of commerce, there is an interesting tension between the aesthetics of image production and the consumer acceptance of symbolism. Björkman (2002), following Walter Benjamin (1969), uses the notion of ‘aura’ to account for this. As he argues, the participation of a firm in the cultural production process is a complex interplay of market forces and comes about through the balancing of various factors, such as market segmentation, aesthetic knowledge about the market, pricing and distribution decisions, and various other marketing factors that combine to create the company’s image in the minds of customers. As an example, he says that an owner of an Armani suit not only buys into Armani’s aesthetic philosophy, but actually buys part of Armani himself. It is this appropriation by the consumer of both the cultural product (an elegant suit) as well as a piece of Armani (the cultural producer), albeit in a rhetorical sense, that makes the cultural production process a postmodern construction.

Another example within the postmodern context is from the field of media and film studies. Borgerson’s (2002) work in this regard is instructive. Her study refers to the management of desire in the cultural production process. Although her example refers to a particular film, ‘Medea’, the conclusions are noteworthy and potentially generalizable. She extends the tragic narrative of ‘Medea’ to ‘semiotized social structures and the flow of human capital’ (Borgerson, 2002: 55). How is this possible? We have already stated that all cultural production involves a high degree of meaning production and meaning transfer. On one side of the equation is the producer of meanings, and on the other side is the consumer of meanings. However, the respective meaning statuses are neither equal nor are they always in equilibrium. That is, to use the terminology of Deleuze and Guattari (1983), the producer and the consumer are different desire machines and by extension, what the producer intends may not be exactly what the consumer wants or perceives it.
to be. In a pristine world of uncontaminated art, where artists create aesthetic objects to realize their personal vision and to satisfy their own creative impulses, one can assume that the artistic enterprise is removed from the world of consumer whims and fantasies. Occasionally, artists may expect that viewers of their art will eventually come to their way of thinking, but at the moment of artistic creation, this is not a main concern. However, in the world of commerce, the audience is already in the picture from the very beginning and is not ignored by the market enterprise, whose primary aim is to balance the creative impulses of the artist with the desires of the audience. In a simulated economy, this process becomes one of translation and retranslation of symbolic images by the marketer. Conversely, at the opposite end, it is one of consumer appropriation and reappropriation of the aesthetic images. In postmodern terms, this becomes a legitimizing discourse of symbolic manipulation and negotiation in an image economy.

In sum, production and consumption are linked hermeneutically in postmodernity; that is, production does not end, but even in consumption, production is taking place in the constitution of meanings and symbols that consumers use to create meaning in their lives (Venkatesh, 1992). Products are constructed and re-constituted through use and infused with symbols that are linked to the meanings in the production and consumption processes. The consumer is no longer at the end of the process, but is part of an ongoing process of symbol construction/consumption and meaning generation.

**Postmodernism and posthumanism**

Under the condition of postmodernity, the information mode is erasing the distinction between the appearance and the real (Baudrillard in Poster, 1988).

The scenes are in a sense more real than the original, hyper-real in other words. Or at least the surfaces, as grasped through the immediate senses, are more real . . . . The representations thus approximate more closely to our expectations of reality. Of the signs that we carry around waiting to be instantiatted: 'Disneyland tells us that faked nature corresponds much more to our daydream demands . . . Disneyland tells us that technology can give us more reality than nature can. (Eco, 1986: 44)

Baudrillard posits that the world is now constructed through simulacra and simulations – a hyper-reality or a world of self-referential signs. He discusses four evolutionary phases of reality and experience; the first is engaging in direct experience with reality; the second is working with experiences and representations of reality; the third is consuming images of reality; and the fourth stage (hyper-reality or the age of simulacra) is taking images themselves as reality. It is the last two that are of relevance to our discussion of cultural production. According to Baudrillard (1993/1976), consumption consists of the exchange of signs. Signs and images supersede materiality and use value. Thus artists, cultural intermediaries, and consumers are interested in the sign value of art and art consumption.

Consumer scholars have written much on the manifestation of the hyper-real in consumer culture (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995). Kozinets has made seminal contri-
butions to the postmodern cultural ethos through his empirical investigations of ‘Star Trek’ (2001) and the ‘Burning Man’ (2002). While ‘Burning Man’ represents anti-market consumer culture, ‘Star Trek’ heralds a posthuman peek into a distant future. Both are examples of simulated constructions on a colossal scale. Simulation is thus the social reality of consumer culture, as indicated in other works that reflect the thematization of cities (Sorkin, 1992) and cyberspace (Turkle, 1995). This is also seen in the marketing and the recycling of images and in signs in advertising, as well as in product design, etc. In terms of the inscription of the hyper-real upon the consumer, in addition to responding and engaging in the hyper-real spaces, cyberspace and marketing activities, the consumer him/herself can become more real than real in terms of adornment and body modification. Thus, clothing fashions and body fashions, in terms of body size and features achievable through exercise and cosmetic surgery, are all manifestations of the hyper-real. Identity is implicated in the hyper-real (Kozinets, 2001, 2002).

Recently, we witnessed the emergence of ‘hyper-real’ artistic cultural products that played with the reality/illusion dichotomy. As Kaplan (1987) wrote, it is not the technical devices of the majority of videos (or artistic works), such as the abandonment of traditional narration devices (cause and effect, time and space, the continuity of relationships, conception of character), frequent reliance on traditional genres from which to parody or ridicule, self-reflection, and the deliberate showcase of production elements, that constitute a postmodern form of art. The blurring of conceptual boundaries, in terms of aesthetic forms and critical categories, is characteristic of artistic products in postmodernity. As Kaplan (1987) uses Baudrillard’s work (in Poster, 1988) to support her study of MTV videos as postmodern forms, so Baudrillard seems particularly appropriate to the study of new and changing art forms in contemporary western society – the hyper-arts (Walker, 2001). In terms of many art forms, it no longer makes sense to talk about self-reflective devices defying the dominant ideology through the deliberate undercutting of illusionism because these hyper-art forms abandon traditional illusionism, blurring the fiction/reality distinction. This is not to argue that the arts have no functional utility, but that functionality itself is treated as a sign (Askegaard and Firan, 1996). It is the transformation of the sign in a virtual world that is at the heart of the transition from postmodernism to posthumanism (Giesler and Venkatesh, 2005).

With the advent of the Internet and various computer-related technologies, cultural production has moved into a different state. The term posthumanism has come to mean several things, from non-aging bodies to grafting of silicon chips into the brain to probing into the deeper recesses of the mind. Recent writings on posthumanism suggest that we may be entering a new era concerning how we conceptualize human bodies and mental structures (Gray, 2001; Halberstam and Livingston, 1995; Haraway, 1991; Hayles, 1999; Rutsky, 1999). Some consumer scholars are also attempting to explore posthumanism and its implications for consumption and marketing practices (Venkatesh et al., 2002). Although not strictly cast in terms of posthumanism, Zaltman’s (2003) recent work on ZMET techniques contains some elements of posthumanism.
What is posthumanism? Katherine Hayles (1999) looks at it as the intersection of human mind and intelligence machines. Donna Haraway (1991) repeats a similar theme in her work on cyborgs. Both Hayles and Haraway rather unwittingly capture the notion of the ‘artificial’ as espoused in an earlier work by Herbert Simon (1982). Featherstone and Burrows (1995) view posthumanism as creating new cultures of technological embodiment. In the remainder of this section, the focus is on the notion of the artificial and its connection to posthumanism. We will attempt to discuss the implications of these developments as we reconfigure our epistemologies of consumption.

We will begin the discussion with Herbert Simon’s (1982) seminal work, The Sciences of the Artificial. In his well-known book resulting from a lecture series, Simon has argued that many branches of human knowledge and practices – science, business, law, architecture, etc. – are concerned with the contingent, that is, not with how things are but with how things might be, in short, with ‘design’.

For Simon, all human ingenuity has been directed toward the creation of the artificial as opposed to what is already given, the nature. Nature is not a human creation; it already exists. But many entities that we consider to be natural are really man-made, according to Simon. Thus, the forest may be a phenomenon of nature; a farm is not, and the plowed field is no more part of nature than an asphalted street. However, what is remarkable about the world of the artificial is that all artificial entities are subject to the laws of nature, and there can be no exception. An airplane is able to fly not because it defies the laws of gravity, but because it obeys the laws of physics to their last detail; otherwise the result would be quite disastrous. It is in this context of the construction of the artificial that we place the whole discourse on posthumanism.

Human civilization is a march toward the creation of artifacts that are designed to adapt to natural systems. Associated with each artifact is a set of practices. When several artifacts are assembled together, we create a system of practices. The basis of any system of practices is a system of knowledge. Systems of knowledge are known as epistemologies. As human beings, we try to adapt to the systems that we create. When the systems do not serve our purpose, we change the systems and the artifacts. This means that we also change our epistemologies. All these elements – artifacts, systems, and epistemologies – are the artifacts of human ingenuity. However, in the Cartesian world, there has been one constant – the human mind – for it is sacrosanct and defines what it is to be human. In our march through history, we have been careful not to tamper with this human element. Only in science fiction do we see attempts to change the human character, with some serious consequences. Science fiction captures our imagination but sets limits to it. Thus the world of Frankenstein or Dracula excites our imagination, but reminds us what can happen if we play with nature. In Simon’s work, we do not deal with the artifacts of science fiction, but with objects of practical design that we create in the real world in order to experience them physically or phenomenologically. When this involves transgressing the world of the natural, we take risks. Another term for this risk-taking is human progress.

To elaborate this point, Simon was careful to argue that none of the artifacts
destroy the humanness of our lives. All systems are created so that we preserve their human quality. The various artifacts we create are meant to enrich our lives. In the world of artifacts, Simon did envision the possibility of the merging of the human and the machine. He called this artificial intelligence. However, he was careful to note that what he is after is not to turn the human into a machine, but to make machines more human. Thus computers are computational machines of extraordinary capacity. It is in the same vein that biological models have been injected into artifacts. The airplane was invented to mimic the flying bird. Similarly, the automobile was invented so it could run faster than a horse. In all these examples, the humanness did not change, only the world of artifacts did.

Where does posthumanism fit into this? Posthumanism seems to change the ‘humanness’ of our existential condition rather radically. Simply put, it is an attempt to alter our notions of what it is to be human in the Cartesian sense. According to Featherstone and Burrows (1995), Haraway (1991), Hayles (1999), and others, this can occur through cybernetic advancements. It is an attempt to extend the Simonian world where machines not only can do routine computational tasks, but also can actually think logically and act linguistically. Posthumanism thus envisions changing the make-up of what it is to be human. Thus, for example, electronic chips can be grafted into the human body and brain, and all the primordial notions of what it is to be human can be altered in the process.

The consequences of posthumanistic advances to the world of consumption are quite substantial. Traditionally, our notions of what a consumer is, whether he/she is an information processor or a cognitive subject or a cultural subject, is derived from systems of humanistic epistemologies. The question is what kind of epistemologies can we envision in a posthuman world? This question will shape the future of cultural production as a process and reality. What will it mean when the nature of humanness changes for cultural producers, cultural intermediaries, and consumers? Will the cultural production process operate differently? While we cannot predict the changes that may occur, we can envision that both the world of artifacts (cultural products) and the roles in the process may change as the world changes. In the meantime, we will turn to a discussion of the implications of cultural production.

Implications of the cultural production process for individuals, organizations, and consumer culture

A recent work by Thompson and Hirschman (1995), whose study draws from Foucault (1979/1975), points out that consumer identities are constituted through socio-historical discourses that endure through time. However, it is the constant engagement with discourse and experiences that re-forms and shapes identity over time. Naturally, this sensibility (i.e. lack of commitment toward meta-narratives) invites fragmentation, and the culture becomes one of crises and discontinuity, with no central design or order. ‘A hedonistic attitude tends to develop, set on enjoying, on grabbing emotional highs, and on fulfilling each
moment rather than on awaiting a grand coming together of things in the future’ (Firat and Venkatesh, 1996: 254).

Therefore, although we cannot speak to the posthuman changes that will impact cultural production, we can see in the contemporary postmodern world that if identity is constantly changing and emergent, consumption of cultural products, including their symbolic meaning, can help define and shape the self. It may be that these symbolic meanings have a long history, but it is through the experience of consuming cultural products that consumers are able to create themselves and the meanings in their lives.

Implications for organizations

According to Ramirez (1991), the beauty of organizations is found in organizational members’ recognition that they are part of a whole (belonging to, as well as distinct from). Aesthetic experience involves the appreciation of belonging to life, which organizations provide through activities that constitute presentational symbols.

In recent years, sociologists of art and now organizational and consumer researchers have begun to study the nature of relationships between cultural intermediaries, artists, and consumers (e.g. Becker, 1982; Björkegren, 1996; Joy, 1998, 2000). For example, Guillet de Monthoux (2004) discusses the role of the cultural intermediary in the art firm and the flows between the art world and the business or industrial world. He and his colleagues study the artist as manager and the relationships between artists and those who produce and distribute material goods such as furniture. Not only does the furniture manufacturer draw creative inspiration from working with artists, but artists impact the firm itself – the way it operates and the way the product is ‘staged’ or marketed to the consumer (Venkatesh, 2001).

Becker (1982) and other sociologists have also studied artistic collectivities and cultural intermediaries or ‘art worlds’. As Becker has observed, ‘All artistic work, like all human activity, involves often the joint activity of a large number of people’ (1982: 1). However, these studies do not take into account the specific role of the marketers in the process of actual production of the aesthetic experience. One notable exception is Joy (1998) who examines the framing roles of artists and curators and gallery owners as cultural intermediaries in the creation of art and artistic discourse. Cultural intermediaries such as patrons (kings, the church, private citizens, critics, academics) have always played a role in the sponsorship and diffusion of the arts (Sinclair, 1990). However, as art has become marketized, new types of cultural intermediaries have emerged and become important in the cultural production process as well. Some examples include arts organizations that bring together artists and consumers, including service organizations dedicated to advocacy in the art world; arts organizations associated with one particular artist or group of artists; and represent organizations that bring touring artists to particular communities. Within these organizations are found a number of types of roles key to the cultural production process, including: directors,
marketers, audience development staff, curators and other program coordinators, public relations staff, and financial directors, among others.

Implications for consumer culture

Cultural production shapes consumer culture through the introduction of cultural products. Contemporary consumer culture is a market(ing)-oriented culture. The consumption of objects and images drives the economy and the consumer’s life experiences. Aesthetics are central to the ways in which cultural products are created, communicated, and consumed, as these products are made up of signs, images (symbols), and meanings. It may even be stated that the world is organized and experienced aesthetically, and this reality is used by marketers in the marketing of products, services, images, etc.

Study implications – the development of a conceptual model

This article provides a conceptualization of the cultural production process as collaboration within cultural industries and discusses the implications of this process for the domain of marketing and consumers. In this section, we outline a conceptual model focusing upon three key agents of cultural production: cultural producers, cultural intermediaries, and consumers of culture. We have argued in the article that aesthetic meanings associated with participation in cultural activities are related to the way in which organizations and consumers construct and negotiate their positions within the meaning system. Consumers are as much aesthetic subjects as they are cognitive subjects.

The process of cultural production in the cultural industries involves the ways in which cultural producers, cultural intermediaries, and consumers of culture interact and collaborate toward the end of producing symbolic meaning. These actors operate within the domain of art and aesthetics in everyday life embedded within the consumer culture. It is through production and consumption processes operating in the cultural industry that aesthetic symbols and meanings are produced and allow for the production of individuals, organizations, and consumer culture. The nature of this collaborative process is captured in a model shown in Figure 1.

This model expands and revises extant models of cultural production and meaning transfer identified in the literature presented above. Within ‘culture’ as the constituting element of the study, the model of the arts and aesthetic objects as cultural production has these elements: the (de)re-production of (postmodern) consumer culture, the production/consumption of the arts, and technology as related to the production/consumption process negotiated by artists, consumers, and cultural intermediaries via the culturally constituted ‘code’.

Artists and creative designers, marketers, and other cultural intermediaries are integral to the constitution of the aesthetic experience and its symbolic meaning. These actors play a role in the production of aesthetics, including the aesthetic code or discourse surrounding aesthetics itself. In addition to the view of cultural
production discussed above, in which cultural intermediaries help to diffuse aesthetic products throughout the culture, we argue that marketers and other cultural intermediaries help to orientate the direction of the cultural production system itself. That is, cultural intermediaries help to create the aesthetic experience itself. Joy and Sherry (2003a) show that the 'art market' indexes the changing value of artworks and is one discourse consumers can use in consuming art as aesthetic experience (other discourses may include those of the cultural elite – for example, critics and historians). The symbolism and meaning of aesthetic signs that cultural intermediaries help to define are applied to many realms, including product design and advertising. Thus, as Nava and Nava (1992) discuss, consumers, who do not participate in conventional forms of art-going or art-making, do draw upon cultural forms such as advertising (Brown, 1995; Nava and Nava, 1992; Schroeder, 2002) and videos (Englis et al., 1993; Goodwin, 1992; Kaplan, 1987) to construct identity and consume and invest with meaning the practices around them.

In summary, this article has discussed cultural production within a marketing framework. The institution of marketing relies upon cultural production as the process that ensures the production, dissemination, and consumption of cultural products.
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