

The second visit

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Abstract

Habituation, or “addiction” to fine arts consumption is a familiar phenomenon and extremely important to arts institutions and to the quality of art experience. Relatively little study has been given to the qualities of one visit to an arts institution that would induce another, however several disciplines (Economics, Sociology, Psychology, Philosophy, Art History, Education, Arts Management and Artists themselves) have generated models of art engagement that bear on this phenomenon. This paper present some examples of these models in two main categories, Social (involving more parties than the audience member) and Individual (concerning only the art and the viewer) and discusses their implications for policy and practice of arts presenting institutions.

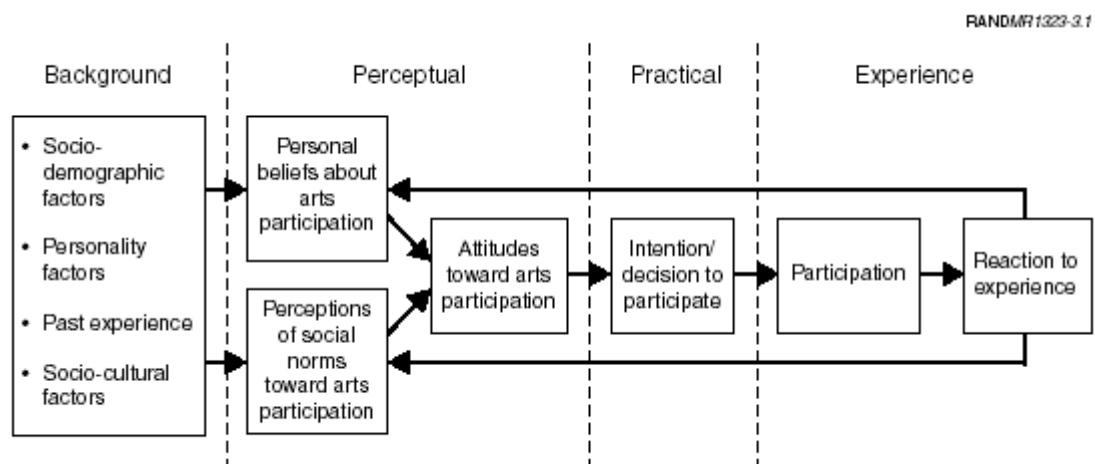
I. Introduction

This essay presents some vignettes of a larger work in progress, examples from a more extensive set of explorations, and we thank the participants in the present meeting for their patience with its roughness and exploratory form

The motivating idea for this project, beyond an interest in expanding the audience for the fine arts and the quality of their experience, is our perception that research in this area has been overwhelmingly directed at the supply side of the process with very little attention to the experience of the audience itself, much less to the mechanisms that motivate people to engage with art on a repeated basis. Even such an integrated and expansive study as Howard Becker's *Art Worlds* (Becker 1982) provides only the sketchiest examination of what viewers and listeners creating the experience of art actually do, or why, and doesn't get to the topic for two hundred pages.

Research focused on arts participation, including visitor and public survey studies, concentrates on considerations related to the time between art experiences as determinants of attendance (parking, prices, accessibility, food etc.) but regularly seems to skirt what would appear to be a central factor in generating a repeat visit, namely the experience of the visitor with the art itself. In general, 'arts participation' is summarized as the purchase of a ticket, and the art experience itself is treated as a binary decision to participate or not.

A refreshing enrichment of this view is found in the recent studies by the RAND corporation, (McCarthy and Jinnett 2001; McCarthy, Ondaatje et al. 2001) which distinguishes stages of participation in an implicitly sequential process and recognizes the iterative quality of forming an "art habit", as summarized in the figure below.



(source: (McCarthy and Jinnett 2001))

In the same vein, the study by Turrini of a Milan theater audience that explicitly models return visits and their relationship to previous consumption explores a methodology that has great promise (Turrini 2002). The Urban Institute has undertaken an examination of art participation as a concomitant of community life (Walker 1999; Walker, Scott-Melnyk et al. 2000; Walker 2002) On the whole, discussion of what would seem central to understanding audience development, namely the personal experience of art consumers with art and with the associated aspects of art participation, is a small part of the available body of research.

On the other hand, models, both implicit and explicit, of arts participation and engagement, including models relating current to future experience and that recognize consumer decisionmaking, have been developed independently in several different academic and semi-academic fields. The purpose of this research is to collect and compare these models, and the present paper offers a few examples of this exercise.

II. The 'second visit' problem

We begin with the assumption that engagement with fine arts should be more, and more widely distributed across socioeconomic groups, than it is. We do not rehash the extensive investigations that have been made of this proposition here, nor repeat its justifications, but the situation of a typical presenting institution is illustrative:

On a web page courting corporate sponsors, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art proudly announces:

- Highest annual attendance (over 700,000) of any modern art museum in the country outside of New York City, and the ninth highest attendance of any art museum in the country
- Highest membership (43,000) of any modern art museum in the country
- 84% of attendees have a college degree or higher and 49% have a household income of \$75,000 or higher (2003)

It is possible to infer from these figures that the premier modern art museum in a wealthy and culturally aware US city reaches only about 10% of its natural audience (college graduates), only a sixth of the college-educated population that attends museums at least once a year, and reaches less than one percent of non-college educated people in its region.¹

SFMOMA's penetration even of its most likely potential audience is remarkably small, given the region's relatively modest endowment of art museums generally, but its impact on the majority of the population in lower socioeconomic strata is almost invisible.

A more important aspect of arts consumption is not visible from a cross-section, namely trends over time. Here the news is mixed: from 1992 to 1997 total attendance at classical music, opera, non-musical theatre, dance, and art museums as a fraction of population increased by 32%, but a significant part of that is attributable to the development of arts presenting institutions in new locations (outside major cities), and in the last few years, many of these

¹ Since the population of the San Francisco Bay area is about seven million, it would appear that one in ten nearby residents, perhaps one in seven adults, visit the museum in a year. However, Americans who attend art museums go, on the average, 3.3 times each per year (1997). Survey of Public Participation in the Arts. Washington, DC, National Endowment for the Arts. so ignoring tourists from outside the region, we can estimate individual visitors as numbering somewhat less than 200,000 people, or only about 4% of the potential audience.

Looking more closely at the numbers, we note that only about 27% of Californians have college degrees (probably more in this area) and six out of seven visits are drawn from this group, so about 170,000 of the visitors are about ten percent of the people who typically constitute the audience for "highbrow" art in this museum's catchment area. It's quite likely that most of the remainder are students who should be considered "latent college graduates", but even if we assume they are all "real" non-college-educated people, they constitute less than one percent of that part of the public. About 60% of Americans over 18 with college degrees (about 200m people) reported attending an arts museum at least once in 1997 (Ibid.), but O'Hare's experience with self-reported arts participation in museum surveys indicates a likelihood of strong upward bias.

institutions (for example, symphony orchestras in Denver, Sacramento, and San Jose) have failed. More disturbing, the arts audience is aging faster than the population as a whole. From 1982 to 1997, the fraction of audiences for various fine arts media who are under 30 have fallen, sometimes as much as 50%, while the fraction over 60 has typically doubled. All audiences are aging faster than the population. (Demographic Data Consultants 1998)

Finally, we note the provocative result that motivates much of this study: frequency of attendance has fallen for recent generations relative to older audiences. More younger people are sampling the art experience, hence the increased overall attendance, but they are not going back for more.

“Second visits” are important

A widely accepted principle of marketing and sales for nearly all products holds that retaining a customer is more important and more profitable than finding a new one. All the overhead costs of a new account are saved when someone comes back, and repeat customers are more likely to recruit others, better sources of information leading to improved product quality, and cheaper and easier to serve than new ones.

From an institutional perspective, regular attendance is especially valuable: repeat visitors are likely to be loyal and supportive members of the museum or symphony “family” and respond to it with financial, political, and civic support. Not surprisingly, as the business functions (development, marketing and gift shop sales) of fine arts institutions have grown in the last thirty years, and institutions compete among each other for the leisure time of an audience with more alternatives, attracting customers back for repeated and even habitual visits has become a standard part of the marketing “tool kit”. Surprisingly, most of this activity is concentrated on mail and other advertising directed to subscribers and members, and it reflects the curious pattern characteristic of the arts marketing literature, wherein the terminal act of the target population is the purchase of a ticket.

In the arts, repeated attendance is even more important. In the first place, it is no accident that the French for *fine art* is *arts savants*. Experienced art consumers get more out of a given engagement than novices for many reasons, including knowledge of the references and context of the work and comparative background with which to interpret and understand it. Fine art exists in a historical continuum and a given work incorporates knowledge about, and from, what went before; experienced audiences are more likely to recognize these references and assumptions.

Why would someone consume another ‘portion’ of art?

Some goods, like food, are consumed again and again because they are used up. We eat repeatedly because each meal has a finite period of utility. Art, on the other hand, is considered a durable good, more like a capital investment, though different media in different forms have this quality to varying degrees (compare a live performance of music, a recording of music, an original painting on one’s wall, a book of reproductions of paintings, reading a novel, owning a copy of a novel, etc.). One of Walt Kelly’s immortal characters observes that it seems pointless for Pogo to own more than one book. Another explains: “...for reading, sure; but what if you need to prop up a table with a broken leg?”

In fact, no-one finds it remarkable that in so many individual cases, fine art is addictive and tends to generate its own demand. Although very few goods

have this property for healthy people, the phenomenon is so familiar in the case of the arts that we rarely stop to note how unusual it is, and how especially unusual it is that such addiction generates no moral or psychological opprobrium. People who just want more and more different cars, or keep adding onto their houses, or can't turn off sports on television, or buy clothes endlessly, are considered wasteful or a little nuts; people who can't get enough Vermeer or Beethoven are considered cultured and admirable.

On the other hand, it happens that people often do not even try fine art to see if they like it, and it happens that some people who do try it don't come back for more. Consequently it's not obvious, but requires analysis and research, to understand when and why these different behaviors occur and what might affect their respective likelihoods.

We have identified eight disciplines and quasi-disciplines where the art habituation process has been modeled, at least implicitly, and are currently collecting the models therein developed to see where they overlap, where they contradict each other, and how they might be useful to people trying to increase or secure a demanding audience for the fine arts. The fields are:

- Psychology
- Economics
- Art History (including Musicology, Philology, etc.)
- Sociology
- Education
- Philosophy
- Artists (by which we mean the thinking of artists about audiences)
- Arts Management (by which we mean to include Museology, Theater Production, Music Production, and Arts Marketing)

In each of these areas, people have made (not always explicitly) models of the following form:

If an encounter between a person and an artifact has conditions A, B, C,...then the person will be more likely to incur some real cost to have "another such encounter".

The phrase in quotes almost never means only "another encounter with the same artifact" but something more general, such as "an encounter with something by the same artist/in the same medium/of the same period/presented in the same sort of institution." Usually these models include some propositions about mechanisms by which A, B, C have the effect claimed.

Intrinsic, Individual and Social Models

To organize research conducted on different substrates, using different languages, and directed at different purposes is a challenging task. However, we have found a fairly consistent distinction among three underlying perspectives, according to whether the models are constructed around the object (artifact), an individual and artifacts, or a social structure that incorporates many individuals, a single viewer or listener, and artifacts.

Intrinsic models

Much of art criticism, aesthetic philosophy, the discourse of artists, and education research is about paintings or symphonies themselves (including

performances) and endeavors to determine what makes them good. Almost none of this analysis pays attention to the behavioral, perhaps narrow, sense of *good* we use here, meaning increasing someone's propensity to consume more. We mention this category to recognize its existence and centrality to these fields, but have not found it of much help with our task other than to note that people will probably want more art if what they see is 'good' at least in some of the many ways critics and scholars have evaluated it.



Figure 1: Intrinsic models involve only properties of a work of art.

Individual models

The next category incorporates models whose "moving parts" are one individual and one or more works of art. The audience member may be characterized by prior history (education, for example) that somehow involves other people, but the core of the model is an individual *qua* individual. This kind of model is typical in most of these fields, including Psychology, Economics, and Philosophy, and common in Artists and Arts Management.



Figure 2: Individual models include an artifact and a viewer or listener, possibly a supplier, viewed in isolation.

Social models

Finally, thinkers in Education, Sociology, Arts Management, and Artists have built models that place artifacts and individuals into social groups and settings. In these models, the *A, B, C...* factors include expectations about how other people will regard or react to the decisionmaker, or how art engagement is expected to advance some sort of group

goals, ranging from the revolution of oppressed masses to the protection of comfortable elites therefrom.

Economic model building blocks are usually individuals or firms that behave like unitary decisionmakers, but some of these models explicitly recognize the effects of groups and interaction and belong in this category.

The remainder of this paper describes some models from each of the second and third category



Figure 3: Social models consider an audience member as part of a group

with the purpose of exemplifying the methodology and inferring some hypotheses.

III. Individual models

Economics

Economists have had a long-standing interest in the arts, and have studied art markets in the same fruitful way they have studied markets for guns, butter, clean air, and creative financial instruments. A large part of this work is peripheral to our concern here, though essential in understanding the art “system” as a whole.

The basics

The basic economic model is built around a consumer with tastes for various goods (including art in different forms and delivered on different terms) and subject to different kinds of constraints (leisure time and income, for example). This consumer confronts an offering of goods at different prices and chooses a “market basket” of consumption in each decision period (including investment for later consumption) that maximizes his utility.

Utility is a complicated and rather subtle idea, something like *happiness* processed through a series of academic seminars. Economists handle it gingerly, usually being careful to treat it as a function, unique to each individual, whose value depends on the goods consumed and their respective value to the consumer at the margin. In most cases, only a few very broad assumptions need to be made about it to obtain very powerful results, such as that its first derivative with respect to any good is positive and that its second is negative. When necessary, a utility function can be constructed that recognizes interactions like *complementarity* between consumption alternatives (neither a DVD player nor a DVD of your favorite movie is worth anything unless you have the other).

The other big player in an economic model is a firm, portrayed as a sort of abstract individual that seeks to maximize profit from making and selling assortments of goods. Important constraints for firms include the costs of labor and capital, available technology, and government regulations. Firms in the arts are frequently non-profit organizations whose constraints and motivation have to be, and have been, modeled in a more complicated way.

Even the simplest economic model of a market has important implications for our understanding of art consumption. Among these are the iron law of scarcity and the discipline of the consumer’s money and time constraints. By this view, every decision to engage with any particular medium or artifact is taken at an irreducible cost of not doing something else pleasurable or valuable, so comparative value, not absolute value, is what matters in consumption choices. Another is the idea of *elasticity* and the law of demand, which indicate that if any good’s price increases relative to others, a consumer (therefore, consumers generally) will consume less of it. Still another is the importance of prices as signals to artists and presenting institutions of what audiences would like. To some degree, non-profit institutions and government arts agencies exist precisely to counter these price signals: National Public Radio’s job, or the BBC’s, is to offer program content that price signals do not ask for.

The characteristic shape of the assumed utility function of quantity consumed, concave downwards, directly implies the phenomenon of *satiety* wherein we value succeeding units of a good less the more we have. The question of art habituation would seem to contradict this familiar pattern from the start (habituation is the opposite of satiety) and certainly no-one wants to hear the

same piece of music over and over. The fundamental problem is the difficulty economics has with goods that are not commodities: we do become satiated with a single work, but some works reward very extended attention; we can become bored with a period or style, but some people happily specialize; we rarely become bored with art generally, or even with music or painting. Insofar as “art consumption” is modeled as something measured by a scalar (such as hours of engagement) much of the most important qualities of the experience and the system will be ignored. As Alan L. Feld observed, “the problem with art economics is that every work of art is unique, and there are zillions of these unique objects.”(Feld 1975)

The implicit motivational model in economics can be stated as follows: when two people meet, each of whom has something the other wants, they become seized by the most powerful force in human affairs, which is the “urge to make a deal”.² In this way, economics might appear to be a source of social models in the sense we use here, but in fact we would view this construction as a pair of individual models because neither party in this basic model cares anything about the other as a person, in important contrast to the sociologist’s approach described below.

Extensions

A market with a standard set of properties can be shown to generate very attractive outcomes for society as a whole, especially the finding that when the dust clears and everyone has made all possible attractive deals with everyone else, no-one can be made better off without injuring someone else. Obviously, these properties—conditions—are important constraints on the applicability of the model, and a good part of economic research is directed to understanding the effects of violating them.

Violations of any of the conditions for a perfect market are called market failures, and economics has developed a catalog of them, some of which are important for the arts. To review a few familiar examples: *monopoly* is a violation of the condition that many sellers compete for buyers of a good; an artist is a monopolist in her own work in a way a plumber is not. *Information asymmetries* occur when a buyer or seller doesn’t know exactly what he is doing; purchasers of paintings depend on dealers and consultants to verify quality that they are not trained to discern. *Public goods* are goods from which no-one can be excluded if they are provided at all, and which are no less available to A if B uses some; a sculpture in the park, like the park itself, is a public good.³

Most of these market failures can be shown to require government intervention of some sort to assure an optimal amount of each good is consumed. Much economic debate about the fine arts concerns whether and when they exhibit market failure justifying public provision, regulation, or subsidy. Little of this extensive body of knowledge bears much on individuals’ evolution of an art habit, and for the most part it counsels treating art like any other good, using prices, subsidies, advertising, testimonials, etc. to affect demand and looking for efficiencies in supply where they are possible (Baumol and Bowen 1968)

² Students are known to giggle at this observation and the reader may as well, but all should note how much more commonly people pass up sex when it is possible (for example, practically all the time in social and business situations!) than they forego mutually advantageous exchanges.

³ Note that providing something to the public at public expense does not make it a public good. Medical care is excludible and rival, not at all a public good even if the government buys it and gives it to everyone.

One thread, however, goes directly to our question of taste formation. Changing consumer preferences complicate the basic economic model, and are difficult to observe separately from the behavior they mediate. In a famous article, Stigler and Becker propose a model in which taste is constant: art consumers are modeled as firms that create utility using art as an input (Stigler and Becker 1997). In effect, art experience accumulates as a kind of capital that makes it easier and easier to turn art into utility. What we call *addiction* or *habituation* is actually an increase in the efficiency of this process the more it is practiced: as more art is consumed (and transformed into utility), the cheaper, relative to other kinds of utility, art enjoyment becomes and consequently the larger fraction of the individual's factor basket it takes up.

To some degree this model is mainly of interest to economists for methodological reasons (parsimony), but it also highlights an absolutely fundamental concept in art, namely that perception is an active process and that the audience not only sees or hears, but thinks about, and with, the stimuli presented and with previous experiences as well. It is not possible to maintain a completely object-focused critical position at the same time as one views art consumption in this active and participatory way. And it provides an elegant formulation of the familiar phenomenon of addiction, especially as enriched and expanded by, e.g., Mossetto (Mossetto 1993).

What it importantly lacks is a mechanism by which to distinguish the respective contribution of different works to the habituation process; in this model any work of art would appear to make the same contribution to art consumption competence, and even a series of engagements with different works by the same artist would appear to have the same effect as a broad overview of a period or style. The implication, that seeing the least expensive art per square inch or per hour of experience would most effectively build personal capital (which no economist believes, of course), highlights the limits of this kind of model.

Artists

Artists manifest theories of action upon a viewer or listener in their work (though it may be ambiguous and implicit), and sometimes this theory has implications for repeated attention. For example, an artist who makes use of references to prior works by others in any central way is obviously assuming that the audience is not arriving at art for the first time or, one assumes, for the last, and so can be understood as expecting the viewer to retain some memory of the present artifact to use with others in the future.

Artists have also occasionally presented quite explicit theories of artistic encounter and habituation, from recording their own engagement with an artifact (cf. Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn") to something near a complete articulated philosophy. An example of the latter form is E. M. Forster's charming short story, "The Celestial Omnibus" (see also his "Co-ordination" on a similar theme), in which one character (Mr. Bons) personifies both the social status-certifying function of art (more on this below) and the worst kind of pedantic fact-grubbing, and another, a young boy, demonstrates an innocent and open-minded direct engagement obviously favored by the author. Bons reads poetry (and boasts of having "seven Shelley's") because he can show off by doing so. He recognizes various literary figures, authors and characters (and thinks Mrs. Gamp not worth his time), but completely misses the real value of music and literature, indeed dies horribly for not being able to experience it.

The boy, who knows nothing and no-one, goes from one encounter to another because each is delightful on its own terms, and in fact ends the story unable to return to earth from “heaven”(the world of art), surely the ultimate literary representation of irreversible habituation. Although much in the story places the encounter with art in a social setting, the author’s obvious position models “good” artistic engagement, and its ability to engender more of the same, as profoundly individualistic model. Indeed, every artistic experience of the boy’s that involves anyone other than an artist or a literary character—that is, with Mr. Bons or his parents—is miserable and demotivating for him.

A second or third reading of this story, or careful reflection, unfortunately undermines the author’s model completely; we know of no work of such quality that so completely negates its own argument. The problem with Forster’s model (a sort of “blank-slate” ahistorical prescription found also in art criticism and aesthetic philosophy) is revealed by taking one step back and watching oneself read it.

Two examples of the problem will suffice. One character (a bus driver here) is identified only (in the boy’s voice) as “Dan somebody” and must be recognized by the untranslated inscription *Lasciate ogni baldanza, voi ch’entrate* over the door of his bus. Using this story in an arts policy course over the years at two extremely selective colleges, O’Hare has encountered no more than two undergraduates who (i) recognized the inscription above the gates of Hell from the *Inferno* in this adapted form (ii) knew enough Italian to understand the pun, and (iii) could thus figure out that the bus driver is Dante (a fair number of these students, of course, had no idea who Dante was in any case). Earlier in the story, we encounter some women in a river singing, and a remark by a different driver (Sir Thomas Browne, since you ask) that they “sport in the mancipiary possession of their gold”. We also see the word *leitmotif* in Bons’ reaction when the boy sings their song, and are expected from this to recognize the Rhine maidens from *Das Rheingold*.

The boy may be engaging with art in the right way, but the poor reader without a fairly good dollop of personal artistic capital cannot get near the very story that presents the message. The irony that an author so generally intolerant of pretense and hypocrisy should float an aesthetic theory entirely inconsistent with his own work is quite poignant. The implications of this failed experiment are, we think, directly relevant to “small-label” practices of art museums, and imply that such a strategy dangerously projects the curator’s unconscious background on the visitor (or uses denial of context provision as a filtering device to exclude an unprepared audience). For a popular but well-annotated summary of modern thinking about the mind as an active interpreter of its environment, see (Pinker 1997).

Psychology

Education

Philosophy

IV. Social models

Some models construe art consumption as a social act involving people other than a single audience member. In these models, the decision to consume, including the decision to consume repeatedly, cannot be properly described only by describing the individual audience member.

Economics

An economic model that is intrinsically social is the “winner-take-all” evolution of many markets, including markets for cultural goods, developed by Frank and Cook (Frank and Cook) The pattern they describe is an increasing share of production in fields like art and sports provided, often because of technological innovation like cheap recordings, by a smaller share of the “best” performers. The phenomenon is exacerbated by increasing competition for decreasing leisure time, so people generally feel pressed to listen only to the “best” pianist, or attend a blockbuster art exhibit. As the idea of “best” shrinks dimensionally, consumers see less advantage in comparing interpretations, owning more than one performance of a work on CD, or even buying plastic art if they can’t afford “the best”.

What makes this model social is, first, the implicit social construction of merit: what is the “best” performance, performer, painter, or whatever is constructed socially by critics and social groups, not privately by the viewer. The second social dimension of winner-take-all markets is the presence of network externalities, which are the increases in the value of a good resulting from others’ adoption of it. Network externalities have been most studied in the context of technology (standardized screw threads, communication networks, languages, software) but as we discuss below, they also apply to the arts. Being able to discuss last night’s performance with friends, and simply making it known that you attended it if it is the “right” performance to be seen at, are valued and more likely if you and your friends have similar tastes...or at least consume the same art.

Sociology

Sociology, in general, has been less successful in constructing models or theories of participation behavior, especially when it comes to habituation or taste formation, than in looking at how art objects are produced, distributed, and consumed. Therefore, most models of taste formation and habituation to art within the discipline of sociology are implicit.

The predominant sociological theories are divided between two branches of thought in regards to the nature of society and social interaction. Macro-sociology is the study of society as a whole, focusing on the cultural and structural aspects of major social systems. The conception of the individual and society being that individuals are born into social systems that exist independently, and ultimately influence his or her behavior within the given social system. The main schools of thought within macro-sociology, functionalism and Marxism, are deterministic and focus on whole societies and the way in which they determine human behavior. The implied social model of behavior here is that values, institutions and culture shape behavior and identity through the process of socialization. Functionalists like Emile Durkheim might draw an

analogy between the workings of a biological organism and the functioning of society. In the same way various organs work together to maintain a living organism, various institutions in society work together to create a social order or structure that entails or necessitates certain behavior based on common values (like wearing clothing in public or being married before having children).

Micro-sociology (Social Psychology) is the study of individuals within a society, focusing on patterns of social interaction in specific settings. The view of the individual and society emphasizes conscious thought and self-awareness. It is the study of how people act and re-act in relation to others. The social model implied in micro-sociological theory is that behavior is the result of meanings, theories, motives and interpretations brought into the social setting by the individual, rather than just a reaction to stimuli from the external environment. Social behavior is studied in the context of the meanings people assign to words (like “pretty”), objects (an American flag or a particular work of art), actions (e.g. a smiling face) and human characteristics (e.g. gender, height or weight). The “self” and society are inseparable, the notion of the self is neither individual nor social, rather a combination of both created through discourse and interaction with others (Cooley 1902; Mead 1934)

These models of social behavior provide important clues for understanding the mechanisms leading to participation in the arts. Much of the sociological theory on taste formation is based on the assumption that cultural orientation is “class-based, learned early in life, taken for granted, hard to change, and powerful in shaping responses to later experiences” (Erickson 1996)).

Art and social hierarchy

The most salient work on the culture-class connection comes from Pierre Bourdieu who finds that culture and education are central in the affirmation of differences between social classes and the maintenance of those differences. (Bourdieu 1984) Bourdieu focused primarily on the maintenance of a system of power by means of the transmission of a dominant culture. He argues that children develop a deeply ingrained, largely unconscious orientation (*habitus*) that shapes all their outward manifestations of taste. *Habitus* is adopted through upbringing and education. In Bourdieu’s macro-level social analysis culture serves as a system of social hierarchization. One’s status is therefore determined by how much cultural or “symbolic capital” one possesses. Culture is also a source of domination, in which intellectuals are in the key role as specialists of cultural production and creators of symbolic power. In *Distinction*, based on empirical material gathered in the 1960s, Bourdieu argued that taste, an acquired “cultural competence,” is used to legitimate social differences.

In short, a “distinction” is made by those of higher socio-economic status in order to separate themselves from lower classes. What is passed down within the family (*habitus*) is the need to distinguish; not necessarily taste, although there are certainly expectations about the way in which one should distinguish himself that get passed along as well (taste formation perhaps). The underlying idea is that self-identification with a class entails some sort of irreducible obligation, like not eating with one’s fingers, or increases the relative value/payoff of displaying the behavioral signs of that identification, drinking

beer in a pub and swearing versus going to the opera. Art is a signifier for socio-economic elites, and one of the most important.

In fact, Bourdieu provides two important ways to view the process of selection and attention. The first, described above, identifies taste for highbrow culture as a personal quality developed in children of elites, and adopted by them without much reflection as behavioral conventions. This taste is consistent across the elite and presumably aligned constantly (rather than being carried on within a single family) by social interactions among the elite's members. This alignment would be necessary in the face of new work, of course, otherwise individual families' judgments would spread apart over generations and no longer serve as a unifying (and exclusionary) device. It's not clear from his data whether this taste is discriminatory power that could distinguish the good from the mediocre in the face of previously unknown works, or merely a personal library of "approved" artists, styles, and works. This social classifying function of art goes back at least to Veblen and fits well with participation data in all western countries.

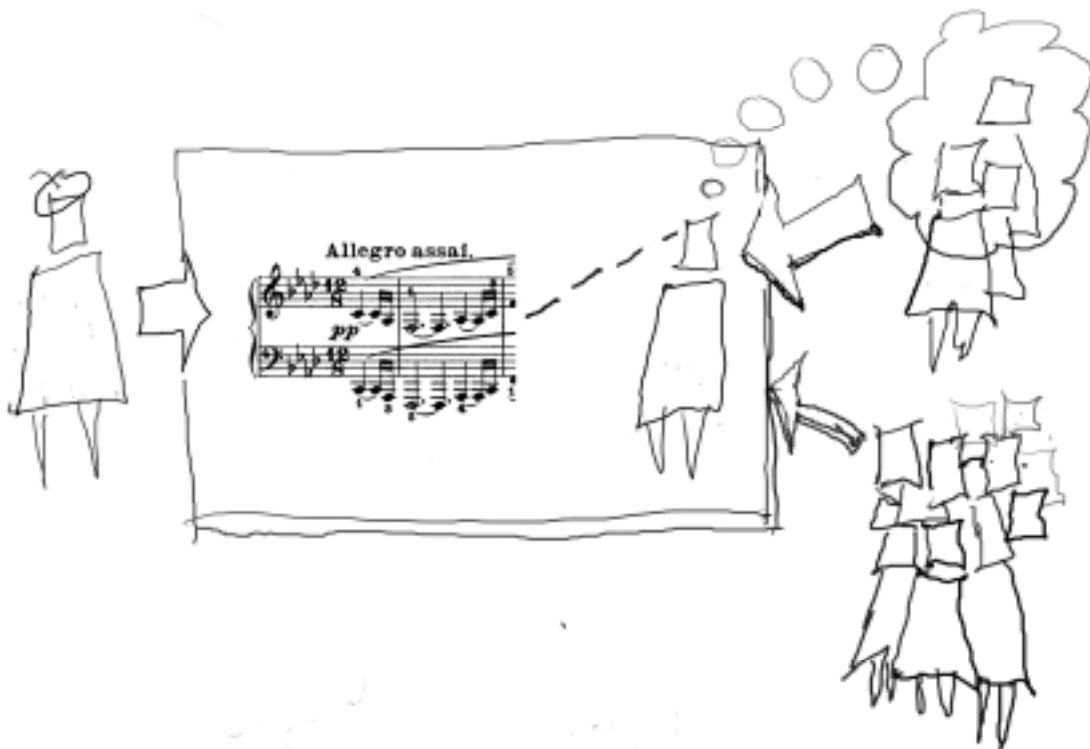


Figure 5: According to some sociologists, the experience of fine art has much to do with social status. The audience member is not only attending to the art, but to what other people, especially members of social elites (to which he probably belongs) will think of his decision to consume it.

Discrimination of schlock from the real thing is especially important in protecting hereditary elites (old money) from parvenus, or East Coast from West Coast contenders for political and financial power. The art galleries of Carmel, or (generally) the street-level galleries of downtown shopping areas, offer the former and the latter are sold exclusively in upper-floor galleries with no street presence. Novices frequently have trouble telling the difference between the *oeuvres* presented, but people to whom these things are important, even if they

have modest artistic vision, can tell the difference instantly should the wrong sort of thing turn up in someone's living room.

The consumption of art as a device by which to impress others is a special case of visibly consuming anything for the same purpose, a behavior described more than a century ago by Veblen. Veblen also observed the "ratchet" pattern we observe with art habituation, noting that expenditure above and beyond what is required for physical necessity becomes habit. That is, once a certain amount or type of consumption has been acquired, an individual becomes acclimated to such expenditure. Giving up or altering it in some way can be as difficult to give up as consumption that relates directly to physical need and may even be necessary to emotional health. The suggestion is that ideal of consumption is a standard always just beyond our means. Veblen writes, "The motive is emulation—the stimulus of an invidious comparison which prompts us to outdo those with whom we are in the habit of classing ourselves" (Veblen, 1899).

It is in this sense that standard of living, or consumption, is habitual. The difficulty of regressing from a particular standard of living or pattern of consumption is similar to the difficulty of breaking a habit. This is important to our understanding of arts participation not only because the motivation for participation may be explained in terms of a desire for upward social mobility and emulation of the consumption patterns of those with higher socio-economic status, but more importantly because the mechanism by which participation can be explained is analogous to that of a habit, or perhaps, even an addiction. Once participation in the arts, going to the opera or visiting a museum for example, becomes a standard of living to which one is accustomed (or that is expected of one) the less likely it is that the behavior will stop or diminish.

The implications for repeated visits are immediate: under this model, assuming self-identification with elite groups is desired by elites, the *social* context of a visit, in particular the degree to which it attracts the right kind of audience and in which "approved" work is offered, will be extremely important in motivating a return visit. As so often happens, the aesthetic experience of the work slips out of sight in this model, and consequently it's not clear what effect new work, that hasn't had social certification capacity affixed to it yet, will have.

By itself, this model places at least two paradoxes of the greatest importance before any efforts to expand the audience for fine arts vertically outside the educated and relatively wealthy audience it now enjoys. First, it raises the question of whether non-elite non-attenders are being offered the opportunity to adopt "someone else's" culture with, willy-nilly, an implicit reflection on their own. If not—if new audiences from lower socio-economic groups are being offered the services of museums and concert halls to enjoy their own culture—then the effect on elites who can no longer expect an arts institution to distinguish them by association (with people like themselves) and by reflection (of the "right kind" of art) will probably be negative. The power of fine art consumption to secure social status entails an unknown but possibly important cost among current attenders for any success in developing new audiences other than elite young people.

Art among elites

The second contribution of Bourdieu, much more original and provocative, though it is foreshadowed by Becker, attends to the problem of new and avant-

garde work.⁴ A banker or corporate executive knows that Picasso is OK and Thomas Kinkade is not, if only because her mother has told her so, but may be in very serious trouble confronted with a self-referential commercial-art-parodying new work, an assemblage of banal objets trouvés, or (a few years ago), a photo-realist painting. On the one hand, she needs to demonstrate correct discrimination but is not personally competent to choose wisely; on the other, she needs to show that she is not old-fashioned and thus cannot avoid the decision.

In this dilemma, she is likely to buy advice from experts, and Bourdieu describes this transaction as a war between two elites that uses art as ammunition. On one side is an economic elite who have ample money resources and a need for the kind of distinction characterized in the foregoing paragraphs, but little time to acquire their own cultural capital of discrimination; on the other is an educated elite with less money, but time, including paid time in their employment (art historians, scholars, decorators, art dealers, curators, etc.), to become independently expert in these matters. Because new work is constantly being created and marketed, and because being up-to-date is an intrinsic part of elite artistic taste, the war continues in a stable tension, as the experts meter out new work to the business and political worlds, perhaps with a slight delay that allows the experts to take investment positions in work not yet expensive but seen (by them) as likely to become so.

The purchase of this advice is often hidden in transactions that appear to be something else. For example, museumgoers buy a ticket that allows them to see what's hot, and large contributors get to attend social functions with curators who may share additional information and specifics. One can go to sale galleries and look at what's on the walls, but only if one buys some paintings (which carry a commission for the dealer) will one get the kind of personal attention and advice that keeps one in step with the competition.

It bears investigation whether the much greater success of avant-garde contemporary plastic arts in finding an audience, compared to music, is related to the much greater difficulty in establishing financial transactions for music, analogous to the purchase of a painting or sculpture, that can incorporate this kind of private consulting service.

The strict association of upper social class with fine arts engagement, and its use as a distinguishing mechanism has historical roots in a period when the church and an idle aristocracy of *rentiers* were the only patrons of art. However, life has become less tidy since Bach traded melodies with Frederick the Great and Mozart entertained the dinner guests of the Archbishop of Salzburg. First, democratic government has taken on a patronage role. Second, an employed, busy bourgeoisie has reached out to the arts for their own sake and to certify their legitimacy. Third, society has become much less hierarchical and class-ordered, and in some countries (the USA, for example) aristocratic pretensions are socially disapproved. Fourth, an enormous and well-funded popular culture industry has developed along with technology that delivers its products cheaply

⁴ "New" work can include old work that is re-introduced to currency. A couple of decades ago, French salon painters, especially Bouguereau, were rediscovered and exhibited as considerable, greatly upsetting a generation of art lovers who had been taught that these works were basically kitsch against which the Impressionists had correctly rebelled (now Bouguereau seems to back in a state of minimal repute, corny and sentimental again). Ragtime, the new popular music of the Edwardian period, got nowhere while Max Morath, a musician without academic credentials, was playing and advocating it, but was revived among social elites when William Bolcom, a pianist and composer with an impeccable international academic resumé, took it up.

and pervasively across class lines. The television in a living room with fine art on the walls may be playing an opera, but it may also be playing *Friends*. Finally, the technology of cultural distribution has made fine arts as well as popular arts affordable, at least in excellent reproduction (CD's). The effect of all this upheaval has been to weaken the principal support mechanisms for the fine arts, partly by causing other diversions to compete for the time of its traditional upscale audience, partly by encouraging a blurring of the popular/elite arts boundary. Is the version of *La Boheme* currently playing on Broadway, sung by attractive people whose small voices are amplified to fill the house, opera? Are Charlotte Church and Andrea Bocelli opera singers or pop stars, or something else? Is the Silk Road project classical music?

Sociologists have considered these complications in useful ways. In her 1996 critique of Bourdieu, "Culture, Class and Connections", Bonnie Erickson stresses the importance of social connections and social capital in its effect on culture. Working from the premise that people of more privileged backgrounds and more prestigious jobs have better social connections and networks, Erickson focuses on networks and culture to show that "network variety is strongly linked to cultural variety; indeed, networks have more impact on culture than class does" (Erickson 1996)

Art and social mobility

Erickson's work focuses primarily on how certain forms of culture can be used to gain advantage in seeking a higher class position or conducting class relationships. Instead of arguing that culture is an unchangeable aspect of personality imprinted during childhood, the main assertion is that culture includes many genres learned at different times in life. In a direct contradiction to Bourdieu, she argues that:

"Family is not destiny in a rapidly changing society in which class structures and cultural possibilities both change considerably within one generation, so that parents' cultural framework seems out of date, nor is it destiny in a society in which children gain massive cultural infusions from schooling that is longer and more important to life chances than their parents' educations (Hunter 1988). Neither is culture as immune to conscious manipulation as Bourdieu implies. Major life transitions, especially the transition to adulthood, can shake up old assumptions and offer a 'fresh encounter' (Mannheim 1952) with a range of new choices".

The most important underlying assumption here is that culture is adopted or learned based on how or why it is useful in the context of one's life, in this case, how it influences one's personal networks and social interactions at work; which, as argued by Erickson, is a determining factor in gaining prominent or advantaged economic standing (job availability and perhaps social class). More importantly, that the "dominating" culture most useful for social or economic mobility (especially in the workplace) is most definitely not Bourdieu's "distinction" or the highest forms of culture. Rather, she suggests that "highbrow culture is defined as an irrelevant waste of time in the private sector and is actively excluded from the workplace" (Erickson 1991) The main point here is, of course, not that highbrow culture is irrelevant but rather that culture is adopted according to what is necessary for navigating the different stages of life, particularly in how one relates to society. In other words, for the individual, "the most useful resource is a little working knowledge of a lot of cultural genres combined with a good understanding of which culture to use in which context.

Equipped with cultural variety and the rules of relevance, a person can navigate successfully in many settings; equipped with vast amounts of high culture alone, a person would be shipwrecked in many social areas” (Erickson 1996)

What is most interesting about Erickson’s work is her emphasis on the difference between cultural knowledge and the use of that knowledge for cultural participation. For example, her research indicates that knowledge of art and books is more tightly linked to early life experiences (family, class, education etc) while at the same time arrives at the conclusion that this kind of cultural knowledge may not be useful in the workplace and is therefore excluded. The underlying assumption seems to be that different kinds of cultural capital (cultural knowledge) are acquired at various stages of life depending on the given social script (or expectations) for what people do at various life stages.

In summary, based on the assumption that there are many useful forms of culture, not one, many variations in how forms of culture are related and a major connection between cultural diversity and network diversity, the implied model is that an individual’s acquisition of culture (taste formation, habituation, etc.) is strongly influenced by contact with many people in many different locations (network variety, hence cultural variety) and lifelong learning in all cultural genres as we move through life. The early influence of class/family is just one of many and not as pervasive as the later effects of education and adult social networks. This model of variegated sources of cultural capital and guidance suggests that arts institutions can be more creative (and more confident) than they have been in building demand even after an audience’s formative years, especially if they can make partnerships with other institutions.

One important caution in regards to Erickson’s work is that she focuses solely on cultural and social capital in the workplace, not the acquisition of cultural knowledge in one’s personal life. While it follows that cultural capital gained in personal/social life may not be transferred to work settings, Erickson herself points out that certain genres of culture, such as art, are more useful in particular work settings (those that emphasize education for example) and are almost always important class indicators in social interactions away from work or in personal life. In other words, an individual’s level of participation in or taste for highbrow art may vary depending on the given situation (work related versus personal/social interaction).

Social Mobility of Art

As early as 1964, Wilensky focused on the “interplay of social structure, high culture, and mass culture” by analyzing which groupings of the population acquire a mass character and which do not, and with what net effect on culture, high and low. (Wilensky 1964) One of the more interesting findings from his data is that for the number of media areas in which high-brow exposure is reported, amount of education for grades 0 through “some college” has little influence in terms of high-brow participation, thereafter, both quality of education and level or amount count heavily, a result that matches Bourdieu’s identification of a clearly demarcated social elite. However, he also points out the important finding that while universities and colleges are the primary source of the high culture audience, they (beginning around that time and continuing to the present) also serve as a mechanism to legitimate elite engagement with mass culture by incorporating it into academic content.

The problem says Wilensky, is that the humanities, the arts and the sciences, indeed the intellectuals are increasingly tempted to play to the mass audiences and expose themselves to mass culture. Perhaps for the same reasons

argued by Erickson, the intellectual elites (the keepers of high culture themselves) are finding it more and more useful to be knowledgeable about mass/pop culture⁵. According to Wilensky, “educated strata— even products of graduate and professional schools— are becoming full participants in mass culture; they spend a reduced fraction of time in exposure to quality print and film”.

The idea that community connections beyond the family and school are cultural transmitters expands the model of taste formation and participation to include social connections as well as connections to community organizations (including religious institutions). Research conducted by the Urban Institute [www.urban.org] as a part of an evaluation of the Community Partnerships for Cultural Participation (CPCP) initiative presented new information about how and why people participate in the arts. Among the key findings were:

- Frequent participants in arts and culture tend to be very active in civic, religious and political activities, and this is true at every income level.
- Early socialization experiences make a difference in the cultural participation patterns of adults, regardless of income and education.
- People are more likely to attend arts and cultural events at community locations than at specialized arts venues.
- People’s motivations for participating in arts and culture suggest strong links with other aspects of community life.

The theory, or model, described in the report considers both individual (or person-specific) factors of influence as well as aspects of the environment (community specific) that affect the choices for an individual. Participants, on an individual level, must have motivation and resources for attendance. Motivation is defined as the values, beliefs or interests within a wide range of social, artistic, cultural and civic reasons people give to explain their participation in the arts. Resources include time, money and participation skills such as awareness and knowledge, for instance. On the other hand, community factors influence how participants connect with and become habituated towards the arts (paths of engagement), as well as the range and types of opportunities an individual might find available (structure of opportunity). Relationships (family, social ties, cultural heritage, and business or professional) foster or create expectations for participation, while group dynamics communicate and implant the importance of certain kinds of arts and cultural participation, as well as provide opportunity for invitations and requests to participate.

The structure of opportunity is made up of the programs available to potential participants in a community, as well as the diversity, quality and accessibility (ticket prices, travel costs, locations, and physical or social environment, and venue) of arts and cultural events. It is the combination of individual and community factors that influence individual participation in the arts (see Figure 1 next page). This interaction is what produces participation

⁵ Something of the sort may explain the contribution to the ragtime revival made by the movie *The Sting*, which starred Robert Redford and Paul Newman in an entertaining work that played an elaborate game on the audience, manipulating the viewer’s assumption of omniscience in a self-referential way (paralleling the confidence game of the plot) that made it appealing to sophisticated audiences. Even though the Joplin used in the score was anachronistic by thirty years with respect to the film’s setting, it was legitimated by its association with this pop/elite straddling work.

outcomes such as the methods of participation (how, when, frequency and the way in which people participate), types of activity (concerts, plays, exhibitions, festivals etc.) and venues (theatres, universities and schools, parks and community centers, for example).

Among the most interesting findings of this research is the degree to which arts participation is a mechanism for obtaining more general social outcomes. Rather than organizing a group because one wants to go to the museum (or sing; see below), one imagines people wanting to organize a group and casting about for an activity to base it on. (Douglas and Wildavsky) Arts institutions are increasingly recognizing the importance of this kind of mechanism and experimenting with ways to use it to build audiences. As a strategy, it has both promise and very sobering risks, like the well-meaning justifications for arts programs on grounds of economic development or improving children's math skills. All of these instrumental uses of art are liable to goal shift away from fundamental values of art; if a theater company is good for a town's economic life, what should we think if a jazz dance school, or a movie theater...or a game arcade in the same building is shown to be even better? And they always carry the implication that art isn't really "worth it" for its own sake and on grounds of its characteristic and distinctive benefits, but might be a useful accessory to something really important.

Artists

In contrast to the model offered by Forster in the preceding section, we turn to that presented by the composer Richard Wagner in his opera *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* (Wagner also wrote up his theoretical model of art and its function in community in essays). The opera is didactic about society, the function of art, and the psychology of audience and artist to a remarkable degree, especially considering how little this content obstructs the musical and dramatic effect of the work

The easiest way to describe Wagner's model is to summarize the parts of the plot relevant here. Into the stable and insular community of sixteenth century Nuremberg comes the *auslander* Walther von Stolzing, not only a foreigner (from Franconia) but as a rural knight, outside the social class of the townspeople and somewhat suspect accordingly. Walther has sold his estates and wishes to live as a bourgeois. He also wishes to marry the Eva Pogner, daughter of the town's richest merchant. Pogner, like all the distinguished bourgeois of the city, is a member of Nuremberg's principal civic institution, a singing society called "the Mastersingers".⁶

Pogner, however, is anxious to demonstrate that merchants and townspeople are devoted to higher things, not merely money and business, and (anticipating Bourdieu by several centuries) thinks showing his commitment to art will have this effect. Consequently, he declares that his daughter may only wed (if she wishes) the winner of the annual public singing contest scheduled for the next day, a contest open only to members of the Mastersingers' society but judged by all the people.

Walther determines to qualify for the society, and thus the contest, at the highest level of Master in one go, and after didactic instruction from an apprentice in the extremely elaborate music theory and rules of the society, sings a qualifying song that is condemned by the masters without mercy. Only one of

⁶ The character Hans Sachs, the Meistersingers association, and much of the musicology incorporated in the opera are historical..

them, Hans Sachs, a highly respected composer, sees merit in this song (which he admits breaks most of the rules) and tries in vain to get his associates to listen to it with an open mind.

By the end of the first act, the essentials of Wagner's theory are laid out: rules and conventions of an art form, amateur participatory artistic activity that provides the framework for community social structure, innovation and individual artistic genius that exceed the limits of these rules, and the ability of an audience to engage with a work that is too far from their comfort zone.⁷

In the second act, Sachs interrupts the lovers' plans to elope and orchestrates a near-riot in the street.

In the third, Sachs reflects in a famous soliloquy on the need for disorder and conflict for social learning and progress. He coaches Walther to compose a song for the contest, promising him that he will find a way to let him compete with it. The composition session features a good deal of discussion of how formal rules and conventions *allow* individual expression and original creativity in art, a discussion distinguished by its focus on how people hear and not just what is said.

Later, Sachs allows Walther's rival for Eva's hand, Beckmesser, to steal the lyrics of Walther's song (thinking it is by Sachs) knowing he will sing it as his own in the contest. Indeed, Beckmesser makes such a hash of it at the event that he leaves the stage in disgust amid boos, saying the song is by Sachs, and not his fault.

Sachs seizes on this accusation, and the community's curiosity about what really happened to the formerly reputable singer Beckmesser, to present Walther as a witness who can clear him of having written a terrible song, thereby putting him on stage despite the Meistersinger membership exclusionary rule. (Recall the discussion of engineering information theory above: at this point the townspeople have received at least two very low-probability signals.) Of course Walther captures the admiration of all with his rendition, wins the prize, and gets the girl. Fed up with the previous small-mindedness of the Mastersingers, he refuses membership, but in yet another reaffirmation of the complementary importance of rules, convention, and discipline to individual expression and creativity,⁸ Sachs successfully entreats Walther to accept the honor the Mastersingers now offer him.

This work incorporates a remarkable number of models of motivation to engage with art, many of which have been noted above in earlier sections, all of which deserve serious academic attention. The first category of these is intrinsic, or at least private utility-seeking: obviously a lot of musical participation is simply due to the delight it provides its listeners. The second is instrumental: Walther wants to sing because he's in love and it's a way to get his girl; the Mastersingers sing in part because it's a mechanism of social bonding and association, in part because it gives them social status, in part because knowing all the *minutiae* of the business is fun in the way stamp collecting or collecting opera lore is fun. The third is probably extremely important and too little understood: the townspeople's attention to Walther's song is raised to a breathless level because it promises to make a confusing and alarming situation comprehensible. The song has become an intrinsic part of a demanding and

⁷ For a thoughtful discussion of Wagner's aesthetic and social theory, see Magee, B. (1968). Aspects of Wagner. London, Ross..

⁸ Marred for modern audiences by a rather disagreeable jingoist attack on foreign 'corruption' of German art.

complex mental exercise, and it can only contribute to organizing the listeners' perceptions if it is engaged with on its own musical terms.

Fourth, people in this opera engage with art by making it. Even the chorus in the last act ends up singing Walther's song with him. Finally, Walther succeeds the second time and fails the first because he needs to find a degree of accommodation to the conventions of his listeners that allows them to hear him but isn't anodyne or overfamiliar. This last might appear to be an intrinsic model, attending only to the art itself, but the role of convention and its social sources (Becker 1982) are essential and hence place this model in the present category. His first effort is original, interesting, certainly not revolutionary to modern ears, but doomed by its solipsism and his instinct that art is something entirely from his own head and heart. For all Wagner's famous posturing as a revolutionary and his fuss over the individualistic heroes of the *Ring*, the critical artistic accomplishment of this opera is a collaborative exercise among the whole historical sequence of master singers (through the rules and forms), a coach/editor (Sachs), the artist (Walther), and his audience.

V. Implications

Conclusions would be premature, but the examples presented here strongly suggest that the varied models of audience engagement with demanding fine arts have practical implications for managing the presentation of this work to the public. Consistent themes are both cautionary and reassuring, but what is most important is the degree to which none of them taken alone is adequate to the complex phenomenon at hand. At the least, an effective presentation strategy will take account of the accumulative nature of personal artistic capital and the socially embedded nature of arts activity. As to the latter, it will have to confront the inevitable tension between, on the one hand, traditional models of artistic excellence and connoisseurship linked with the role of art in maintaining social elites, and on the other, the persistent economic pressure to spread costs coupled with the gradual disintegration of the art-elite equation.

The many ways art participation are linked to other purposes and goals, in fact and potentially, suggest a rich set of alternatives for overcoming the difficulty arts providers have in signaling potential users of the benefits available. To choose only one example, note the importance in Wagner's models of making one's own art. Current population rates of active participation in the fine arts (painting, playing music, etc) are very low. Surprisingly, gift shops at least at the San Francisco Opera and Symphony, have only once to our knowledge offered any sheet music for sale among the CD's, videos, doodads and *chotchkes*; theater companies are starting to open such sales counters but almost never offer, for example, stage makeup. Correctly understanding the caution in Frank and Cook's work might suggest deliberately countering the idea that one should not sing because one can't sing as well as the professionals on the stage.

The most promising applications of this body of knowledge, in our view, would explicitly integrate models from different disciplinary perspectives, taking an engineering or *bricolage* approach. For example, two economic models, accumulation of personal artistic capital and information asymmetry, imply a visitor who cannot see, on one visit, the capital he has just accumulated that represents a significant part of the value of the experience; this would require a second visit. To signal this requires a presenting institution to represent that learning through another dimension of the experience, possibly taking advantage of the social context of a visit with more experienced audience members, possibly using visitors rather than art as the subject of its publicity, possibly organizing the visit itself to highlight the learning inside the limits of attendance.

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