

# The Cultural Turn in U.S. History

Past, Present, and Future

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The University of Chicago Press  
Chicago and London

## The Return of the Culture Industry

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For those of us trained as cultural historians during the final decades of the twentieth century, it was easy to perceive Theodor W. Adorno's landmark writings on the "culture industry" as out of synch with our own conceptual priorities. Where Adorno had emphasized the expanding scope and power of corporate producers, our primary concerns were the subjectivity and agency of individual consumers. And where Adorno had railed against a mass cultural landscape of "unending sameness," we set out to explicate more localized patterns of appropriation and refashioning. Starting in the mid-1940s, Adorno employed the phrase "culture industry" to exclude any notion of mass culture that "arises spontaneously from the masses themselves."<sup>1</sup> To our eyes, however, this notion seemed roughly equivalent to throwing the analytical baby out with the bath water. What Adorno's strict division appeared to foreclose were precisely the complex questions of use, meaning-making, and ideological struggle that had led many of us to study mass culture as a historical problem.

My point in elaborating these contrasts is not to suggest that our perceptions were somehow misguided. Even before I took my first cultural history courses during the mid-1980s, many of the field's leading voices were moving toward a far more contested notion of cultural commerce, one in which the agenda-setting powers of corporate producers operated in continuous, reciprocal tension with the creative choices of readers, listeners, and viewers.<sup>2</sup> This new conceptual framework sparked a "renaissance in the study of popular or mass culture" and quickly became the "opening move" for a wide range of pathbreaking essays and monographs.<sup>3</sup> It also signaled the gradual supercession of an older critical position (in many ways exemplified by Adorno's best-known work) that had postulated mass culture as "other."<sup>4</sup> For Adorno, it was still possible to

imagine the culture industry as the debased antipode to an "autonomous art." Our concern, by contrast, was how to historicize—and ultimately transcend—the "fixed poles" of modernist and mass, high and low, inside and outside, dominant and resistant.<sup>5</sup>

Still, I found it hard to shake Adorno. What exactly were we losing, I wondered, in killing off one of the first and most rigorous efforts to engage mass culture as an object of critical analysis?<sup>6</sup> Did our own historiographical priorities make it harder to see and appreciate other important facets of this seminal project? My apprehensions here, I should explain, had less to do with Adorno's canonical stature (which, by the early 1990s, was in sharp decline among most Americanists) than my own desire to historicize and explicate mass culture as something more than a collection of localized phenomena. And on *this* score, especially, Adorno's essays had a kind of staying power that rewarded rereading. His broader vision of culture industry, that is to say, was never limited to this or that medium, nor even to the United States. Rather, he presented this industry as a global commodity system, just about as expansive as capitalism itself.

I also began to realize that Adorno's own position on the culture industry was far from static. Broadly speaking, his earliest formulations—for example, in the "mass deception" chapter of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947)—were also his most severe, a pattern specialists have generally linked to three major developments: the rapid influx of American entertainment products in Weimar Germany; the subsequent rise of European fascism; and the broader shock experiences of wartime exile in New York and Los Angeles.<sup>7</sup> During the 1960s, by contrast, Adorno modified his "absolutist stance" on the culture industry in a number of important respects.<sup>8</sup>

In a 1966 essay for the newspaper *Die Zeit*, Adorno wrote in support of the "Young German Cinema" and expressed a more hopeful sense of the creative potential of alternative media practices and federal grant programs.<sup>9</sup> Three years later, he published an article in *Der Spiegel* praising long-playing records as both conducive to serious listening and more democratic than the "phony hoopla" of highbrow opera festivals.<sup>10</sup> And in a 1969 radio lecture titled "Free Time" ("Freizeit"), delivered shortly before his death, he ventured new forms of curiosity and optimism about the public's capacity for critical evaluation:

What the culture industry presents people with in their free time, if my conclusions are not too hasty, is indeed consumed and accepted, but with a kind of reservation. . . . Perhaps one can go even further and say that it is not quite believed in. It is obvious that the integration of conscious-

ness and leisure time has not yet completely succeeded. . . . I shall refrain from spelling out the consequences; but I think that we can glimpse here a chance of maturity, which might just eventually turn free time into freedom proper.<sup>11</sup>

Significantly (and probably not coincidentally), I first became aware of these "self-revisions" around the same time that a second key development was taking shape, namely, the *return* of the culture industry as a widely invoked object of historical analysis.<sup>12</sup> This return, it is important to emphasize, was no simple recapitulation of Adornean positions (canonical or otherwise) in new scholarly contexts. Indeed, many of the best-known invokers were leaders of the very same projects that had made agency and contest first principles of the cultural turn.

Consider, for example, Michael Denning's introductory remarks from his well-known 1987 study of dime novels:

I will argue that these popular stories, which are products of the culture industry . . . can be understood neither as forms of deception, manipulation, and social control, nor as expressions of a genuine people's culture, opposing and resisting the dominant culture. Rather, they are best understood as a contested terrain, a field of cultural conflict where signs with wide appeal and resonance take on contradictory disguises and are spoken in contrary accents.<sup>13</sup>

Or Eric Lott's 1993 formulation of the cultural politics of blackface minstrelsy:

In contrast to both the populist and revisionist views, which sees minstrelsy's politics as univocal, my study documents precisely the historical contradictions and social conflicts the minstrel show opened up. . . . One of our earliest culture industries, minstrelsy not only affords a look at the emergent break between high and low cultures but also reveals popular culture to be a place where cultures of the dispossessed are routinely commodified—and contested.<sup>14</sup>

Or Robin Kelley's 1997 discussion of pleasure and profit on the post-industrial playground:

What I am suggesting . . . is that the pursuit of leisure, pleasure, and creative expression is labor, and that some African-African youth have tried

to turn that labor into cold hard cash. Thus, play has increasingly become, for some, more than an expression of stylistic innovation, gender identities, and/or racial and class anger—increasingly, it is viewed as a way to survive economic crisis or a means to upward mobility. . . . In a nation with few employment opportunities for African Americans and a white consumer market eager to be entertained by the “other,” blacks have historically occupied a central place in the popular-culture industry.<sup>15</sup>

Or Paul Gilroy’s 2000 vision of black cultural circulation across the Atlantic world:

The black musicians, dancers, and performers of the New World have disseminated these insights, styles, and pleasures through the institutional resources of the cultural industries that they have colonized and captured. These media, particularly recorded sound, have been annexed for sometimes subversive purposes of protest and affirmation. The vernacular codes and expressive cultures constituted from the forced new beginning of racial slavery reappeared at the center of a global phenomenon that has regularly surpassed . . . innocent notions of mere entertainment.<sup>16</sup>

Particularly striking in these statements are the subtle reconfigurations of Adorno’s concept to connote something other than straightforward manipulation or ideological domination. And one could point to many other prominent examples. From Miriam Hansen’s work on silent film spectatorship to Janice Radway’s analysis of the Book-of-the-Month Club to Mark Anthony Neal’s discussions of transnational hip-hop: the popular and mass cultural “industries” now routinely referenced in much of the leading scholarship are clearly not operating on the same “totalizing” plan first sketched out by Adorno during World War II.<sup>17</sup> Yet this pattern begs a more basic question. Why reconfigure rather than *replace*? Now that the culture industry no longer serves as a synonym for social control, what exactly is it *doing* in so many of our texts?

### Labels

Let me begin with the long-running problem of labels. Over the past three decades, most of us who work on cultural commerce have become far more careful and self-conscious about the adjectives we use. Few today would apply the term “mass” to cultural forms produced in a pre-industrial setting or marketed to a single demographic. Fewer still would

describe mass culture in the manner that so annoyed Adorno—as something “that arises spontaneously from the masses themselves.” But what about the related questions of when and how mass begins? In his 1999 essay collection, *American Culture, American Tastes*, Michael Kammen offers one of the most careful and incisive arguments for restricting this term to cultural commodities produced after World War II. Simultaneous distribution and universal access, Kammen emphasizes, were not really possible before the advent of electronic media, national brands, and corporate franchising. Even McDonalds did not become “ubiquitous” beyond the middle-class suburbs until the 1970s.<sup>18</sup>

Yet the more one thinks about these complex questions of size, speed, and circulation, the harder it becomes to maintain strict categorical divisions. Two brief examples from my own research begin to illustrate some of the difficulties. In fall 1842, most U.S. commentators were positively dazzled by the pace with which Charles Dickens’s *American Notes for General Circulation* moved across international markets. Within seventy-two hours, Dickens’s widely anticipated travelogue (first published by London’s Chapman and Hall) sold 50,000 copies in the United States alone. And within about a week, hundreds of newspapers in every part of the nation were running chapters—both in serial form and as special “extra” editions—with little regard for British copyright.<sup>19</sup> The very same year, P. T. Barnum became manager of New York’s American Museum and quickly transcended older distinctions between local and national publics, firsthand observation in the exhibition hall, and secondhand evaluation through disembodied print media. Responding to the outrageous publicity stunts Barnum liked to call “humbugs,” newspapers “throughout the country” regularly copied his press releases and exhibition reviews. Thus, he explained, was the “fame” of the American Museum “wafted from one end of the land to the other.”<sup>20</sup>

One might object here, of course, that both of these examples point to historically specific senses of ubiquity—senses that were quickly superseded and recalibrated through the ongoing process of market expansion. What seems self-evidently large, fast, or far-flung at one moment may appear relatively modest, plodding, or circumscribed in another. But that is precisely my point: qualitative labels such as “popular” and “mass” inevitably refer to modes of production that are historically mobile and often vary from medium to medium. Perceptive critics sometimes respond to these dilemmas by adding a second adjective. In Kammen’s schema, for instance, Barnum’s antebellum shows are described as “commercial popular culture,” which in turn gives way to “proto mass culture” around

the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>21</sup> Other scholars employ the somewhat redundant phrase “mass popular culture” to distinguish between relative scales or stages of historical development.

Even these solutions, however, are plagued by a number of lingering problems. One involves the frequently nonlinear rhythms of cultural appropriation.<sup>22</sup> As most hip-hop fans know, the raw materials of their preferred musical genre first emerged during the mid-1970s, when a number of DJ’s in the South Bronx began to employ older technologies of mass reproduction (records, turntables, and cassette tapes) for new strategic purposes (sampling, scratching, and localized distribution).<sup>23</sup> Here, as in many other cases of cultural recycling under capitalism, the dialectic between vernacular practice and mass production moves in multiple directions—sometimes, mass begets vernacular begets mass.<sup>24</sup> To describe the now global phenomenon of hip-hop as *either* vernacular *or* mass culture is to miss much of its social and historical significance.

The second basic problem involves the ongoing difficulty of lining up eras, products, and scales in any kind of fixed or finished way. As Kammen himself emphasizes, the corporate juggernaut known as McDonalds was far more massive in 1970 than in 1950. And it is hard to imagine that this category will ever stand still. Consider our Hollywood blockbusters that “open everywhere.” In November 2003, the blockbuster film *Matrix Revolutions* achieved the largest international release in Hollywood history, opening simultaneously on more than ten thousand screens and in forty-three languages.<sup>25</sup> Yet as film distribution continues to move to wireless networks and the Internet, “everywhere” will quickly come to signify a far larger set of markets.<sup>26</sup>

In still other cases, the confusion derives from mass-distributed products, which in actual practice remain largely invisible. Lawrence W. Levine was among the first to draw attention to this possibility, noting: “not all mass culture was popular. Many mass-produced books went unread, many films unseen, many radio programs unheard by substantial numbers of people. This distinction is crucial: not everything mass produced for the American people was popular, even if a substantial percentage of what was popular by the 1930s was mass produced.”<sup>27</sup> For Levine, the significance of this rhetorical slippage lay in unexplored consumer choices, the broader process of audiences “distinguishing between what they found meaningful, appealing, and functional and what they did not.” But his insight also points to important questions of categorical cohesion and periodization. To describe the hundreds of unseen products in most local video stores as qualitatively more “popular” than, say,

*Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, is to prioritize one category of measurement (distribution points) over others (such as resonance and impact) that are arguably more significant. The end result, as my students like to point out, is a pair of conceptual labels that sometimes confuse as much as they explain.

Culture industry, by contrast, conjures the image of a far more concrete historical entity whose specific organizational patterns and stages of development can be carefully tracked and explicated without unraveling the larger category. This capacity for historical differentiation is one of the built-in advantages of Adorno’s catchphrase and may help to explain why so many recent scholars have reclaimed it: by moving the term “culture” from noun to adjective (mass *culture* to *culture* industry), we shift the conceptual emphasis from qualitative measure to mutable institution. This institutional category, moreover, poses fewer analytical difficulties in that it regularly shifts between literal and figurative meanings. It can refer to a specific business enterprise such as the late nineteenth-century vaudeville empire built by Benjamin Keith and Edward Albee, as well as to the larger process of syndication for which the phrase “Keith-Albee circuit” often serves as historical shorthand.<sup>28</sup> Much like the term “market,” industry simultaneously signifies a microlevel site of production and a macrolevel system of circulation.<sup>29</sup> In his 1963 essay “Culture Industry Reconsidered,” Adorno emphasized just this sort of analytical flexibility. “The expression ‘industry,’” he explained, is “not to be taken too literally. It refers to the standardization of the thing itself—such as that of the Western, familiar to every movie-goer—and to the rationalization of distribution techniques. . . . It is industrial more in a sociological sense, in the incorporation of industrial forms of organization even when nothing is manufactured.”<sup>30</sup>

This clarification points to a third major advantage. By its very design, Adorno’s concept focuses more careful attention on the historical processes of standardization, distribution, marketing, and integration that ultimately connect Barnum’s exhibitions and McDonald’s burgers as systems of commodity production. Acknowledging this continuity, it seems to me, need not lead us to resuscitate older theories of economic determinism: the long-obsolete notion of cultural commodities as one-dimensional vessels of “false consciousness.” Nor would I wish to endorse Adorno’s troublesome habit of collapsing the distinction between commodity types for rhetorical effect—for example, his quip in “The Schema of Mass Culture” that “the Ford model and the model hit song are all of a piece.”<sup>31</sup> Rather, what remains valuable in such quips is Adorno’s stubborn refusal to consider questions of aesthetic form or ideological

function *apart* from the mediating structures of capitalism. For Adorno, “the rationalization of distribution techniques” and “the incorporation of industrial forms” are not simply incidental context—they are the distinctive, inescapable features of modern cultural production that pervade his entire line of questioning.<sup>32</sup>

### Massification

But how does one track something as large and abstract as “the rationalization of distribution techniques”? Where, in other words, might we look for key historical watersheds in the “production of the popular”—as industry, idea, and marketing category?<sup>33</sup> For the most part, our tendency has been to explore these questions of “massification” through regional or national studies of individual cultural forms.<sup>34</sup> One of the earliest and most sophisticated examples is Denning’s *Mechanic Accents* (1987), which devotes an entire chapter to the reorganization of literary production during the second half of the nineteenth century. In the post-Civil War “fiction factories” of New York City, he explains, the “tendency of the industry was to shift from selling an ‘author,’ who was a free laborer, to selling a ‘character,’ a trademark whose stories could be written by a host of anonymous hack writers and whose celebrity could be protected in court.”<sup>35</sup> In some cases, this meant that authorial brand names such as “Bertha M. Clay” long outlived the actual writers who first produced them. It also meant that the same authorial staffs who wrote “Bertha M. Clay” romances for women sometimes produced “Frank Merriwell” and “Nick Carter” adventures for men. These new forms of standardization, moreover, coincided with equally dramatic changes in corporate structure and distribution: “whereas the first wave of cheap books and story papers in the 1840s was often limited to the market of a single city and survived only a few years, the distribution monopoly of the American News Company made the post-Civil War nickel and dime libraries a national industry.”<sup>36</sup>

In her 2002 study *The Circus Age*, Janet Davis charts a similar transformation in the late nineteenth-century exhibition trade, devoting the bulk of two early chapters to major changes in marketing, distribution, and labor.<sup>37</sup> Central to her story is the 1869 completion of the transcontinental railroad, a historical watershed that enabled the creation of more capital-intensive, three-ring spectacles and ever-wider national touring schedules. Yet, as Davis also makes clear, the structural transformation of the “railroad circus” was never simply a question of laying additional

tracks. In order to capitalize on the expanding reach of the new transportation networks, late nineteenth-century impresarios such as P. T. Barnum, Adam Forepaugh, and James Bailey enlisted market researchers to analyze population patterns, weather conditions, competing summer resorts, factory rosters, even crop reports—anything, in short, to identify the most profitable routes. They also added entire departments of advance men to secure local contracts for fuel, water, animal feed, and hotel rooms; bill posters to cover the public spaces of each new tour stop; press agents to solicit promotional deals with local editors and merchants; and sledge gangs to erect and take down the traveling canvas cities. As Davis concludes, “the relationship between the circus and big business was more than metaphorical, because the circus *was*—relatively speaking—big business at the turn of the century.”<sup>38</sup>

One could go on like this for some time, mining leading studies of individual cultural forms for evidence of additional changes. In his path-breaking work on late nineteenth-century magazines, for example, Richard Ohmann has emphasized the symbiotic relationship between the first national advertising campaigns of the 1880s and the emergence of new nationally distributed periodicals such as *Ladies’ Home Journal* and *Cosmopolitan*, both of which strategized content, marketing, profits, and distribution in direct relation to their ad buys.<sup>39</sup> In similar fashion, Janice Radway has suggested that Harry Scherman’s Book-of-the-Month Club constituted an innovative response to one of the most basic dilemmas of mass literature, namely, how to market new titles “widely, repetitively, and continuously without devaluing the cultural itself as a status category.” Part of what made Scherman’s 1924 enterprise so successful, she argues, was its ability to replicate some of the major “structural innovations of the Fordized economy” even as it recognized that “the relentless, staccato pace set by the inexorable production of an increasing number of goods and services caused great anxieties within the American population. With respect to the publishing sphere, this meant that the increase in title output . . . presented readers with the daunting problem of how to winnow the mass of books published to a reasonable collection of a few titles to read.”<sup>40</sup>

Collectively, it seems to me, these studies have provided a series of important snapshots on much the same historical process: the specific effects of corporate capitalism on specific cultural industries at specific moments in time. But what about the even broader sense of culture industry first articulated in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*—a transnational “system of capital,” with multiple “branches,” “media,” and “sectors?”<sup>41</sup> Part of

what makes this wide-angle question somewhat trickier to answer is the polemical impulse running through much of Adorno's work. Precisely because he wanted to condemn the culture industry for its "totalizing" tendencies, he often engaged in obvious forms of hyperbole. "All mass culture," we are told, is "identical"—a calculated overstatement which immediately flattens the media-specific characteristics and year-by-year changes that concern most historians.<sup>42</sup> Adding to the problem is Adorno's preference for treating the culture industry as a fully formed contemporary menace. How, exactly, the menace came into being—or where we might mark the crucial turning points in its transnational expansion—never really surfaced as central questions in his larger body of work.<sup>43</sup>

This should not lead us to conclude, however, that wide-angle historicizing is simply impossible. Indeed, one of the more intriguing features of the culture industry over the past two centuries has been its tendency to generate published commentaries on its own historical development. The specific vehicles for such commentaries are familiar to most of us, although they more typically go by the name of trade papers—with titles such as *Variety*, *Publisher's Weekly*, and *Pollstar*. None of these titles offers perfect comprehensiveness, of course; most only survive a decade or two. And although some of the leading publications cut across multiple media, the vast majority focus on individual cultural forms.<sup>44</sup> Still, these periodicals constitute a badly underutilized resource for cultural historians, especially for those of us interested in connecting long-running investments in discourse, representation, subjectivity, and perception to much larger, macrolevel questions about market structures, institutional networks, distribution systems, and communication webs (those key words of twenty-first-century globalization studies).<sup>45</sup> More than virtually any other type of primary source, trade papers help us map the culture industry's tendency toward transnational "monopolization" and "bureaucratic expansion," a tendency that Adorno (channeling Marx and Weber) liked to assert but rarely explored in much specificity and detail.<sup>46</sup>

Consider two of the earliest and most important examples: the *Era* (published in London from 1838 to 1939) and the *New York Clipper* (published between 1853 and 1923).<sup>47</sup> One of the most striking features of these periodicals is their surprisingly broad and early articulation of international markets. During the 1850s, the *Era* ran regular columns on dozens of different cities across England, Ireland, and Scotland, as well as on a wide variety of "Foreign Theatricals" in New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Paris, Turin, Naples, Madrid, Berlin, Cologne, Vienna, Prague, and Saint Petersburg. By the 1860s, the paper's scope of foreign report-

ing was even broader, extending across most of the British Empire into Asia, South Africa, and the Pacific. The *Clipper* was a bit slower to push beyond the confines of Lower Manhattan, but starting in the 1860s, its weekly columns extended to openings in Britain and Canada. And by the 1870s, its "Foreign Show News" and "Theatrical Record" included reports from correspondents in France, Italy, Austria, Scandinavia, Cuba, South America, Hawaii, Australia, New Zealand, and India.<sup>48</sup>

My goal in assembling these lists is not simply to push for longer, transnational patterns of circulation—a move that goes back at least as far as Paul Gilroy's brief but rich discussion of the Fisk Jubilee Singers in the *Black Atlantic*.<sup>49</sup> The more important point, in fact, may be that trade papers such as the *Era* and *Clipper* were themselves instrumental in building the very networks of commerce and discourse through which early acts such as the Fisk Jubilee Singers became visible across vast cultural geographies.<sup>50</sup> Listen, for example, to the *Clipper* editors' description of their mission in the paper's first regular "Amusements" column of May 24, 1856:

To the Profession—The *Clipper* is, perhaps, circulated over a wider extent of the country than any other journal in the United States. In view of this fact, we desire to make it as interesting to our theatrical friends as it already is in the sporting community. It is often the case that, owing to the changes occurring in the profession, actors and actresses are utterly unable to keep the "run" of each other. To obviate this difficulty, we have set apart a portion of our journal as a "Theatrical Directory," by means of which the whereabouts of our friends may be seen at a glance. In order to make this department as correct and complete as possible, we respectfully request those who take an interest in such matters to drop us a line, weekly, giving the movements of the disciples of "Thespis." Managers of Theatres, Circuses, Minstrels, &c., would perhaps consult their own interests by sending us a weekly "bill of the play," as such favors will always receive earliest attention.

What I believe we can hear in these lines is the culture industry becoming conscious of itself as a nonlocalized yet interconnected system of capital. Even as the system's self-appointed interlocutors acknowledge the relatively fragmented state of internal communication ("owing to the changes occurring in the profession"), they begin to imagine new methods for coordinating management, scheduling, and promotion across multiple markets. Over the next half century, this movement toward

wider circulation and coordination registered most clearly in the papers' advertising columns. During the 1850s, the *Era* and the *Clipper* generally featured a page or less of ads, most of which simply announced the weekly offerings of individual theaters in London and New York. Around the turn of the twentieth century, by contrast, both papers regularly ran up to six full pages of ads, many of which promoted products (such as foreign booking agencies and steamship lines) specifically designed to facilitate the integration of performers, managers, and venues around the globe.<sup>51</sup>

On one level, then, trade papers such as the *Era* and *Clipper* help us to track the *longue durée* of capitalist expansion taking place across multiple decades, markets, and even hemispheres. Yet they also make it easier to see more localized shifts and political struggles occurring within different "branches" of this industry at particular historical moments.<sup>52</sup> Good examples can be found in the *Era's* almost weekly coverage of British "singing saloons" during the 1850s.<sup>53</sup> Over the previous decade, these largely working-class venues had come to occupy a relatively secure position on one side of the institutional divide created by the Theatre Regulation Act of 1843. Simply put, this federal legislation forced British managers to make a choice: they could either show plays or serve alcohol but not both—a market-driven policy that increased the number of officially licensed "legitimate" theaters even as it created new forms of socioeconomic stratification.<sup>54</sup>

By the early 1850s, there were over a hundred singing saloons in Liverpool alone. But this explosion of extra-theatrical amusement mixed with alcohol did not go unchallenged.<sup>55</sup> Moral reform groups sought to curtail the trend by lobbying local governments and sponsoring alcohol-free "people's concerts" and "mechanics' institutes." Singing-saloon managers, by contrast, attempted to parlay their commercial success into more venues and broader clienteles. The typical pattern was to apply for a theater license with the profits from a singing saloon, thereby securing multiple sectors of a particular urban market. Theater managers, however, saw this maneuver as a potential encroachment on their interests and hired lawyers to fight the license applications of singing-saloon managers. The *Era* editors, hoping not to offend any particular constituency within their national readership, chose the safer option of blaming Parliament:

It is the law that seems to be *the great* offender in this case. God forbid that there should be no restrictions upon public performances. At the same time, the public has a right to all the rational amusement it wants. So long

as there is no offence to morality, an Englishman is justified in demanding to be permitted to listen to singing while he takes his beverage. . . . As for singing rooms, let them be properly conducted, and who can reasonably say that the Legislature should shut them up?<sup>56</sup>

I offer this brief episode from the mid-Victorian culture wars to support two broader conclusions. One is that the production of the popular has never simply unfolded according to some inexorable logic of capitalist expansion. Rather, it always (simultaneously) runs through multiple axes of competing products, shifting publics, and localized power struggles. For the most part, previous scholarship has cast these struggles as relatively narrow conflicts between producers and consumers, with some conflicts over access, others over behavior, and still others over the forms and meanings of the representations themselves. Less well explored or understood are the contemporaneous struggles that often take place *within* and *across* culture industries. The British case we have just considered, for example, was as much a contest between competing entertainment sectors (licensed theaters versus singing saloons versus alcohol-free peoples' concerts) and commercial interests (the rival managers who produced and sold each type of product) as it was a struggle between theater owners and their working-class patrons. In our own time, the various forms and fronts of culture industry conflict have continued to proliferate. Self-described "independent" film and music companies are routinely celebrated, purchased, and then redefined as the niche markets of multinational conglomerates; battles over file-sharing products such as Napster make their way to the Supreme Court; evangelical groups uneasy with society's prevailing norms produce their own cable channels, film festivals, and concert tours.

A second key conclusion is that these battles within and across international mass culture frequently take on distinctive national characteristics. As some readers will have recognized by now, the singing-saloon squabbles in Victorian Britain were virtually contemporaneous with another, more violent eruption of culture industry stratification in New York City—the notorious Astor Place Theater Riot of 1849, which left twenty-two protestors dead in the streets.<sup>57</sup> In the United States, however, there were no central regulatory mechanisms for distributing theatrical patents, no federal laws about mixing alcohol and drama. Rather, in the more laissez-faire cultural economy of antebellum Manhattan, licenses and lawyers were replaced by brickbats and bullets.

The juridical contours of the antebellum show trade likewise varied

from location to location. Some governing bodies (such as the states of Vermont and Connecticut, or the city of Lowell, Massachusetts) passed legislation banning "low theatricals," but many others did not. And the localized strictures often changed from year to year, a system that produced characteristically ad hoc patterns of domestic cultural politics. In London, the Lord Chamberlain's office read and approved or censored most of the new plays intended for the nation's stages. In most U.S. cities, by contrast, antebellum theater managers and publishers discovered they had pushed too far only when they found themselves targeted for boycotts, libel suits, or violence.<sup>58</sup>

### Varieties of Conflict

At this point, it may appear that we have long since abandoned Adorno's top-down mode of theorizing. Nowhere in his culture industry essays, after all, do we find cases of internal struggle akin to the singing-saloon battles or the Astor Place riot. And on the rare occasions when he alludes to "the rebellious resistance" of low cultural forms, it generally comes in reference to some hazy moment in the pre-industrial past, when "social control was not yet total."<sup>59</sup> Still, I think it would be wrong to conclude that Adorno has nothing to teach us about how to theorize cultural conflict in a more rigorously historical framework.

Our current fascination with globalization is a good case in point. On one level, of course, Adorno's early essays seem to anticipate all-too-familiar arguments about the rise of corporate oligopolies and creeping Americanization. Yet his simultaneous focus on transnational systems of capital—rather than individual nation-states—also leads, somewhat more unexpectedly, to roughly the same analytical starting point adopted by recent theorists of black cultural politics such as Paul Gilroy, Stuart Hall, and George Lipsitz, all of whom have pushed for greater critical attention to the transnational circulation of cultural commodities (e.g., reggae and hip-hop records) as vessels of oppositional consciousness.<sup>60</sup> The intellectual lineage here is relatively straightforward but easy to miss: one cannot theorize mass cultural exchanges within and across diasporic communities until one has a transnational model of mass culture.

Adorno's emphasis on the interconnectedness of culture industry sectors and branches, moreover, helps us to think about how one form of market expansion might inadvertently reshape power relationships within another. Let me offer one brief example from my current book project. As I noted earlier, Dickens's *American Notes for General Circulation* (1842) was

among the first mass-circulated texts of the nineteenth century. Less well known is that fact that its transatlantic popularity stemmed in part from one of the earliest published descriptions of African American dancing in a post-emancipation context. The key passage takes place at a Five Points dance cellar visited by Dickens during his March 1842 tour of New York City. It begins with an audience request:

What will we please to call for? A dance? It shall be done directly, sir: "a regular breakdown." . . . Five or six couples come upon the floor, marshaled by a lively young negro, who is the wit of the assembly, and the greatest dancer known. . . . the sport begins to languish, when suddenly the lively hero dashes in to the rescue. Instantly the fiddler grins, and goes at it tooth and nail; there is new energy in the tambourine; new laughter in the dancers; new smiles in the landlady; new confidence in the landlord; new brightness in the very candles. Single shuffle, double shuffle, cut and cross-cut; snapping his fingers, rolling his eyes, turning in his knees, presenting the backs of his legs in front, spinning about on his toes and heels like nothing but the man's fingers on the tambourine. Dancing with two left legs, two right legs, two wooded legs, two wire legs, two spring legs—all sorts of legs and no legs—what is this to him? And in what walk of life, or dance of life does man ever get such stimulating applause as thunders about him, when, having danced his partner off her feet, and himself too, he finishes by leaping gloriously on the bar-counter, and calling for something to drink, with the chuckle of a million of counterfeit Jim Crows, in one inimitable sound!<sup>61</sup>

Previous scholars have often presented this passage as a rare window onto black vernacular forms soon to be overshadowed by the rise of commercial minstrelsy (the first organized minstrel show in New York City took place only four months after *American Notes* was published).<sup>62</sup> Less understood are the broader historical impacts of Dickens's representational choices on the young black man at its center: the still anonymous "lively hero" whose climactic and "inimitable" laughter seems directed precisely at the commercial blackface industry ("a million counterfeit Jim Crows"). We now know a great deal more: that his real name was William Henry Lane, although he generally performed as Juba or Master Juba; that he began his career at least two years earlier, performing surreptitiously in blackface under P. T. Barnum's management; that soon after Dickens's visit he became the first African American dancer to perform in mainstream northern venues and headline touring companies;

and that he used this growing fame during the mid-1840s to forge a more lasting and successful career on the other side of the Atlantic, where he eventually appeared in almost every major theater and music hall across the United Kingdom.<sup>63</sup>

As I began this project, my instinct was to treat Lane's remarkable (and remarkably early) career as an exceptional case. Most antebellum black performers, after all, did not find their labors recorded for mass consumption by the world's best-selling author, a dramatically new form of cultural capital that Lane proceeded to leverage in multiple locations. Yet as I sat in the British Library pouring through hundreds of newspaper reviews across England, Scotland, and Ireland, I came to refine my initial appraisal in two key respects.

First, I found myself surprised by the sheer number of African American performers in Victorian Britain. From the dramatic performances of Ira Aldridge and the orchestral music of Francis Johnson to the operatic recitals of Elizabeth Greenfield and the panorama paintings of Henry Box Brown, virtually every black performer to achieve a significant level of commercial success before the Civil War did so by moving across national boundaries. This discovery led to a second round of rethinking about the structural parameters of black agency within early mass culture. Indeed, as I sorted through the peripatetic careers of other black pioneers such as Charles Hicks, the Fisk Jubilee Singers, James and George Bohee, Sam Lucas, Sissieretta Jones, George Walker, Bert Williams, and Aida Overton Walker, a much larger pattern began to crystallize. Strategic circulation across regional, national, and international markets was not simply incidental to these careers—it was the means by which something called black popular culture first became visible and ultimately sustained itself across the nineteenth century.<sup>64</sup>

Somewhat surprisingly, then, Adorno's early insistence on treating mass culture as a transnational industry made it easier to track larger patterns of subaltern struggle only partially visible in more recent and localized studies. But what of his much-better-known remarks regarding the culture industry's "regressive" effects on individual consumers? Here again it is important to be clear about Adorno's deep and abiding skepticism toward the very notion of an oppositional consumer consciousness. For most of his career, Adorno theorized mass consumption not as a domain of individual subjectivity or even play, but as something "administered" by the culture industry and its increasingly mechanized forms of spectatorship. "Rebelliousness," in this schema, was essentially a sham—

one of the culture industry's standard marketing angles (along with novelty and prudery) designed to seduce, distract, and pacify.

Even here, though, there are some important wrinkles. Recall, for example, Adorno's intriguing comments of 1969 (in "Free Time") about the ambiguous effects of culture industry immersion: the products and promotions that are only "accepted with a kind of reservation" and "not quite believed in." The empirical touchstone in this case was a 1966 study by the Frankfurt school of how the public perceived a royal wedding "broadcast by all the mass media." Initially, at least, the results only seemed to confirm the "familiar pattern." "Relevant, possibly political news" was "transformed into a consumer item," and most consumers parroted back the media hooks, describing the wedding as a "once-in-a-lifetime" event. In the same surveys, however, Adorno began to observe a curious commingling of "acceptance" and "disbelief"—especially when the questions focused on the "political significance" ascribed "to the grand event." He even detected "symptoms" of a broader "split consciousness," noting "that many of the people interviewed . . . suddenly showed themselves to be thoroughly realistic, and proceeded to evaluate critically the political and social importance of the same event."<sup>65</sup>

This notion of a "split" consumer consciousness—at once shaped by culture industry formulas and conscious of the shaping—has received relatively little attention from cultural historians.<sup>66</sup> Yet it may constitute one of the more important developments in the longer history of mass culture, an ideological pattern just about as old as the culture industry itself. As early as 1855, it was already creeping into Barnum's autobiography as a new managerial maxim—that "the public appears disposed to be amused, even when it is conscious of being deceived."<sup>67</sup> A decade later, it resurfaced in his 1865 essay collection *Humbugs of the World*, but this time in the form of a managerial complaint about the growing numbers of consumers who "humbugged themselves" by treating his most expensive, genuine wonders as possible fakes.<sup>68</sup> The problem, of course, was that Barnum had taught his audiences all too well. Thoroughly acculturated to the showman's bogus self-accusations and promotional shell games, many American Museum consumers now began to view *all* of his claims—even those that were entirely true—with a reflexive skepticism.<sup>69</sup>

In his recent work on the British music hall, Peter Bailey has identified a related species of mass cultural "knowingness" articulated between working-class performers and audiences—often at the expense of the more socially powerful. Particularly helpful is Bailey's insistence that the

music hall's "knowing" aesthetic of double entendre and comic innuendo (the second-level "conspiracies of meaning" produced through winks, nods, and puns on stage) emerged not from some marginal or autonomous site of working-class struggle, but from within and through the ongoing processes of commodification, standardization, and combination that transformed the early singing saloons into a national industry. This industry, he concludes, "did not . . . generate an anti-language in the accepted sense of the term, but rather a resignification of everyday language which knowingly corrupted its conventional referentiality and required a certain competency in its decoding."<sup>70</sup>

Where might these arguments lead? Above all, I believe they push us to think beyond the well-worn questions of cultural industry manipulation (yes or no?) and cooptation (how much?). My point here is not simply that most culture industry products are ideologically contradictory, simultaneously shaped by producers as well as consumers.<sup>71</sup> Rather, I am suggesting that the longer historical process of culture industry expansion has generated new forms of self-consciousness (vis-à-vis its working methods) and expertise (vis-à-vis its aesthetic practices). In Barnum's museum, this process registered as an epistemological shift in the meaning of "curiosity." Although some viewers continued to debate the authenticity of the dubious wonders, others discussed how they were being manipulated by the debate itself, treating the showman's promotional tricks as an equally fascinating, second-level topic of moral and economic evaluation. In the British music hall, by contrast, knowingness crystallized as new forms of cultural competence, as the ability to resignify words and phrases increasingly subject to commercial standardization and government regulation.

Less clear is what *happened* to these new forms of market-driven savvy as they migrated (and cross-pollinated) beyond their historical points of origin. Bailey has urged caution in assuming a straightforward movement into oppositional politics: "it would be wrong to triumphalise. . . the counter-discourse of music hall knowingness was limited to the infraction rather than the negation of the dominant power relationships and, as its echo of official idioms demonstrated, it was compromised between challenge and collaboration."<sup>72</sup> Much the same, I think, can be said about the rising tide of consumer doubt fostered by Barnum. By focusing more explicitly on the self-reflexive qualities of his public reception, we go a long way toward complicating the long-running stereotypes about Barnum and suckers. Yet as Barnum himself discovered, consumer skepticism in this context was a slippery thing. In some cases, it could

produce a kind of critical distance: the ability to stand outside the system, explicate its working methods, and make new and different choices. But in other cases, it socialized its adepts to a more despairing and passive brand of cynicism: the conclusion that there was no outside of Barnum's shell games, or that the culture industry's long-running valorization of choice was nothing more than a fool's bet.<sup>73</sup>

Significantly, Adorno's final thoughts on these questions (issued less than three months before his death) were far more equivocal than most of his public statements from the previous three decades. Indeed, the closing lines of "Free Time" posed the problem of split consciousness in the form of an open question, one that still echoes into the present: "I shall refrain from spelling out the consequences; but I think that we can glimpse here a chance of maturity, which might just eventually help to turn free time into freedom proper."

#### NOTES

For their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this chapter, I thank Mike O'Malley, Larry Glickman, Paul Anderson, Rita Chin, and many of the individuals who attended the State of Cultural History conference in September 2005. My deepest debts here, however, are to Larry Levine. Although Larry had no great fondness for Adorno, he would have been open to the broader conversation this essay seeks to foster.

1. In Adorno's words: "the term culture industry was perhaps used for the first time in the book *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, which [Max] Horkheimer and I published in Amsterdam in 1947. In our drafts we spoke of 'mass culture.' We replaced that expression with 'culture industry' in order to exclude from the outset the interpretation agreeable to its advocates: that it is a matter of something like a culture that arises spontaneously from the masses themselves." Theodor W. Adorno, "Culture Industry Reconsidered," reprinted in *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture* (London: Routledge, 1991), 98. This essay originally appeared in the form of a public lecture, carried by the Hessian Broadcasting System, in spring 1963, and was subsequently published in *Ohne Leitbild* in 1967. For helpful context on these issues, see Andreas Huyssen, "Introduction to Adorno," *New German Critique* 6 (Autumn 1975): 3-11.
2. Early examples of this pattern include the following: Gareth Stedman Jones, "Class Expression versus Social Control?" *History Workshop Journal* 4 (1977); Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), esp. chap. 4, "The Rise of Secular Song"; John Kasson, *Amusing the Million* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978); Frederic Jameson, "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture," *Social Text* 1 (Winter 1979); Stuart Hall, "Notes on Deconstructing 'The Popular,'" in *People's History and Socialist Theory*, ed. Raphael Samuel (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981); Richard Ohmann, "Where Did Mass Culture Come From? The Case of Magazines," *Berkshire Review*

- (1981); George Lipsitz, *Class and Culture in Postwar America* (New York: Praeger, 1981); Lewis Erenberg, *Steppin' Out* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); T. J. Jackson Lears, "From Salvation to Self-Realization: Advertising and the Therapeutic Roots of the Consumer Culture, 1880-1930," in *The Culture of Consumption*, ed. Richard Fox and T. J. Jackson Lears (New York: Pantheon, 1983); Francis Couvares, "The Triumph of Commerce: Class Culture and Mass Culture in Pittsburgh," in *Working-Class America*, ed. Michael Frisch and Daniel Walkowitz (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983); Roy Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours for What We Will* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984); Warren Susman, *Culture as History* (New York: Pantheon, 1984); T. J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life* (New York: Knopf, 1985), esp. chap. 4, "A Bar at the Folies-Bergere"; Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986); and Elliott Gorn, *The Manly Art* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986). My point here is not to suggest that the growing emphasis on cultural contest simply hardened into a unified position by the mid-1980s. Rather, as the preceding list demonstrates, scholars came to this position from a wide variety of disciplinary locations, which meant that they also argued for a "contested" model of cultural commerce with very different theoretical assumptions and priorities. Good examples of these competing priorities can be found in the occasionally heated 1992 *AHR Forum* on popular/mass culture featuring work by Lawrence Levine, Robin Kelley, Natalie Davis, and Jackson Lears, *American Historical Review* 97, no. 5 (December 1992): 1379-1430.
3. The quotations here come from Michael Denning, "The End of Mass Culture," in *Culture in the Age of Three Worlds*, by M. Denning, 97-120 (London: Verso, 2004), 97, 98. This important field critique first appeared as part of a special issue on mass culture in *International Labor and Working-Class History* 38 (Fall 1990).
  4. Denning, "End of Mass Culture," 114.
  5. *Ibid.*, 98. To some extent, of course, these shifts were generational. Indeed, for those of us who had worked in college radio, played in bands, produced our own records, written for zines, experimented with video, designed Web sites, or simply cared about the actually existing commercial landscapes we all inhabited, the most basic problem with Adorno's line of critique was not so much its ferocity as its inability to locate *any* creative activity in the cultural life of late capitalism. For my own part, casting mass culture as an unambiguous object of critical repulsion felt both disingenuous and unproductive.
  6. The phrase "kill off" comes from Denning's afterword to "The End of Mass Culture": "Since my essay could hardly hope to kill off the capitalist culture industries, my more modest goal was to kill off the concept that is no longer particularly useful for mapping or understanding them" (115). I should note at the outset that Adorno was hardly alone in theorizing and critiquing mass culture during the mid-twentieth century. Other important interventions in the postwar mass culture debates included the following: David Riesman, "Listening to Popular Music," *American Quarterly* 2 (1950): 359-71; Leo Lowenthal, "Historical Perspectives of Popular Culture," *American Journal of Sociology* 55 (1950): 323-32; Dwight Macdonald, "A Theory of Mass Culture," *Diogenes* 3 (Summer 1953): 1-17; Gilbert Seldes, *The Public Arts* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1956); Bernard Rosenberg and David Manning White, eds., *Mass Culture: The Popular Arts in America* (New York: Free Press, 1957); C. Wright Mills, "The Cultural Apparatus," *Listener*,

- March 26, 1959; and Norman Jacobs, ed., *Culture for the Millions? Mass Media in Modern Society* (Princeton: Van Nostrand, 1961).
7. Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (coauthored with Max Horkheimer) was first published in 1947 by Querido. Other key texts for the development of Adorno's conceptual apparatus include the following: "On Jazz" (1936); *In Search of Wagner* (1937-38, but not published until 1952); "On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening" (1938); "The Radio Symphony" (1941); "On Popular Music" (1941); the early fragments of *Minima Moralia* (begun in 1944 but not published until 1951); *Composing for the Films* (1947, with Hanns Eisler); and Adorno's intense debates with Walter Benjamin, many of which are collected in *The Complete Correspondence, 1928-1940* (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 1999). For studies of Adorno's broader career and theoretical work on culture industry, see Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923-1950* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1973); Jay, "Adorno in America," *New German Critique*, no. 31 (Winter 1984): 157-82, and Jay, *Adorno* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984); Eugene Lunn, *Marxism and Modernism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982); Patrick Bratlinger, *Bread and Circuses: Theories of Mass Culture as Social Decay* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), 222-48; Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986); and Miriam Hansen, foreword to *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere*, by Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), ix-xli. See also Adorno's autobiographical essay, "Scientific Experiences of a European Scholar in America," in *The Intellectual Migration: Europe and America, 1930-1960*, ed. Donald Fleming and Bernard Bailyn, 338-70 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969).
  8. I borrow the phrase "absolutist stance" from Hansen, foreword to *Public Sphere and Experience*, xx.
  9. Theodor W. Adorno, "Transparencies on Film," first published in *Die Zeit*, November 18, 1966. This intervention, as Hansen has shown, was designed to support a 1965 federal grant program that subsidized the debut feature films of Volker Schlöndorff, Edgar Reitz, and Alexander Kluge. Miriam Hansen, "Introduction to Adorno, 'Transparencies on Film,'" *New German Critique* 24-25 (Autumn 1981-Winter 1982): 193.
  10. Theodor W. Adorno, "Opera and the Long-Playing Record," first published in *Der Spiegel*, March 24, 1969, 169.
  11. Theodor W. Adorno, "Free Time," in *Culture Industry, 196-97*. The first publication of this May 25, 1969, radio address appeared in *Stichworte* (1969). The title of the essay has also been translated as "Leisure Time."
  12. This phrase comes from Hansen, "Introduction to Adorno, 'Transparencies on Film'" (190), which provides one of the earliest and most sophisticated treatments of Adorno's shifting positions. See also Andreas Huyssen's widely influential essay "Adorno in Reverse," *New German Critique* 29 (Spring-Summer 1983), which was subsequently reprinted as chapter 2 of *After the Great Divide*. Huyssen and Hansen deserve much of the credit for pushing U.S. scholars to reconsider Adorno's culture industry essays in more nuanced and historically contingent terms.
  13. Michael Denning, *Mechanic Accents* (London: Verso, 1987), 3. Perceptive readers will note that Denning's use of "culture industry" in this passage stands in appar-

- ent contradiction to his subsequent remarks about "killing off" Adorno's concept (in "End of Mass Culture"). In actual practice, Denning has been instrumental in reconfiguring (as opposed to eradicating) Adorno's catchphrase; it continues to appear in almost everything he publishes.
14. Eric Lott, *Love and Theft* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 8.
  15. Robin Kelley, "Playing for Keeps: Pleasure and Profit on the Postindustrial Playground," in *The House That Race Built: Black Americans, U.S. Terrain*, ed. Wahneema Lubiano (New York: Pantheon Books, 1997), x.
  16. Paul Gilroy, *Against Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 130.
  17. Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991); Janice Radway, *A Feeling for Books* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal, eds., *That's the Joint! The Hip-Hop Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2004). Other prominent examples of this pattern include Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); David W. Stowe, *Swing Changes: Big Band Jazz in New Deal America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994); Richard Ohmann, *Selling Culture: Magazines, Markets, and Class at the Turn of the Century* (London: Verso, 1996); Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (London: Verso, 1997); Shelley Streeby, *American Sensations: Class Empire and the Production of Popular Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Janet M. Davis, *The Circus Age: Culture and Society under the American Big Top* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); David Suisman, "Co-workers in the Kingdom of Culture: Black Swan Records and the Political Economy of African American Music," *Journal of American History* 90, no. 4 (March 2004): 1295-1324; Victoria De Grazia, *Irresistible Empire: America's Advance through Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005); and Karen Sotiropoulos, *Staging Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006). My own reworkings of Adorno's catchphrase can be found in James W. Cook, *The Arts of Deception: Playing with Fraud in the Age of Barnum* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), esp. 28-29, 264-65, 274n56, and 308n11; and Cook, "Introduction: The Architect of the Modern Culture Industry," in *The Colossal P. T. Barnum Reader*, ed. J. W. Cook (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2005). On Adorno's conception of totality, see Martin Jay, *Marxism and Totality: The Adventures of a Concept from Lukacs to Habermas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).
  18. Michael Kammen, *American Culture, American Tastes* (New York: Knopf, 1999). See esp. chap. 1, "Coming to Terms with Defining Terms," 3-26.
  19. As Meredith McGill has demonstrated, this was only one major example of a much larger antebellum "culture of reprinting," which continued until the passage of an international copyright law in 1891. Meredith McGill, *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting, 1834-1853* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003). See also Ronald J. Zboray, *A Fictive People: Antebellum Economic Development and the American Reading Public* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).
  20. P. T. Barnum, *Struggles and Triumphs* (Buffalo, NY: Warren, Johnson, and Co., 1872), 130. For examples of Barnum's rapidly expanding press coverage, see Cook, *Colossal P. T. Barnum Reader*.
  21. Kammen, *American Culture, American Tastes*, 3-26. In fairness to Kammen, it should be noted that he mostly employs such labels to describe period-specific tendencies rather than absolute qualitative differences. My goal in raising these issues is to suggest a way out of the analytical zero sum that pits qualitative specificity against the longer history of capitalist expansion.
  22. For two early and sophisticated discussions of appropriation, see Hall, "Notes on Deconstructing 'The Popular'"; and Roger Chartier, "Culture as Appropriation: Popular Cultural Uses in Early Modern France," in *Understanding Popular Culture*, ed. Steven L. Kaplan (Berlin: Mouton, 1984). See also Chartier, "Texts, Printing, Reading," in *The New Cultural History*, ed. Lynn Hunt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).
  23. On these issues, see Tricia Rose, *Black Noise* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1994); William Eric Perkins, ed., *Droppin' Science: Critical Essays on Rap and Hip Hop Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996); Forman and Neal, *That's the Joint!*
  24. We also know that this dialectic frequently moves in the opposite direction, as mass cultural commodities modeled on previously local songs, dance moves, fashion trends, and so forth, are re-appropriated on the other side of the commodification process by new groups of consumers with their own distinctive use patterns. It was precisely this complex circuit of re-appropriation that Lawrence W. Levine first made visible in 1977 when he described early twentieth-century blues records as "bearers and preservers" of folk traditions for rural African Americans thrust into motion by the Great Migration. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, 231. In Levine's powerful story, vernacular begets mass begets vernacular.
  25. Editorial, *New York Times*, November 11, 2003.
  26. Of course, much the same kind of argument can be made about pop songs, MP3 files, and the increasingly conventional practice of releasing music videos on the Internet.
  27. Lawrence W. Levine, "The Folklore of Industrial Society: Popular Culture and Its Audiences," *American Historical Review* 97, no. 5 (December 2002): 1373.
  28. On the Keith-Albee circuit, see Robert Snyder, *The Voice of the City: Vaudeville and Popular Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); and Snyder, "Big Time, Small Time, All around the Town: New York Vaudeville in the Early Twentieth Century," in *For Fun and Profit: The Transformation of Leisure into Consumption*, ed. Richard Butsch (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 118-35.
  29. On the shifting meanings of market, see Jean-Christophe Agnew, *World's Apart: The Market and the Theater in Anglo-American Thought, 1550-1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 41-42, 52-53, 55-56.
  30. Adorno, *Culture Industry*, 100-101.
  31. Theodor W. Adorno, "The Schema of Mass Culture," in *Culture Industry*, 79. This essay was originally written as a continuation of the "culture industry" chapter of Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. It first appeared in print as part of Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften III: Dialektik der Aufklärung* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1981), 299-335.
  32. An autobiographical footnote may be instructive here. For those of us who began to practice cultural history in the midst of the Reagan era "culture wars," Adorno's line of questioning often sounded disturbingly similar to the conservative jeremiads against mass culture echoing all around us. Rhetorically, at least, they had much in common. Where Adorno had described the "fun" of Hollywood movies as "a medicinal bath which the entertainment industry never ceases to

- prescribe" (*Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 118), late twentieth-century conservatives such as Allan Bloom dismissed rock music as "a non-stop, commercially pre-packaged masturbational fantasy." Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 68–81. Rhetoric aside, however, these critiques grew out of very different analytical and political projects. As Andreas Huyssen first noted, Adorno's primary concern was neither the problem of "masses" threatening culture "from below," nor the "preservation" of a traditional "high culture" in the service of social and political "domination." Rather, the specific target of Adorno's mid-twentieth-century wrath was corporate capitalism's manifold impacts in ordering consumption "from above." Huyssen, "Introduction to Adorno," 8–9. See also Huyssen, *After the Great Divide*, 25.
33. This question of how the popular is "produced" has often been ignored or elided—even by leading cultural historians. Helpful discussions on this issue can be found in Hall, "Notes on Deconstructing the 'Popular'"; Clark, *Painting of Modern Life*; Denning, *Mechanic Accents*; and Richard Broadhead, *Cultures of Letters* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).
  34. The term "massification" is often used in studies of modern consumer culture. See, for example, James B. Twitchell, *Adcult USA: The Triumph of Advertising in American Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); and Bill Brown, *The Material Unconscious: American Amusement, Stephen Crane, and the Economies of Play* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996).
  35. Denning, *Mechanic Accents*, 20.
  36. *Ibid.*, 19. On this issue, see also Nan Enstad, *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure: Working Women, Popular Culture, and Labor Politics at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 17–47.
  37. Davis, *Circus Age*, 15–81.
  38. *Ibid.*, 40. In many cases, Davis adds, the larger "logistical spectacle" performed by thousands of itinerant laborers proved to be just as fascinating to local audiences as the subsequent entertainment products exhibited under the big top (38).
  39. Richard Ohmann, *Politics of Letters* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1987), 135–51. See also Ohmann's revisions and expansions of these arguments in *Selling Culture*.
  40. Radway, *Feeling for Books*, 169–70.
  41. Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 94, 105.
  42. *Ibid.*, 94–95. On Adorno's penchant for critical hyperbole, see Jay, *Marxism and Totality*; and Gillian Rose, *The Melancholy Science: An Introduction to the Critical Thought of Theodor W. Adorno* (London: Macmillan, 1978).
  43. On Adorno's reluctance to explore the "crucial transition from the culture of liberal capitalism to that of monopoly capitalism," see esp. Huyssen, "Adorno in Reverse," 22–23.
  44. In most cases, too, individual trade papers represent specific corporate and class interests, a pattern that necessitates careful cross-reading of a wide range of publications.
  45. The list of major works in this burgeoning field is long and diverse. Those I have found particularly helpful include the following: Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd, eds., *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997); Edward Herman and Robert McChesney, *The Global Media* (London: Cassell, 1997); Frederic Jameson and Masao Miyoshi, *The Cultures of Globalization* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998); David Held, Anthony G. McGrew, David Goldblatt, and Jonathan Perraton, *Global Transformations: Politics, Economics and Culture* (London: Polity Press, 1999); Denning, *Culture in the Age of Three Worlds*; Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004); Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees* (London: Verso, 2005); Donald Sassoon, *The Culture of the Europeans* (New York: Harper Collins, 2006); and Simon J. Potter, "Webs, Networks, and Systems: Globalization and Mass Media in the Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century British Empire," *Journal of British Studies* 46, no. 3 (July 2007): 621–46.
  46. These terms come from Theodor W. Adorno, "Culture and Administration," in *Culture Industry*, 109–10.
  47. My thanks to Matthew Wittmann for his research assistance on these periodicals.
  48. This international expansion of cultural circulation was aided by two mid-nineteenth-century technological innovations: the telegraph and the ocean-going steamship. For more on the early history of mass media, see Daniel Czitrom, *The Media and the American Mind: From Morse to McLuhan* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982); and Paul Starr, *The Creation of the Media: Political Origins of Modern Communications* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).
  49. Gilroy, *Black Atlantic*, 87–96. For additional studies that devote significant attention to transnational cultural circulation before the twentieth century, see the following: Dale Cockrell, ed., *Excelsior: Journals of the Hutchinson Family Singers, 1842–1846* (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon Press, 1989); Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); John Blair, "First Steps toward Globalization: Nineteenth-Century Exports of American Entertainment Forms," in "Here, There and Everywhere": *The Foreign Politics of American Popular Culture*, ed. Reinhold Wagnleitner and Elaine Tyler May (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2000), 17–33; W. T. Lhamon Jr., *Jump Jim Crow* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003); Roslyn Poignant, *Professional Savages* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004); Cook, *Colossal P. T. Barnum Reader*; Robert Rydell and Rob Kroes, *Buffalo Bill in Bologna* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Daphne Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).
  50. My thinking here has been influenced by Michael Warner's work on "publics" as simultaneously discursive and institutional entities. Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2002).
  51. Starting in 1874, moreover, the *Clipper* published an annual "almanac" featuring population statistics, railroad and steamship schedules, postage rates at home and abroad, distances between major cities, and seating capacities for "some of the largest theatres in the world"—everything, in short, for the managerial corps of a nineteenth-century "show trade" now redefining itself in more explicitly global terms.
  52. In retrospect, it's easier to see that Lawrence W. Levine's widely influential *High-brow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988) was pushing in some of these same directions—that is, toward a more comparative historical analysis of socioeconomic stratification across multiple nineteenth-century cultural forms.
  53. See, for example, the *Era* for December 7, 1851; January 2 and 9, February 20, August 29, September 5 and 12, and October 10, 1852; and January 2, 1853.

54. For further analysis of these issues, see John Russell Stephens, *The Censorship of British Drama, 1824–1901* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); Peter Bailey, ed., *Music Hall: The Business of Pleasure* (Milton Keynes/Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1986); Dagmar Kift, *The Victorian Music Hall: Culture, Class, and Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); and Jane Moody, *Illegitimate Theatre in London, 1770–1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
55. For helpful discussion of similar stratification patterns in antebellum New York City, see Peter G. Buckley, "Paratheatricals and Popular Stage Entertainment," in *Beginnings to 1870*, vol. 1 of *The Cambridge History of American Theatre.*, ed. Don B. Wilmeth and Christopher Bigsby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 424–81.
56. "Concert Halls and Singing Halls," *Era*, January 9, 1852.
57. On the Astor Place Riot, see Peter Buckley, "To the Opera House: Culture and Society in New York City, 1820–1860" (Ph.D. diss., State University of New York at Stony Brook, 1984); Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow*; and Robert Allen, *Horrible Prettiness: Burlesque and American Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).
58. On nineteenth-century theater riots and libel cases, see Bruce McConachie, *Melodramatic Formations, American Theatre and Society, 1820–1870* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1992); and Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Rereading Sex: Battles over Sexual Knowledge and Suppression in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Knopf, 2002).
59. Adorno, "Culture Industry Reconsidered," 98–99.
60. See, for example, Paul Gilroy, *"There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack": The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990); Hall, "What Is This 'Black' in Black Popular Culture," in *Black Popular Culture*, ed. Gina Dent (Seattle: Bay Press, 1992); and George Lipsitz, *Dangerous Crossroads: Popular Music, Postmodernism, and the Poetics of Place* (London: Verso, 1994).
61. Charles Dickens, *American Notes for General Circulation* (London: Penguin Classics, 1985), 138–39.
62. See, for example, Eileen Southern, *The Music of Black Americans: A History* (New York: Norton, 1971); Marshall Stearns and Jean Stearns, *Jazz Dance* (New York: Da Capo, 1978); and Shane White, "The Death of James Johnson," *American Quarterly* 51, no. 4 (December 1999): 753–95.
63. I examine this complex history in my current book project. On Lane's career, see Marian Hannah Winter, "Juba and American Minstrelsy" (1947), reprinted in *Chronicles of the American Dance*, ed. Paul Magriel (New York: Da Capo, 1978); and James W. Cook, "Dancing across the Color Line: A Story of Mixtures and Markets in New York's Five Points," *Common-place* 4, no. 1 (October 2003); and Cook, "Master Juba, King of All Dancers! A Black Dancer's Story from the Dawn of the Transatlantic Culture Industry," *Discourses in Dance* 3, no. 2 (2006).
64. This pattern, moreover, was never restricted to popular entertainment. Indeed, it was at this same moment, during the late 1840s and early 1850s, that black abolitionists, writers, and artists such as Frederick Douglass, William Wells Brown, and William and Ellen Craft first began to use British markets as oppositional networks to raise capital, assert their ideological and political independence, and exert transatlantic leverage.
65. Adorno, "Free Time," 195–97. It's worth noting that the concept of split consciousness was not entirely new. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, for example, Adorno and Horkheimer described "the triumph of advertising in the culture industry" as the moment in which "consumers feel compelled to buy and use products even though they see through them." During the mid-1960s, however, this line of argument began to take a number of important turns. First and perhaps most important, Adorno began to treat the act of "seeing through" as a more ambiguous process, one in which the long-term ideological effects of culture industry immersion did not necessarily add up to collective "compulsion." He also began to express new forms of curiosity about the lessons of empirical research, especially as they related to the culture industry's historical evolution. In the final pages of "Free Time," Adorno made this relationship explicit. The Frankfurt school's study of the celebrity wedding, he now argued, was a "textbook example of how critical-theoretical thought can both learn from and be corrected by empirical social research." His reflections on the wedding also began with an intriguing moment of self-revision: "Let me say a little more on the relation of free time and the culture industry. Since Horkheimer and I coined the term more than thirty years ago, so much has been written about this means of integration and domination, that I should like to pick out a problem, which at the time we were not able to get a proper perspective on" (195–96). For helpful discussion of these developments, see also Hansen, "Introduction to Adorno, 'Transparencies on Film,'" 190–93; and J. M. Bernstein, introduction to *Culture Industry*, 12–16.
66. On this issue, see also Michael Saler's fascinating discussion of "ironic imagination" in two recent essays: "Clap if You Believe in Sherlock Holmes: Mass Culture and the Re-Enchantment of Modernity, c. 1890–c.1940," *Historical Journal* 46, no. 3 (2003): 599–622; and "Modernity, Enchantment, and the Ironic Imagination," *Philosophy and Literature* 28 (2004): 137–49.
67. P. T. Barnum, *The Life of P. T. Barnum, Written by Himself* (New York: Redfield, 1855), 27.
68. P. T. Barnum, *Humbugs of the World* (New York: Carleton, 1865), 55–56.
69. I examine the origins of this phenomenon in Cook, *Arts of Deception*; see esp. 1–29, 73–118, 259–62. See also Cook, *Colossal P. T. Barnum Reader*, 6–7, 85–102, 182, 227.
70. Peter Bailey, *Popular Culture and Performance in the Victorian City* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 128–50. Bailey's work in this area first appeared as "Music Hall and the Knowingness of Popular Culture," *Past and Present* 144 (August 1994).
71. Denning, "End of Mass Culture," 98.
72. Bailey, *Popular Culture and Performance in the Victorian City*, 149–50.
73. For recent discussions of the problem of cynicism in mass culture, see Peter Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987); Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), 1–53; and Timothy Bewes, *Cynicism and Postmodernity* (London: Verso, 1997).