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Moving Beyond Production: Ron Eyerman and the Cultural Sociology of the Arts

By Lisa McCormick¹

Abstract: This paper celebrates Ron Eyerman's contribution to the sociology of the arts.

Through a discussion of selected publications, I highlight the key arguments and the themes running through this strand of his work to show how he both pointed beyond production perspectives and secured a central place for art and music in the strong program of cultural sociology. I also revisit his call for a meaningful sociology of the arts, not only to reflect on how this has influenced my own research agenda, but also to take stock of the current state of the field and gauge how much progress has been made in responding to his challenge to take meaning seriously.

Keywords: sociology of the arts; sociology of music; sociology of film; production of culture; artwork; Ron Eyerman

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If ever someone deserved the title “artful sociologist”, it is Ron Eyerman. This is admittedly a dangerous play on words, because it likely calls to mind the cunning, sly and devious John Dawkins, Charles Dickens’s (2003 [1837-1839]) memorable character known as the “Artful Dodger” in *Oliver Twist*. However, if the negative connotations can be put aside so that “artful” is understood in the other senses of the word – if we take it to mean being inventive and ingenious, or even better to mean being “well-versed in the liberal arts, learned and wise”² – this becomes an entirely fitting phrase to refer to a sociologist who is also an artist and whose work in the sociology of the arts has been both influential and inspirational.

This paper celebrates Eyerman’s contribution to the sociology of the arts through a discussion of selected publications. By highlighting the central arguments and themes in these works, I show how he suggested a way to move beyond a production perspective and secured a place for art and music in the strong program of cultural sociology. In the conclusion, I revisit his call for a meaningful sociology of the arts and reflect on how this has influenced my own research. I take stock of the current state of the field, gauge how much progress has been made, and indicate what work yet remains to be done in responding to his challenge.

Moving towards Meaning in the Sociology of the Arts

Eyerman is deservedly well-known in the sociology of the arts for his work on the role of music in social movements (Eyerman and Jamison, 1995; Eyerman and Jamison, 1998), but these important publications comprise only a fraction of his contribution to the field. His regular interventions through book reviews certainly merit attention, but my approach here is to consider some of his lesser-known articles and to revisit his more

² Oxford English Dictionary.

programmatic papers. First, I discuss two articles from the 1990s, arguing that the interpretive analysis presented in them anticipates the strong program's themes and concepts even before they were articulated as such. Then I discuss a pair of publications where Eyerman explicitly indicates how and why the sociology of the arts should move beyond the focus on production.

Forging a path

Given Eyerman's dedication to painting and his longstanding interest in music, it is somewhat surprising that his first article on an arts topic was about film. "Romancing the Road: Road Movies and Images of Mobility" (Eyerman and Löfgren, 1995) examines how the road movie genre was made. Rather than simply surveying the best-known examples produced by the culture industry, Eyerman and Löfgren take a more ambitious three-fold approach that involves: tracing the genre's "mental and material" roots back to 19-century America; describing its institutionalization into recognizable formulae of "particular scenery, characters and scripts" (p. 54); and explaining how these elements have evolved in response to a changing social and cultural context. Their beginning premise is that road movies have wide appeal but resonate most strongly with American audiences because "freedom and social mobility have been linked to physical mobility" (p. 54) in American culture, and that this association is reinforced through Hollywood representations. Their analysis focuses in particular on Route 66, the fabled highway featuring so consistently in this genre, tracing how its meaning evolved over the course of the 20th century. The discussion reveals a deep understanding of – and fondness for – America. With virtuosic cultural musicality, they link symbolic transformations to literary touchstones that either dramatized salient social issues or captured the national imagination at the time. Making these connections to classic American

literature also allows them to identify the narrative tropes defining road mythology in each historical moment.

As Eyerman and Löfgren explain, during the economic depression of the 1930s “movement itself became a symbol of hope” (p. 57) and Route 66 seemed to offer a pathway towards a better life. The literary touchstone of this period is John Steinbeck’s (1973 [1939]) *The Grapes of Wrath*, which chronicles the Joad family’s journey down the “Dustbowl Highway” from Oklahoma to California; this was the route was traveled by thousands of desperate individuals seeking a better life in the west. The figures populating the tales from this period are “the hobo, the travelling minstrel, the con-man, the cowboy, and the itinerant union organizer”, while the narratives are equal parts risk and romance; “the chance of a new start” inevitably came with “the ever-present danger of failure and even death on the unknown highway” (p. 57). They go on to describe how, after the Second World War, Route 66 came to be associated with adventure rather than flight. It was where to “get your kicks”, as Nat King Cole’s 1946 hit song promised. Only, in contrast to the Dustbowl migrants of the 1930s, post-war adventurers were usually headed away from Los Angeles rather than towards it. In this period Jack Kerouac’s (1958) *On the Road* “gave literary form to the myth of the road’s liberating potential” (p. 57) in an especially engaging fashion for the emerging young mass audience. Narratives balanced risk with hope, centering on the drifter and the hipster who hit the road to escape the soullessness of bourgeois life. Along the way they encountered a cast of colorful characters, such as field hands, hobos, pimps and whores, and witnessed a part of America believed to be on the brink of extinction. By the 1970s, however, it was Route 66 itself that was endangered, having become “a lonesome by-way” (p. 59). As the construction of the interstate highway system increasingly absorbed the traffic of internal migration, Route 66 was transformed yet again, this time into a “symbol of life on the road, a mixed bag of drama and nostalgia” (p. 59). Eyerman and Löfgren credit Michael Wallis’s

(2001 [1990]) bestseller “Route- 66 – The mother road” with securing this new meaning. The version of the tourist/traveler distinction it presented, and the road culture it celebrated, cemented a notion of authenticity that would guide the design of diners and drive-in restaurants for decades to come.

Having explored the mythologies constituting the symbolic universe of road movies, Eyerman and Löfgren then attend to the genre’s history in film. They point to its precursors in buddy movies, gangster films and the Western, and they separate its development into two waves: the “travelling social criticism” (p. 61) of the 1960s and 1970s when the genre was first institutionalized, followed by a second wave of road movies starting in the 1980s with “yuppies at the wheel” (p. 63). Their discussion of the genre’s “pedagogical tricks” has much to recommend it, but what I found more impressive about their analysis is how they avoid ethnocentrism and parochialism. At the outset the authors acknowledge that “for African-Americans it was the train that symbolized both the hope of a new life down the road and the means of escaping the restrictions and pain of the present, not the automobile” because the road was “an unsafe and unwelcome environment” (p. 55). They also consider why road movies have never gained the same status in Europe. American road movies have received an enthusiastic audience in Europe since the 1960s because they have the “power to strike a familiar note as well as an exotic one”, condensing typically American images to produce “reactions of both fascination and repulsion” (p. 68). But the genre is not easily imported. It is one thing for Europeans to make American road movies, but when European directors “transplant the genre into European settings” (p. 70) such as Sweden, problems of cultural translation emerge.

To explain why the genre cannot be easily transplanted to Scandinavia, Eyerman and Löfgren look to the social and cultural context and find several reasons. Transit culture in Sweden was less developed than it was in the United States, Swedes did not have the same

passion for cars, and “the idea of ‘going for a drive’ or ‘taking to the road’” (p. 72) simply did not register. Another factor was that those who did travel on Swedish highways were unlikely to meet anyone more threatening than farmers, thus removing the possibility of confrontation and culture shock that fuels the drama of American road movies. (It would be several years before the “Nordic Noir” phenomenon, as exemplified by Stieg Larsson’s Millennium trilogy, would emerge to inject more danger into the Swedish cultural imagination.) However, the biggest obstacle preventing a Swedish variant of the road movie genre was a fundamental cultural incompatibility: “the basic theme of road movies, ‘risking it’, has little resonance with basic Swedish conceptions of personal challenge and social mobility” (p. 73). Because the Swedish welfare state had discouraged individualism by promoting an ideology of classless modernity, social mobility never dominated public discourse the way it had in the United States; when mobility was achieved it was seen as the result of collective projects such as social movements and state-funded education, not personal gumption and ambition. As a result, Swedes resisted the “American pattern of individualizing the failure to ‘make it’” and attributing this to a personal shortcoming, which meant that they were also less likely to fantasize about escaping and “never looking back”, which is the experience at the heart of the road movie.

Returning to this article now, it is easy to see how Eyerman and Löfgren anticipate themes that became hallmarks of the strong program in cultural sociology (Alexander and Smith, 2003). Meaning is central in their analysis. Their discussion of “road mythologies” achieves an intricate reconstruction of a system of collective representations comprised of symbols, cultural codes and narrative structures defining this film genre. Their argument can also be restated using concepts from social performance theory (Alexander, 2004). The collective representations woven into road-movie scripts are not just understood but felt by North American audiences because they align with shared beliefs and experiences, even

though the *mise-en-scène* of American society is constantly changing. In Europe, however, the alignment between these collective representations and audience experience is only ever weak at best. Directors who attempt to translate the genre only compromise its integrity when symbols with local referents are inserted into scripts. Therefore, European audiences understand and appreciate American road movies, but they do not identify with their moral universe, which is why fusion is never achieved.

Eyerman's second publication on the arts, "From the 30s to the 60s: The Folk Music Revival in the United States" (Eyerman and Barretta, 1996), has much in common with "Romancing the Road". First, it also involves an affectionate examination of a quintessentially American art form and its re-interpretation over time. Eyerman and Barretta begin their article with the observation that the folk music revival in the United States happened in two waves that were only 20 years apart. They grant that urban elites and politicization were central in both waves, but they argue that the context within which they operated was different, which had a decisive effect. The emphasis on context is the second feature this article shares with "Romancing the Road". A satisfactory explanation cannot be accomplished without it: "to be understood and evaluated properly, these cultural movements should be placed in the context of processes of social change occurring in American society at large" because they provide clues about "how many of the actors involved understood their own activities" (p. 502). For Eyerman and Barretta, the social changes most relevant to the folk music revival include: the decline of the Communist Party and the emergence of the New Left; the changing meaning of "the people", a central symbol in leftist politics; the expansion of higher education in the 1950s; and the development of the commercial music industry. Finally, just as in "Romancing the Road", the comparison with Europe is instructive. Eyerman and Barretta note that European folk revivals were prone to being co-opted by governments and turned into nationalist movements. The formulation of a "folk"

past in the United States was no less a social construction, but it did not follow suit; “the unique ethnic and racial mix” in the American context “meant that this construction would have less clear building blocks than in a relatively more homogenous country, such as Sweden” (p. 507).

The similarities between the two articles make the difference that much more striking. In “From the 30s to the 60s”, Eyerman and Barretta adopt the production of culture (POC) perspective for the comparison of the two revival waves, praising how well the approach facilitates the analysis of “the institutional context in which activists attempted to transform the meaning and status of folk music” and how it brings to light the “more or less *unintentional* effects of often rather mundane institutional arrangements” (p. 504, emphasis original). This might initially appear to be a move away from the kind of interpretive analysis presented in “Romancing the Road”. However, as the authors explain, POC was brought in to complement the cognitive approach to social movements developed by Eyerman and Jamison (1991). The latter perspective was better-suited to focus on “more specifically cultural” (p. 506) aspects because it conceived of social movements as both “knowledge producers” and “social forces opening spaces for the production of new forms of knowledge” (p. 506). While the cognitive approach enabled them to see the two waves of folk music revival as “creative or experimental arenas for the practicing of new forms of social and cognitive action” (p. 506), the POC approach ensured that they also accounted for organizational matters, including how the entertainment industry was marshalled to “elevate local movements to a national level” (p. 506). An added advantage is that they could do so in a more “nuanced and dynamic” (p. 506) fashion than was possible with resource mobilization theory.

The influence of the POC is easily identifiable throughout the analysis, and not only in how figures such as Alan Lomax, Pete Seeger, Woody Guthrie and Izzy Young are understood in terms of “gatekeepers” (p. 512) and “alternative entrepreneurs” (p. 528). In

their discussion of the first wave of the revival, Eyerman and Barretta explain how the centralization of the Communist Party (CPUSA) affected both the form and content of folk music. They show how the CPUSA created an infrastructure for folk music by creating a forum for debate about the role of music in periodicals such as *The Daily Worker* and *New Masses* and by establishing the Worker's Music League (WML), whose New York branch members were instrumental in compiling first collections of American folksongs that "reflected the proper political position" (p. 512). Despite the CPUSA's best efforts to produce a "non-capitalist culture for the proletariat" (p. 509), folk music gained popularity beyond leftist circles in the 1940s through network radio (especially CBS) and recordings by touring groups (such as the Weavers) on major labels (such as Decca).

Organizational context is equally prominent in their examination of the second wave. Eyerman and Barretta explain how a new infrastructure for folk music emerged after the collapse of the politically organized left: Ivy League and liberal arts college campuses provided new performance venues; magazines such as *Sing Out!* and *Broadside* served as outlets for debate about the political function of folk music; and Greenwich Village coffeehouses and clubs (especially the Folklore Center) formed an institutional base. They argue that this arrangement allowed for greater experimentation and development of the form not only because the institutional base had formed outside politics, but also because its various parts were only loosely organized; none of the groups were "in a position to exert ideological hegemony" (p. 535) or defend a political line. They also explain how the commercial potential of folk music could be more actively pursued in the second wave. By the 1960s, the culture industry was more developed, recording labels "could afford to take a liberal attitude" (p. 534), and new commercial ventures, such as the Newport Folk Festival, seemed viable with a growing mass audience of "young people enter[ing] the institutions of higher education" (p. 535).

While the POC line of analysis is prominent in this article, it never overwhelms the thick description, which is replete with historical detail and interpretive insight. Once again, the strong program is anticipated so well that the argument can easily be translated into the theoretical framework of social performance. For starters, they anticipate the problems of performance and the challenge of fusing actor and background symbols in their discussion of authenticity and purism. When the folk music canon was being invented during the first wave, the litmus test of authenticity was an association with the proletariat, but before long this had shifted towards reflecting “the folk” and expressing a “democratic ideal of the people” (p. 518). Movement intellectuals (especially Alan Lomax) helped to cultivate the repertoire of musicians (such as Huddie Leadbetter (Lead Belly)) to express this ideal, while Woody Guthrie arrived on the New York scene a ready-made personification of everything urban-based elites thought “folk music should be: rural, straight-forward, homey, and, most of all, political” (p. 514). The second wave of the revival built on this foundation, which gave rise to purism, “an increased appreciation for folk music for folk music’s sake” (p. 528). If singer-songwriters in this generation wanted to be authentic, their only option was “to be as close a copy of the first generation, Guthrie and Seeger, as possible” (p. 534). What Eyerman and Barretta examine through the POC perspective are what would now be treated as the means of symbolic production: the musical, organizational and material resources required to define, develop, display and disseminate the folk music genre and image.

Even more elements of social performance can be found in Eyerman and Barretta’s analysis. They explain the transformation of the audience within and across the two waves of the revival. Initially, folk music was the exclusive preserve of leftwing circles because it was mainly performed by workers’ choruses or in venues provided by the labor movement (p. 515). But it changed when folk music could be heard on the radio or at a formal concert, and it changed again when Pete Seeger’s group called “People’s Songs” introduced a new

interactive performance occasion called “the Hootenanny” (p. 529). In the second wave, the main audience for folk music became white college students cultivating new identities and seeking “an alternative form of expression” (p. 522). This audience differed from its earlier counterparts in quality as much as in composition: theirs was not just a mass culture but a “public culture” in the sense of being “open to being interpreted, digested, and contested by those it reached as well” (p. 521). Finally, Eyerman and Barretta also attend to what cultural sociologists would now call the *mise-en-scène*. They argue that the Newport Folk Festival became more than a great concert series because the music was performed against the backdrop of political events in the early 1960s; “the declining promise of Kennedy’s new frontier, the Bay of Pigs, the Berlin Wall, and the Cuban Missile Crisis” intensified the meanings of the music and “widened up the possibility of political dissent” (p. 532).

Indeed, their discussion of the Newport Festival even foreshadows some of the conclusions that Philip Smith draws from his research on Woodstock and Bayreuth. According to Smith, artistic excellence is required for a festival to gain a reputation, but for it to become iconic, “some kind of circuit breaker” is needed to connect “the festival to broader vital concern” (Smith, 2012: 182). Eyerman and Barretta make a similar point about the Newport Festival. They insist that it did not become an “institution of folk music revival” simply because they found “the right mix of performers” (p. 532). Star musicians were necessary but not sufficient. The reason why the festival became significant as well as financially successful is that it provided a stage for “the growing symbolic and political power of the civil rights movement” and gave participation in the movement “meaningful political and cultural content” (p. 532).

Issuing the Call to Bring Meaning Back In

Eyerman's first call to bring meaning back into sociological approaches to the arts appeared in the programmatic article "Towards a New Sociology of Art Worlds" (Eyerman and Ring, 1998). To assess the state of the field, Eyerman and Ring compare developments in the sociology of art and in art history. Sociology does not come out well. In Eyerman and Ring's view, the sociology of art has come to be "dominated by the study of art worlds, an approach which explains art objects or artifacts in terms of the social organization of their production and consumption" (p. 277). Whether in its American form (as exemplified by Howard Becker and Diana Crane) or in its European form (represented by Pierre Bourdieu), this emerging tradition's strength was contextualization. It had helped sociology to outgrow the idea that art "result[ed] from the imagination of individual genius" and replaced it with the idea of art as an "organized social activity, where individual artists are linked into networks which both limit and sustain their creative acts" (p. 281). Eyerman and Ring recognize the importance of this development and praise Richard Peterson for accomplishing this sort of analysis "on a more macro level" (p. 281). However, these improvements did not make up for its serious failing: the sociology of art deliberately "brackets out meaning" and the content of the artwork, dismissing these as the "epiphenomenal outcome of the process of production itself, not something internal to an artwork or to any communication between the work of its audience" (p. 277). It had thereby resigned itself to analyzing artworks "from the 'outside'" (p. 281). Meanwhile, art history had found a way to achieve the contextualization of artifacts without sacrificing the consideration of meaning. It had subsequently "experienced a virtual revolution" by opening itself up to ideas from feminist theory, Lacanian psychoanalysis and Foucauldian discourse analysis (p. 281). In comparison, sociology was "lagg[ing] far behind" (p. 281).

Eyerman and Ring go on to advocate a particular direction for a new sociology of art, but not before including a cautionary tale. A large section of this article is devoted to an

intellectual history of Sven Sandström's failed attempt to merge Swedish sociology and art history. To make a long story short, the two disciplines could not be bridged because they had "quite distinct and opposed intellectual traditions" (p. 280) and the academic division of labor was too deeply engrained. Perhaps for this reason Eyerman and Ring propose a set of reforms to be undertaken within the sociology of art itself. They argue that sociology can build on established research into art worlds by beginning to investigate "the relationship between the production of artworks, objects designated as art, and the production of meaning" (p. 280). The central question then becomes: "What meanings and motivations are involved in the production of art objects and communicated in their reception, and how are these related to wider social processes and structures?" (p. 280) Eyerman and Ring explain how the Frankfurt School and the Birmingham School of cultural studies have each taken a position in response to this question but have offered only partial answers. In their view, a more promising direction is found in Robert Witkin's (1995) approach.

Witkin is hailed as a pioneer in the new sociology of art because he successfully combines the "art world approach" with a sociology of the artwork, "read[ing] transformations in social structure and relations as they are reflected in artworks" (p. 282). This is especially well illustrated in Witkin's (1997) analysis of Manet's *Olympia*; in addition to interpreting the painting along the lines of the "now standard Marxist and feminist accounts", Witkin can draw on classical social theory to place it in a "grand" historical narrative. This allows Witkin to explain "how a painter can work within inherited traditions but also innovate through them to convey to audiences a reflected understanding of themselves and the social relations of their age" (p. 282). Witkin is praised for "tak[ing] seriously some of postmodernism's objections [...] to grand theorizing", accepting the challenge of interpreting artworks "within their concrete historical settings" and "focus[ing] on symbols and the value of semiotic analysis" (p. 282). Where Witkin came up short was in

restricting his exploration of meaning to individual responses. Even if those individuals were defined in terms of class, the theoretical limitation remained. Only when the analysis was extended to include “collective action and actors” would it “open the door to a new (political) sociology of the art world” (p. 283).

Eight years later Eyerman reissued his call for sociologists to take meaning more seriously in the chapter he contributed to *Myth, Meaning and Performance* (Eyerman, 2006). In these pages he proposes viewing art as “a collective mode of experience [...] that opens up an imaginative space (individual and collective) from which to view the world and from there to represent it” (p. 18). This perspective hinges on a spatial metaphor, as do other sociological approaches to the arts, but the differences are substantial. Bourdieu’s “field” and Becker’s “art world” both suggest domains that have a “determinant role” (p. 10) over the actions and beliefs of individuals who venture inside. Eyerman’s “experiential space”, in contrast,

gives more place to imagination and creativity, as meaningful and constitutive of the space, rather than something external and determinant, a reified space one enters like a maze. Art, in other words, can provide a space within a space, a place from which to view the surrounding world yet not be untouched by it. It can be a collectively realized Archimedean point, [...] a social activity through which new kinds of social identities and practices emerge. (p. 19)

In my view, he speaks as an artist as much as a sociologist when he describes art as “a means of approaching and knowing the world” (p. 21) that does not simply reflect the “social conditions of its production” but provides a “prism through which to reflect on those conditions” (p. 22).

The rest of the chapter offers an expanded critical overview of various approaches in the sociology of the arts. Adorno is reluctantly acknowledged for providing “the pathway to

return to meaning in the sociology of the arts” (p. 21), although Eyerman parts ways with the Frankfurt School when he insists that art does not only distort cognition but retains the potential to enlighten as well. The production of culture perspective does not come out as well. Its shortcomings are identified through the example of Crane’s (1987) analysis of the American avant-garde, which is found to be “hampered by its focus on external factors in explaining development in the arts” (p. 26). Her explanation of stylistic change addresses “the expanding market for artistic products, the number of interested galleries, the career opportunities and changing role of the artist, as well as the internal structure of networks for the production, display and consumption of art” (p. 26). But artworks and meaning are hardly considered at all, which is to the detriment of her argument. Crane essentially gets it backwards. Market forces and institutional mechanisms are presented as the drivers of change in art worlds, but if this were the case, key figures such as Willem de Kooning would never have given up on abstracts and returned to figurative representation when the former style was selling well on the market and the latter had been declared an exhausted form by influential critics. For Eyerman, it was artists who drove the “great historical shift” in style in the American avant-garde, both as “individuals, and as a self-aware collective”, because they overcame obstacles “not for money or because of markets but because it meant something” (p. 26).

Bourdieu does not fare much better than the production of culture perspective in Eyerman’s overview. To explain the difference between a “representational notion of truth” and the “interpretive notion of truth” (p. 27) he advocates, Eyerman critiques Bourdieu’s (1996) analysis of Flaubert in *The Rules of Art*. For Bourdieu, the best novels represent “those invisible forces we like to call structure, which help shape human thoughts and actions” (p. 27). Indeed, Bourdieu seems to suggest that novels are sometimes more effective than social scientific methods at grasping aspects of social structure because they allow

writers to “reveal things that otherwise might go unsaid or unnoticed”, thereby “giv[ing] voice to worlds, as well as processes, that we would rather not see or speak about” (p. 27). Bourdieu’s analysis aims to accomplish just this with the writer’s social world; exposing the “rules of art” involves revealing “logic that writers and literature institutions obey and that express themselves in submerged form in and through their works” (p. 28). What all this reveals to Eyerman is that Bourdieu has no interest in the meaning of art “beyond what it might say about society” (p. 28). For Bourdieu, art is only a mirror. If, however, art is understood as a “meaningful activity” instead of an instrument, it becomes much more than that, namely, “a prism to look through” (p. 28).

Eyerman concludes the chapter with an outline of what a meaningful sociology of the arts would entail. He indicates that four steps would need to be taken. The first is a “shift from a paradigm of production to one that is centered on creation and imagination” (p. 32). This would require developing a dynamic model of imagining, experiencing and making, and a conceptualization of meaning as an emergent property in the interaction between subject and object” (p. 32). Next, a “non-instrumental conception of culture” would need to be adopted. Once culture is understood as a “relatively autonomous space of experience and practice”, art “can be seen in relation to the wider culture” and the historical moment. The third step involves “bring[ing] the artwork and the artist back into view” (p. 32). Sociologists must accept that there is more to art and artists than distinction, class and power, and find a way to “include the expressive element” in their framework without reverting to a naïve romanticism. Art might have become commodified, but that has not eliminated its ability “to evoke a distinctive, aesthetic response” (p. 32). In the final step towards a meaningful sociology of the arts, there would need to be a “shift to a perspective that includes collective as well as individual actors” (p. 32). One example of a move in this direction is the performance perspective, which has the virtues of including “both sides in a communicative

interrelation”, allowing for the possibility of emergent properties, and emphasizing “corporality, being there, doing, viewing and experiencing” (p. 33).

Conclusion: Answering the Call

Over a decade has passed since Eyerman issued this call and provided the roadmap. In this concluding section, I offer my own assessment of the state of the field to gauge how much progress has been made in constructing a meaningful sociology of the arts.

With respect to the first step, the sociology of the arts has only begun to shift away from the paradigm of production. The production of culture perspective and the Bourdieuan approach are still widely adopted, but their dominance has been challenged by the new interest in materiality (Rose-Greenland, 2016; Griswold et al., 2013; Domínguez Rubio, 2014; Strandvad, 2011; Strandvad, 2012; Kobysheva, 2018) and mediation (Prior, 2011; Hennion, 2015; Born, 2010). However, a main theoretical inspiration in both of these developments is Actor Network Theory (ANT), which is why little progress has been made in achieving the second step. ANT might offer a dynamic model of experience, but it does not endorse the view of culture as a relatively autonomous realm, and rich historical analysis is rarely a primary aim. However, some ground has been made towards developing a non-instrumental conception of culture thanks to the strand of economic sociology following from Viviana Zelizer. The challenge to the “hostile worlds” view (Zelizer, 2000; Zelizer, 2005) has provided effective ammunition against the assumptions built into the Bourdieuan framework, as we find in Gerber’s (2017) extensive study of professional artists. While this is a promising development, it remains to be seen whether it is actually a turning point; at present, most research on cultural labor in the creative industries continues to be more concerned with inequality and neoliberalism than with creativity and imagination.

The most progress has been made regarding the third step, but only if we count as progress the growing number of similar calls to bring the artist and the artwork back into view. Soon after the publication of *Myth, Meaning, and Performance*, Eduardo de la Fuente (2007) claimed to see encouraging signs of a “new sociology of art” emerging; he urged sociologists to consider more than external factors and to frame questions about the aesthetic properties of art and artworks. Alexander and Bowler (2018) have also joined in the chorus. They re-examine a case previously analyzed by Nicola Beisel (1993) – the 1887 anti-obscenity campaign spearheaded by the social reformer Anthony Comstock – to show that the scandal can only be explained if the French paintings of female nudes at the center of the controversy are interpreted through the “period eye”. Marshall (2011) has argued that a sociological approach to popular music will only be fully realized with “a rethinking of what can be considered ‘sociological’” so that “the ‘internal’ structure of the aesthetic object” would become part of sociology’s remit (p. 155). Somewhat confusingly, he calls the “more musical sociology” he advocates “materialist”, but this is not meant to signal that he is following Hennion and DeNora in a strictly Latourian direction. In Marshall’s view, both have had limited success addressing the “music itself” (p. 167). By “materialist”, Marshall is referring to the “spatial and temporal dimensions” of music that must be addressed if sociologists wish to understand “musical experience and musical meaning” (p. 165).

Achieving the fourth step has been a central goal in my work. Because of Eyerman’s influence, I have developed a performance perspective that informs my research in a variety of empirical settings (McCormick 2015a, McCormick 2015b, McCormick 2012). However, I am not alone in working towards a multi-dimensional perspective that incorporates collective as well as individual actors, allows for emergent properties, and emphasizes corporality and experience. Hesmondhalgh (2013) accomplishes his critical defense of music by demonstrating how it contributes to human flourishing both on a personal level (the

individual self and intimate relations) and on a social level (co-present and mediated sociability and publicness). For the former, music enhances everyday life through its relationship to affective experience, while for the latter, it contributes indirectly to political struggles by sustaining feelings of solidarity. Between Hesmondhalgh's critical approach and his engagement with the questions of nationalism and cosmopolitanism in cases as varied as Afghanistan and Latin America, he offers more than a sociology of the art world; it is a political sociology of music in and around the world.

In short, progress has been uneven, and more work remains to be done to complete the move beyond production. But the field is headed in the right direction, and sociologists of the arts have Eyerman to thank for setting us on this most promising of paths.

About the author

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