

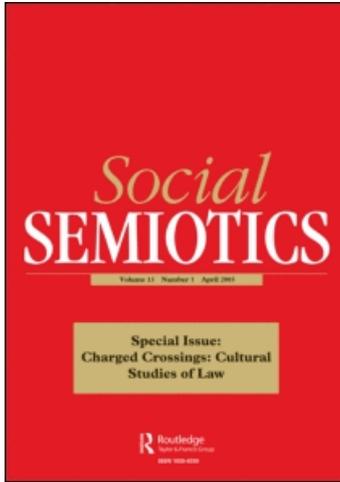
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### Advertising and the conquest of culture

Timothy D. Taylor <sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Department of Ethnomusicology and Department of Musicology, University of California, Los Angeles, CA, USA

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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### Advertising and the conquest of culture

Timothy D. Taylor\*

*Department of Ethnomusicology and Department of Musicology, University of California,  
Los Angeles, CA 90095-1657, USA*

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Thomas Frank's important *The conquest of cool: Business culture, counterculture, and the rise of hip consumerism* usefully described the advertising industry's "conquest of cool" in the 1960s and beyond, the co-optation of the hip and the cool for the purposes of advertising marketing. This article argues that, since Frank's book appeared, the "convergence of commerce and content" – as the advertising industry calls it – has meant that the production of content is even more entwined with advertising than ever before. The first part of this article describes this shift with particular attention paid to the production of advertising music, which increasingly employs well-known rock, hip-hop, and other popular musicians. The analytical portion of this article draws on the studies of Richard A. Peterson and others on the rise of the socially elite "omnivore" consumer of cultural products to argue that advertising has played a crucial role in this shift, emphasizing the cool and the trendy. Last, the article updates Pierre Bourdieu's influential notion of cultural capital, for, if social elites are more omnivorous in their tastes, then cultural capital today must increasingly be associated with knowledge of the trendy, not only the fine arts.

**Keywords:** advertising; Bourdieu; cultural capital; music; taste; trendiness

Our slogan is "bands, brands and fans, and bringing them all together". (Brian Murphy, President of Fearless Entertainment, a marketing/event production firm; quoted by Waddell 2004, 18)

The point of a proper and effective intersection of the labels, publishers and advertisers is on the not too distant horizon. Hopefully, the actual music, as opposed to the commodity of the music will be king again. (Josh Rabinowitz, Senior Vice President/Director for Music at Grey Worldwide, an advertising agency; quoted by Paoletta 2007, 18)

#### Introduction

In the past few years it has become commonplace for workers in the advertising industry to use the phrase "convergence of content and commerce" to describe the increased role that advertising plays in the production of popular culture in the United States, one of a number of tumultuous transformations in American

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\*Email: [tdtaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:tdtaylor@ucla.edu)

culture in the past few decades. This shift is part of a series of vast changes in the realm of cultural production, changes so all-encompassing that it is now possible to argue that we are living in a moment when traditional cultural hierarchies are in a greater degree of flux than they have been in quite some time, perhaps not since the great upheavals of the nineteenth century that were cogently described by Lawrence W. Levine in *Highbrow/lowbrow* (Levine 1988). The instability of today's situation is the result of a number of factors: the ever-growing role of advertising, which continues to identify and capitalize on the trendy, sometimes even becoming the arbiter of the trendy; the "convergence of content and commerce" in cultural production; and the rise in eclecticism in the taste of social elites.

The first part of this article will present and discuss these shifts; the second will analyze what they mean for theorizing cultural capital today. Of particular interest is the growing commercialization of cultural production, to the extent that I believe there is no longer a significant distinction to be made between "commercial culture" and "culture" – it is virtually the same, increasingly driven by the omnivorous advertising and marketing industry. This growth has destabilized the position of the fine arts at the top of the hierarchy of cultural production; it is now less meaningful to measure American social groups by their knowledge of high culture, manifested socially as cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984). If there is any single yardstick today, it is the "trendy", frequently identified and promoted by the advertising and marketing industry. No one in the industry who I have encountered actually defines it – this term, used interchangeably with "hip" and "cool", is an ideological complex that has been woven deep into the fabric of the industry for decades, as Thomas Frank (1997) has shown.

The foregoing obviously employs the Bourdieusian language of distinction, and I believe that his extraordinarily useful conception continues to offer many insights. *Distinction* (Bourdieu 1984) was a landmark book in the study of culture and social groups in the second half of the twentieth century, yet its data were collected in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and the book was published in French in 1979. The aim of this article is thus a simple one: to bring some of Bourdieu's insights into a twenty-first-century American context. I have no illusion about mounting a study on the massive scale of Bourdieu's (my relationship to the means of academic production is much different than his was, for one thing). But I do want to update some of his theoretical positions.

### **Advertising and/as the culture industry**

Let us begin with advertising, which has come to play an extremely important role in the production of popular culture in the United States; so important, in fact, that the ideologies in its field of cultural production are increasingly informing – even dominating – the field of production of popular culture more generally, so that it is becoming a single field. If the nature of production changes, it is inevitable that the always-ongoing contestations over what counts as "legitimate culture," as Bourdieu terms it, will also change: the vast shifts in the culture industry I will describe have resulted in a new system of the production (and dissemination) of popular music, which in turn is shifting what constitutes cultural capital.

Even though many tens of billions of dollars are spent annually on advertising in the United States, the past decade has been difficult for the industry. Because of TiVo

and other time-shifting video-recording devices, by the early twenty-first century, advertisers and the advertising industry began to worry that television commercials were no longer being viewed, paving the way for product placement, or what began to be called “advertainment” or “branded entertainment”. “The aim”, according to an advertising trade press report in 2002, “is to get viewers to actually choose to view ad content by making it as compelling as the programming” (quoted by Elkin 2002, 1). In that year, TiVo began offering “advertainment” to its customers. Spending on branded entertainment was over \$4 billion in 2005, up from the \$3.45 billion spent in 2004; as recently as 1999, by contrast, spending totalled \$1.93 billion (Elliott 2005b, 16). In 1994, American Express spent 80% of its marketing budget on television advertising, whereas in 2004 it spent only 35%. John Hayes, the Chief Marketing Officer at American Express, said “We have moved out of the ‘buying’ world and entered the world of content and channel integration in a significant way” (quoted by Kim 2004, 1). Insiders in every corner of the culture industry seem to be in agreement that this convergence is occurring. Josh Rabinowitz, a Senior Vice President-Director for Music Producer at Grey Worldwide, who has produced a few commercial recordings (not just recordings of commercials), believes that:

More artists are going to be broken [i.e., introduced to the public] through corporations, with the agencies as talent scouts . . . The agencies are kind of like the A&R [Artist and Repertoire, a function once assumed by record companies], and the client’s blessing is the green light. My theory is that sooner or later, the record companies will be cut out of part of the process. (Quoted by Lindsay 2005, 26)

Additionally, while workers in the advertising industry have long employed the trope of “creativity” to describe their own work, they wield the term today as a means of arguing for their natural affinity with entertainment industry. It is only recently, however, that this rhetorical strategy has seemed to gain traction outside the world of advertising. At a 2002 meeting of advertising and content providers, an advertising agency executive told the assembled crowd:

We’re not in the business of content or commerce but in creativity. We are in the business of creating brand experiences. Brands are the central focus of what we do. Our industries are moving independently but in the same direction. (Quoted by Graser 2002, 14)

In 2007 Peter Nicholson, a partner/chief in the advertising agency Deutch New York, concluded an opinion piece in *Billboard* magazine (the main American music trade press weekly, one of many signs of the convergence of the advertising and music industries) by invoking the creativity trope, writing that:

I will end on my bias as to why an ad agency makes for a great partner if you are an independent band: creatives [workers on the creative side of the industry, as opposed to the business side]. Most agency creatives are artists at heart. And in some agencies, they actually get to be more artist than marketer. Creatives spend a lot of time making ideas that take on a bit of their own personality. So the work becomes personal and not commercial. Or, as I like to say, a lot of care has gone into the work. The creatives share the same understanding that any artist has: your work is precious and it is personal and must always be respected. (Nicholson 2007, 4)

Another issue concerns the reduction in the number of radio venues for popular musicians to broadcast their music (discussed in Taylor 2007b). The Communications Act of 1996 permitted a single company to own more than one radio station in a single market. Inevitably, there has been a trend toward monopoly, with the top

four radio-station owners broadcasting to almost one-half of all listeners, and the top 10 owners broadcasting to almost two-thirds of listeners as of 2006 (see DiCola 2006). To cut costs, these companies streamlined and standardized playlists, with the result that far fewer musicians and songs are now heard on the air. Most musicians can thus no longer count on radio airplay to promote their work, and instead are turning to the advertising industry and its recent spin-offs (to be described below) to place their music into commercials, television programs, and films. This has meant that the old stigma about allowing one's music to be used in commercials has evaporated almost overnight, as many industry insiders have noted. The Executive Creative Director of Deutch, Los Angeles, observes that: "The biggest change is the willingness. The sell-out stigma is gone" (quoted by Lindsay 2005, 26). Peter Nicholson at Deutch, New York, adds that:

The old cliché that the artist "sold out" doesn't apply in this situation, because it is a harmonious relationship that is built on the truth of popular culture's perception of the music and the brand. The music is cool. The brand is cool. And both can become part of the DNA of how a person defines him- or herself. (Nicholson 2007, 4)

This has meant that advertising agencies are more in control of musicians' work than in the past. The Creative Director at Arnold Worldwide said in 2002: "When artists fight with agencies because they think they're compromising their art, that lasts about two seconds. We're paying way too much for that kind of prima donna [behavior]" (quoted by Bess 2002, 11; bracketed term in original). So pervasive has been the use of pre-existing popular music in the media that the new measure of success for popular musicians today is no longer registered in radio airplay or even sales, charts, or signing a contract with a major record label; one artist's manager told a music producer at an advertising agency in New York that his client had had a terrific year – "a 'Grey's Anatomy' [television show] placement, two ad placements and a possible film license" (Rabinowitz 2008b, 16).

Finally, another shift has been technological. While advertising musicians of a generation ago probably had some classical music training and could read and write music, the rise of digital music technologies in the 1980s meant that those who knew them best could better compete for commercial music jobs. Early adopters of these new technologies tended to be in the realm of popular music, who viewed writing for commercials as something other than their main work, and would frequently play in bands, produce recordings, and perform other kind of labour in the commercial music world. Their flexibility of labour was another factor that hastened the introduction of contemporary popular musics to advertising (see Taylor n.d.).

There are thus a number of tensions today: there are more outlets for music in the form of more cable television stations, and thousands upon thousands of videos, recordings, and websites – but at the same time, the main way that musicians once made their work known (radio) has become a much less accessible medium, forcing many musicians to permit their work to be used for commercial purposes. As a result, the production of advertising music in commercials has become increasingly intertwined with the production of popular music more generally. As one composer at a New York City music production company told me in 2006, there is no counter-culture anymore; there is only culture, and it is made by commercial interests. That is overstating the case, I think, but it is nevertheless clear that the advertising industry enjoys a greater influence over the making of popular culture, perhaps, especially,

music – and American culture more generally – than at any time in its history, to the extent that it increasingly drives popular music production. And its ideology of the trendy is becoming increasingly dominant.

### The conquest of culture

To understand what this convergence looks like in practice, let us look more closely at the advertising's industry's obeisance to the trendy and how this manifests itself in the field of production of commercials with popular music. Thomas Frank (1997) usefully elucidated the advertising industry's "conquest of cool" beginning in the 1960s, showing how the industry attempted to identify and co-opt anything that the culture thought was cool and trendy for the purposes of selling, offering many useful accounts of the industry's attitudes towards the trendy.<sup>1</sup> The conquest of cool, the trendy, has changed little since Frank's book appeared, and has become even more widespread. In this section, therefore, I will examine, with a nod to Frank, what I will call the advertising and marketing industry's conquest of culture.

The first major project that marked this convergence of content and commerce in the realm of popular music was English rock star Sting's decision to appear in a commercial for Jaguar in 2000. The singer's popularity had waned since his days with the Police, but, nonetheless, as a rock star, possessed the qualities that advertisers and their agencies frequently seek to exploit. Sting's then-manager, Miles Copeland, says that when he first saw the music video of "Desert Rose" (from the album *Brand New Day*), he realized that it was a car commercial, and sent the video to Jaguar's advertising agency, Ogilvy & Mather. Copeland says he presented the deal this way: "If you will make the commercial look like an ad for my record, I'll give it to you free". It was the first time, Copeland said, that a known artist had promoted an unknown song in this way (quoted by Donaton 2003b, 22). Jaguar's worldwide director of sales and marketing said: "Once we saw it, we realized the enormous opportunity to produce a television advertisement using footage from the video. Sting was delighted to become part of Jaguar's mystique" (quoted by Wernle 2000, 18). The singer, in a press release, said that: "The director proposed a number of cars to be used in the video and I chose the Jaguar S-type. It's a beautiful car and it evokes the feeling of style and success we were trying to achieve" (quoted by Wernle 2000, 18). The agreement was that Sting appeared without a fee, in return for excerpts of the video of the song being used in the commercial. In 2003 an *Advertising Age* article entitled "Sting-Jaguar deal still serves as model for the music world" wrote of the "reverent references" people in the industry still make to this arrangement (Donaton 2003b, 22).

The marketing expenditures in this case tell an equally interesting story. The label had planned to spend \$1.8 million just to market the "Desert Rose" single, which included \$800,000 to produce a video of it. Jaguar spent \$8 million to broadcast the commercial, much more than is usually spent in music marketing. According to *Advertising Age*, the song received little airplay before the commercial was broadcast, and the sales expectations for the album were about a million copies. But after the commercial was aired, sales soared, and became Sting's biggest solo album at that time, selling 4 million copies in the United States alone. Jaguar enjoyed a surge in sales as well, particularly among younger buyers (Donaton 2003b, 22).

Subsequent campaigns have insinuated brands ever more completely into music production and *vice versa*. For example, on the Coors Light “Love Songs” spot from 2002, which garnered a good deal of attention in the industry, the musicians omitted any reference to the beer. One of the musicians, John Godsey, said that they wanted to make the performance “sound like a real band” so that “people would respond to it as a song, not an ad” (quoted by Ballard 2003, 16). Writing songs instead of jingles is not that new, going back at least to the early 1970s (the most famous example being “I’d Like to Teach the World to Sing” for Coca-Cola in 1971), but songs that do not mention the product are a comparatively recent development.

Major brands have also embarked on promotion and sponsorship deals with musicians. In 2002, Toyota promoted Phil Collins’s CD *Testify* and one of its songs, which was used in a commercial for the brand’s Avalon model. Toyota employed a caption in the style of MTV to identify the song “Can’t Stop Loving You” in the first few seconds of its commercial. The record company affixed stickers on 500,000 copies of the CD, Toyota’s logo appeared on posters advertising the CD as well as on related merchandise, and the record company located promotional materials in record stores advertising the Avalon. According to the senior vice president for marketing at the record company, because of the decline in music sales: “we are looking for new and innovative ways to get the music out to the public. We are very proactive in this area. Toyota is the most collaborative partner we ever had. This is real co-marketing” (quoted by Halliday 2002, 14). A year later, DaimlerChrysler signed a \$14 million multiyear contract with singer Céline Dion, who appeared in their television commercials; the company also sponsored her long-running show in Las Vegas with its name emblazoned on the marquee (Halliday 2003, S4).

Following arrangements such as these, musician’s relationships to major brands began to become even more complex and intertwined. In 2003, musicians Common and Mýa recorded “Real Compared to What” for a Coca-Cola commercial, a cover of a 1960s protest song by Eugene McDaniels with new lyrics by Mýa (just one of many commercial adaptations of 1960s political music; see Neal 2003). She released the full version of the song on her subsequent album, *Moodring*, the same year. Steve Berman, the head of marketing for Interscope/Geffen/A&M, who is a proponent of the convergence of the advertising and music industries, said:

We went to Mýa and Common, not with a product endorsement, but with an idea that would give them exposure while giving Coca-Cola something that would be at the core of their message. From our perspective, it’s not a commercial; it’s a record and a visual interpretation of that message. (Quoted by Donaton 2003a, 18)

Berman acknowledges the decline in CD sales because of illegal downloading and file-sharing, but notes that: “Music is more popular than ever, but figuring out how to monetize that is difficult . . . If you tap into a culture, the market is still there”. The solution to coping with the decline of sales, he says, was to forge alliances with marketers.

We’ve decided to work with strong brands where we’re targeting a similar audience. We’re always challenged by budgets and have to come up with alternative ways to market our artists. A record company can’t compete on traditional marketing platforms. For a major release, the entire TV budget might not equal one prime-time spot. (Quoted by Donaton 2003a, 18)

A different approach was employed in an advert for Sprite called “Liquid Freedom,” launched in 2005. The commercial shows sweaty basketball players jumping onto the court, which morphs into a swimming pool. Human Worldwide was commissioned to write an original song for the commercial, which employed the standard 30-second version of the song. The song became so popular that Coca-Cola, which owns Sprite, “got excited and wanted to get behind it”, according to Marc Altshuler of Human (quoted in Human and Sprite 2007, 28). Human shares the proceeds with Coke. Altshuler says:

Instead of paying us the traditional fee for a 30-second spot, which doesn't really apply, they wanted to figure out a way to use their network – POP [point-of-purchase], packaging – to drive people to get this music, and split everything 50-50. It's a pretty unbelievable deal and it was a lot of work. (Quoted in Human and Sprite 2003, 28)

The arrangement Coke struck with Human was to have Sprite's point-of-sale and packaging in over 200 countries direct people to a website where the song would be available for download. This spot worked well because there was no dialogue, which meant it could play in various countries; Altshuler describes it as a music video. He also attributes the success of the video to web-based searches, which makes such videos easy to find; “people discussed ‘Pool’ in chatrooms, advertising chatrooms, and on blogs,” he writes. And he quotes the Director-Creative Development, Asia, at Coca-Cola, who argued that: “Brand content is not pushed at people but requested, downloaded, collected or shared.” Altshuler goes on to say that:

brands now can drive the culture via the underground and the Internet. Websites such as YouTube, Google and eBay can function as two-way streets for brands: Brands discover who their consumers really are, and consumers let brands know what they want. (Altshuler 2007, 23)

Another recent development is that, while advertisers and marketers have occasionally employed hip-hop music since at least the mid-1980s, the music has become far more common recently. In the spring of 2003, Pepsi sponsored a series of radio programs called *Project X*, a hip-hop show aimed at the elusive Generation Y demographic. Every commercial was for Pepsi, and the musicians sprinkled the brand's name in their broadcast conversations. “DJs are the key influencers in hip-hop – they dictate trends”, said the executive in charge (quoted by Schmelzer 2005, 14; see also Flass and Bachman 2003). At least eight of the top 20 *Billboard* hip-hop singles that year referred to Pepsi (Schmelzer 2005, 14). McDonald's tried something of the same strategy in 2005 when it hired an entertainment-marketing firm to encourage hip-hop musicians to incorporate the Big Mac into their songs. Said the director of brand entertainment strategy at McDonald's: “The stars of hip-hop have become brands. This partnership reflects our appreciation and respect for the most dominant youth culture in the world”. This strategy drew criticism from the Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood, however, which felt that the resulting commercials would target children, who “won't know the rappers are being paid to push Big Macs – these ‘adversongs’ are inherently deceptive”. McDonald's, of course, disagreed: “We believe that the McDonald's brand is so omnipresent already in America that having it in music, having it in TV, having it in movies, is no more intrusive than anything else children experience nowadays” (quoted by Graser 2005, 123). The deal Maven Strategies (a new kind of firm that brings together musicians and marketers) made with McDonald's and the musicians was that the musicians

could choose for themselves how to mention the sandwich in their songs, but McDonald's would have final approval.<sup>2</sup> Maven is paid as a consultant in these arrangements; the musicians receive nothing up front, but receive \$1–5 each time the song is played on the radio (Graser 2005, 123).

The popular music practice of remixing – taking a pre-existing track and modifying it digitally by adding other sounds and altering it in other ways – has also found its way into advertising music. *Advertising Age*, in a story about the 10 most successful product launches in 2003, listed the Sprite ReMix as its number nine:

Coca-Cola re-established the hipness of the flagging Sprite brand with a smart PR-drive launch for its tropically-flavored extension. Backed with a Memorial Day launch infused with rule-breaking hip-hop icons and a 50-city sampling tour that included a remix recording studio, the line helped boost trademark Sprite by 7% through November. (Quoted in “10 most successful product launches” 2003, 26)

Before Sprite ReMix was launched, Coca-Cola distributed the drink through DJs, giving away three million bottles at various events, and hosted a party with P. Diddy at the MTV Music Video Awards. This strategy of giving the product to people who are called “lifestyle influencers” resulted in a 90% awareness with children 12–18 years old and increased sales by 8.6% (MacArthur and Neff 2004, 1). Coca-Cola and its advertising agency have even been willing to give up the most valued commodity in the world of marketing – brand stability, which is thought to engender brand loyalty – in order to sell their product. The premise behind Sprite ReMix is that it is like a musical remix: it is always different. Willingness to jettison this hallowed idea grew out of Sprite's conversations with young people about the drink and popular culture. Rob Stone of Cornerstone Promotion, which handled the Sprite campaign, says:

With kids today, things change so quickly, it really does tie back to developing a brand that's about change. It almost doesn't matter if it's a berry flavor or a tropical flavor [the first two flavours of the drink] – it's the whole image of ReMix. (Quoted by Walker 2004, 24)

In a recent bid to lure consumers deeper into the web spun by brands, in the summer of 2008 McDonald's resurrected its famous “Two all-beef patties, special sauce . . .” jingle from the mid-1970s – but instead of enticing professional musicians to cover it, remix it, or incorporate it somehow into their music, McDonald's is attempting to cash in on viewers' memories of the commercial by inviting consumers to make their own remixes of it. A recent survey of 1000 Americans revealed that 80% know the ingredients of a Big Mac, which the jingle lists (“If there were a jingle” 2007, 6A). McDonald's Chief Marketing Officer says that the jingle was “something that many of us grew up with”, and that reusing it is “a great way to capture the fun and the personality of Big Mac and the brand, so we're very excited”. McDonald's advertising agency produced an updated version of the jingle for a television commercial that advertised the jingle contest, directing viewers to a MySpace website where there were multiple versions of the updated jingle by various artists in different styles.<sup>3</sup> Viewers of the website were encouraged to make their own remix of the jingle, and all visitors to the site could vote on their favourites. A panel of three judges decided on the winner, whose version of the jingle was to be used in a television commercial (Moran 2008a). The MySpace website sorted the uploaded videos by “genre” – country, Latino, Hip Hop, R&B, and rock. Those interested in making

their own remix could download an “audio kit” that included the updated version of the jingle, as well as many snippets of beats and other sounds that could be incorporated into one’s own remix. Those I listened to (a random sample), eschewed these prefabricated sounds and simply devised their own version of the jingle. The winner, out of 12,280 entries, was a hip-hop version (Moran 2008a), which was aired for a week on MTV in July 2008.

The erosion of meaningful distinctions between the advertising and music industries has resulted not only in a convergence of content and commerce but also of the marketing of popular musicians. According to Stuart Elliott, it is timing that distinguishes the practices of the present from those of the past, for popular musicians today time the release of recordings with advertising campaigns in which they appear. Elliott cites as an example a commercial for Hewlett-Packard that featured the music of Gwen Stefani and included her and two other members of her band, wearing much the same clothes as in her music video; the same person directed the music video and the commercial (Elliott 2005c, §C, 5).

Recently, record labels and advertising agencies have moved closer together in yet another way. Sony BMG started an in-house advertising agency called Arcade Creative Group, which opened in April 2008. It can draw on the label’s vast catalogue of recordings to use in commercials they produce (High 2008b, 12). In July of the same year, the advertising agency Euro RSCG acquired a majority stake in a firm called The:Hours, an independent record label (High 2008a, 24–25). And new companies are springing up that produce both recordings and advertisements. Decon, one such firm, employs workers who have backgrounds both in the advertising and music industries, and the company produces recordings as well as commercials. Its co-founder describes the firm’s approach thus:

Our whole model now is to figure out how to incorporate what we’ve developed with our music and entertainment relationships and apply it to branded content to connect with the youth market. We want to use brands as a launching pad for our talent, and vice versa. (Quoted by Moran 2008c, 16)

What the foregoing shows is that there are now myriad ways that advertising, through its association with musicians from many different genres, is infiltrating the world of popular music production and dissemination: sponsoring tours, commissioning songs that are not obviously advertising music, inviting consumers to be a part of the music-making process through remixing; promoting musicians’ recordings; and still more.<sup>4</sup> Through this penetration of the field of production of popular music, the advertising industry is able to continue and promote its ideology of the importance of trendiness by attaching itself to the hip, the cool, or even, as I will discuss next, creating trends.

### **Trendspotting → trendsetting**

Until recently, advertising agencies saw their job as following and attempting to capitalize on trends; as one executive who worked on the Pepsi account said bluntly in the late 1970s: “Pepsi doesn’t create trends, it follows them” (quoted by McGinnis 1979, 71). Advertising agencies expend a great deal of effort trying to keep up with trends, although the Internet has made researching them easier than in the past. Tom Julian, a trend analyst at Fallon in New York, says that: “We have to go from Tucson

to Los Angeles to Vegas to Pittsburgh and live in student unions vicariously, [and] spend time in retail settings . . .” (quoted by Anderson 2004).

To help identify existing trends, the advertising and marketing industry is increasingly turning toward social scientists and social science methodologies such as ethnography (“Ethnography is hot”, proclaimed a special supplement to *Advertising Age* recently); there is a growing number of publications on this subject aimed at audiences in the advertising and marketing industry, and there are more and more articles devoted to the subject in the trade press.<sup>5</sup> There is also a growing number of scholarly or semi-scholarly guides that are edited by and/or include articles by trained anthropologists.<sup>6</sup>

One recent article notes the increased problem for marketers in focus groups: so many Americans are now so complexly identified, with multiple self-representations (with “different profiles posted on MySpace, Match.com and Wikipedia”, writes an academically-trained anthropologist now in the advertising industry), it is difficult for marketers to know just who they are dealing with in focus groups. Thus, according to this same writer, “in this environment, ethnography is more vital than ever in helping marketers understand what’s really going on in the subcultures where brands live, flourish, fade and regenerate” (Dumas 2007, 27).

The search for trends has produced a new industry that serves the advertising and marketing industry and whose sole function is to spot trends and provide information for marketers. Irma Zandl, one of the founders of this industry, owns a firm that recruits 3000 people between the ages of 8 and 24 to investigate what is cool and trendy. These workers are sought out mostly in malls where they fill out questionnaires about their tastes. The staff at the Zandl Group publishes the results in *Hot Sheet*, which comes out in a “youth market” version and a “young adult” version every other week; subscription costs are \$18,000 per year for each.<sup>7</sup> *Hot Sheet* is a slick publication that features stories on hot musicians, beverages, and so forth, as well as brief profiles of young people, including their taste in music, beverages, and much more.<sup>8</sup>

It is clear, however, that the gold standard for an advertising agency is for their client’s brand to become part of popular culture, not simply to emulate it; workers in the industry speak of this in matter-of-fact terms. An article in *Adweek* from late 2004 said that “considering its ephemeral nature, advertising might be the perfect venue for tapping into – even creating – fads and trends” (Anderson 2004). Industry insiders have said much the same thing more recently. A co-founder of an advertising agency in Boston asked in 2001: “Did Pepsi sell more the day after Britney Spears’s 90-second Super Bowl commercial? I don’t know. But Pepsi’s job is to be part of the pop culture” (quoted by Anderman 2001, §L, 1). In trying to reach a younger crowd by sponsoring various popular culture acts and events, the president and chief executive at a major advertising firm said in 2005:

We want the pop culture dialogue to include Burger King . . . The mission is not about generating awareness of Burger King . . . because everyone knows Burger King. We want to make a connection. We want to make Burger King the kind of brand people would want to wear on a T-shirt. (Quoted by Elliott 2005a, §C, 4)

And individuals in advertising agencies increasingly view themselves as being part of, contributing to, and supporting popular culture (see Taylor 2007b). Peter Nicholson, Deutch New York partner/chief, said in 2007 that:

[T]he pulse of pop culture isn't dead; it's very much alive and being nurtured in advertising agencies ... [Advertising] has always been in touch with popular culture, but now, more than ever, advertising agencies have become more in tune with the beat of pop culture and how that applies to the brands. And, all brands have a role in popular culture. Some have niche roles; others have a broader, more significant reach.

Nicholson decries the old assumption in which music was the “starlet” and “sponsorship was the groupie that got a prime photo op to flaunt around”.

That old model always annoyed me because it discounted the importance of the brand's stature in popular culture ... [T]he brand's position in pop culture is more powerful than the music or the artist. So the right brand and music in partnership would provide better and faster exposure for the music and the brand. (Nicholson 2007, 4)

Other people in the industry take what one could call a historical-revisionist view, as does Josh Rabinowitz:

Historically, the worlds of branding and advertising have been the underwriters of much of pop culture. In 2008 and beyond, much of pop culture, especially music, may begin to underwrite and rewrite the path of advertising and branding, changing the dynamics of that equation from subsidizer to the subsidized. (Rabinowitz 2008a, 17)

It is now the case that musicians may try to attach themselves to brands for qualities that they desire, instead of the other way around. Hip-hop star Common recently struck a deal with Microsoft, which sponsored his tour and featured him in commercials. When asked why he wanted to work with Microsoft, Common – who seems to regard himself as a brand – said that:

Microsoft is classy, it's a timeless brand, and it means something to the world, internationally, and I felt like that's the direction of what I want Common to be, to be honest. I want to be timeless, I want to be international and those are the things I feel like I'm working toward now. I was able to team up with them for some of those reasons ... I liked creatively where they wanted to go. (Quoted by Moran 2008b, 22; see also Crosley 2008)

Spending nearly a decade writing a history of music used in advertising, I have reluctantly come to the conclusion that there is no longer a meaningful distinction to be made between “popular music” and “advertising music” (Taylor n.d.). My students now tell me that only when the lyrics begin do they realize that a radio commercial is a commercial and not a “real” song. Michael Schudson's famous term “capitalist realism,” which he meant to apply to advertising production, now seems to describe a significant swath of American popular culture more generally (Schudson 1984).

### **Popular culture and changing tastes**

Despite, or perhaps because of, advertising's greater role in the production of popular culture, it, and its ideology of the trendy, have become increasingly influential in American culture. Some sociological studies argue for a new degree of eclecticism among social elites, which do not participate solely in elite activities but in a range of them, some of which could not be considered to be elite. The argument is usually presented as a transition from those with “univore” tastes to those who are “omnivores.”

Richard A. Peterson, one of the founders of this discussion, writes that high-status pursuits are not losing their “efficacy as status markers for the elite”. But he does think that “the image of the taste-*exclusive* highbrow, along with the ranking from ‘snob’ to ‘slob,’ is obsolete” (Peterson 1992, 252; original emphasis). Peterson believes that elite taste is no longer simply for high art forms while disdaining everything else, but has become much more inclusive, appreciative of many different kinds of practices and cultural goods, including high art (Peterson 1992, 252; see also Coulangeon 2003 for the view from France).

Peterson’s data (collected with Albert Simkus) also show, among other things, a waning of interest for classical music among elite groups; only 30% of respondents in the highest status group said they preferred classical music to other genres, and only 6% more said they preferred opera. Peterson concluded that 64% of the top group does not fit the old model of the “aesthetically exclusive snob” (Peterson 1992, 248). In a different publication that uses the same data, Peterson and Simkus (1992) show that, among the high-status occupational groups, classical music is followed by folk music as the music most preferred by them (although the figure representing the percentage of those surveyed mentioning folk music is not given).

Following this study, Peterson and Roger M. Kern released another that compared two different datasets, from 1982 and 1992, to see whether a shift from univore to omnivore was occurring over time, concluding that “omnivorousness is replacing snobbishness among Americans of highbrow status” (Peterson and Kern 1996, 901 and 903–904).

These and other sociologists explain this shift to omnivorousness by noting the increased sophistication of the mass media since the 1960s (Gans 1985); better and more widespread public education (Gans 1985); the rise in white-collar service jobs (Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich 1979; Gans 1985; Lash and Urry 1987). Others argue that the baby-boom members of this new group, unlike their parents’ generation, did not (re)turn to classical music after their youth, but continued to listen to their “own” genres of music, finding them to be more socially and politically relevant (Peterson 1990, 210–213; see also van Eijck 2001).

It seems to me that these authors are missing an important issue, for “eclecticism” in taste – while seemingly unruly – is, as I am arguing, organized, by the ideology of the trendy that is increasingly prevalent in American culture, in large part because of the role played by advertising in the production of culture.<sup>9</sup> Those elites who like, say, a trendy classical musician, some world music, and some indie rock may appear to show “eclecticism” in their tastes; this eclecticism is not random or disorderly, but organized by the ideology of trendiness. Nonetheless, I think Peterson, Simkus, Kern, and others are largely correct in their identification of symptoms, if not their accounting of them. Taste for popular cultural forms has partially displaced a taste for high cultural forms among elites: popular culture has become more important to this social group, increasingly legitimate.

### **Cultural capital and distinction today**

While, given the foregoing, there are a number of theoretical directions one could pursue, what interests me here concerns the question of the convergence of commerce and content, and how this affects the tastes of members of elite social groups, and thus cultural hierarchies. To put it in more Bourdieusian terms, I am

concerned with what has happened to distinction, and the role that cultural capital plays in practices of distinction today.

While earlier advertising agency workers such as the writers Sherwood Anderson, Don DeLillo, Joseph Heller, and visual artists such as Andy Warhol, might have aspired to participate in the world of high art, beginning in the 1980s the importance of the trendy began to dominate, so that those who succeeded these earlier workers in the advertising industry had much less of an interest in high culture than their forbears. The cumulative effect is that the American cultural landscape has become radically altered: “Highbrow/lowbrow” no longer applies. Or, rather, I would argue that a loose hierarchical structure still exists, but it is not a structure that places knowledge of “legitimate culture” alone at the pinnacle: it is now the trendy that is displacing this earlier knowledge to some extent. The problem is, whatever these are thought to be changes radically – unlike the world of high culture, where change is much slower. And it is this very transitoriness that, of course, marks the success of the advertising and marketing industries: they deal in trends, the transitory.

### *The new petite bourgeoisie*

To a large extent, these significant changes in the production of advertising and popular culture were driven by a new social group that was identified in the late 1970s and 1980s. A number of writers both in and out of academia began considering this new group, which took a variety of names depending on the author’s perspective: baby-boomers, professional managerial class, new middle class, yuppies.<sup>10</sup> However one conceptualized it, whatever one called it, this group seemed to possess beliefs that marked a shift away from long-held American mores and practices. And the social power of this group, both because of its sheer numbers and because of the potency of its ideologies, has led to a number of transformations in American culture, some of which are the changes in taste discussed earlier.

It is clear from Bourdieu’s conception of the new bourgeoisie and new petite bourgeoisie that these groups include cultural workers such as advertising agency personnel. I discussed Bourdieu’s treatment of the new petite bourgeoisie at some length elsewhere and there is no need to recapitulate that discussion here at length (Taylor 2007b). One of the points that Bourdieu makes about the new petite bourgeoisie is that they frequently work as cultural intermediaries, bringing high culture to the masses. This is how I presented the new petite bourgeoisie in the advertising industry in that earlier work, arguing that what the new petite bourgeoisie was mediating was not high culture, but underground culture in the form of techno music.

Clearly, however, the role of cultural intermediary no longer satisfies some people in the advertising industry: today, dissatisfied with the role of intermediary, which, as Bourdieu says, does not confer prestige, members of the new petite bourgeoisie in the advertising industry want more: they not only want to present interesting musicians (or whoever) to a broad public through their work, they want to be credited with possessing the most acute sense of distinction, distinction for the trendy, an ideology they promote as unrelentingly as the popular music they select for commercials. For them, taste for the trendy matters more than taste for high culture, and their position is becoming increasingly dominant. In a world suffused with goods, as I have written elsewhere, possession of taste is becoming even more prestigious than making goods

or services or sounds themselves (Taylor n.d.). Notice that in many films and television programs today, the music supervisor – the person who picks the previously-recorded music to be featured in the film – is listed in the credits before the composer, who, of course, writes original music.

The new petite bourgeoisie in the advertising industry today is increasingly able to promulgate its own tastes on everyone else through its heightened involvement in the production of popular culture. The “struggles over the legitimate definition of culture and the legitimate way of evaluating it”, as Bourdieu puts it, are ongoing, but today, instead of occurring among members of the dominant group, they are increasingly evident in the new petite bourgeoisie (Bourdieu 1984, 93).

### *Cultural capital today*

What does this mean for cultural capital and our conceptions of it? How are distinctions made if the new “definition” of what constitutes “legitimate culture” – the trendy – is becoming persuasive?

It is important to recall that Bourdieu’s conception of “cultural capital” refers to knowledge and experience of *high culture*; Bourdieu posits a grand, unitary hierarchical system in which everyone is measured based on the amount of the various forms of capital they possess, and how they use them. Furthermore, cultural capital not only refers specifically to high culture, but also can only be spoken of in terms of quantity, or “volume”.

Endeavouring to reconstitute the units most homogeneous from the point of view of the conditions of production of habitus, i.e., with respect to the elementary conditions of existence and the resultant conditionings, one can construct a space whose three fundamental dimensions are defined by volume of capital, composition of capital, and change in these two properties over time (manifested by past and potential trajectory in social space). (Bourdieu 1984, 114)

That is, someone who, say, has a vast knowledge of baseball but knows nothing of operas or museums or poetry has little or no cultural capital.

Additionally, it is clear from *Distinction* that Bourdieu was attempting to capture a struggle within the dominant group to redefine what constituted “legitimate culture”: would it continue to be indexed to those with knowledge of “legitimate culture”, or would it succumb to the commercial values that he thought were attempting to erode it? Much of *Distinction* is concerned with this question, and must therefore be seen as a work that was attempting to chronicle the shifting landscape of French culture – especially bourgeois culture, in the 1960s and 1970s – not identifying a fixed structure or structures. I believe that Bourdieu did identify something along the lines of a deep structure of social hierarchy that is largely consistent with the class structure of the time, but that what constitutes cultural capital in that hierarchy has indeed changed; the centrality of legitimate culture has waned but an identifiable hierarchical structure still exists, as do practices of distinction based on various forms and quantities of capital. That is, the kinds of capital Bourdieu theorized are, to employ a term he used in another context, transposable. I therefore continue to subscribe to Bourdieu’s charting of French culture (with adjustments made for early twenty-first-century America), but believe

that, as Bourdieu saw in motion and captured in prose, what constitutes cultural capital has now changed.

But if people belonging to elite social groups, responding to the encroaching ideology of the trendy, are becoming more eclectic in their tastes, then, clearly, the “composition” of cultural capital has changed: it can accrue to those with knowledge of the trendy. Cultural capital must now be understood to refer not only to knowledge of high culture, but, increasingly, to familiarity with trendy cultural products.

### **Trendy distinction in practice**

In order to see how the ideology of trendiness operates in practice, one would need an ethnographic study, or a massively statistical one as in *Distinction*. Short of that, however, some arguments can be made about how the ideology of trendiness has affected tastes.

It is clear that high culture, at least the realm of classical music, has been attempting to become trendier since at least the late 1980s. It is well known that classical music sales have been small for quite some time, as audiences are greying; it is now a commonplace for aficionados to refer to “the death of classical music” (see Fink n.d.; Lebrecht 1997). Signs of the classical music industry’s attempts to rejuvenate itself, to make classical music hipper, are everywhere – whether in the rise of ensembles such as the Kronos Quartet, or the broadcasting of Metropolitan Opera in movie theaters, or trendier programming designed to bring in younger audiences, or classical music publishers releasing scores of bestselling advertising music and film music (see Taylor 2007a).

Classical music charts and sales are also revealing. What serious classical music lovers (among whom I count myself) listen to is seldom represented; instead, obviously, the most profitable artists, some of whom are among the trendy, dominate charts. It is telling, however, that the best-selling classical album of 2007 was rock star Sting’s *Songs from the Labyrinth*, and that Sting was listed as the Number 1 classical artist of that year; the album appeared as Number 24 on the year-end charts of 2008. Others of the top 10 artists of 2008 include trendy classical musicians such as cellist Yo-Yo Ma, violinist Joshua Bell, and pianist Lang Lang (see Table 1).

While much could be made about the suitability for inclusion of some albums on this list, the encroachment of the trendy factor is clear enough, whether in the guise of an aging rock star reinventing himself with the ancient music of his fellow Englishman, or classical musicians such as Joshua Bell representing themselves as rock stars, or the 5 Browns, five pianistic siblings who exploit the trendy youthfulness on their album covers. There have been more salacious attempts by classical musicians to garner attention, as I have written about elsewhere: Lara St John’s nude (but violin-covered) upper-body portrait on the cover of one of her albums is perhaps the most salient example (Taylor 2002). The point is simply that many classical musicians are endeavouring to capture public attention, and are doing so by employing modes of self-representation borrowed from the world of popular culture, attempting to tap into the ideology of trendiness.

Table 1. Best-selling classical albums of 2008

Number	Title	Artist
1	<i>Spirit of the Season</i>	Mormon Tabernacle Choir and Orchestra at Temple Square with Sissel
2	<i>Chant: Music for the Soul</i>	The Cistercian Monks of Stift Heiligenkreuz
3	<i>Radio City Music Hall: Live in New York</i>	Andre Rieu
4	<i>Vivaldi: The Four Seasons</i>	Joshua Bell/Academy of St. Martin in the Fields
5	<i>No Reservations</i>	soundtrack
6	<i>The Magic of Lang Lang</i>	Lang Lang
7	<i>Appassionato</i>	Yo-Yo Ma
8	<i>Bach: Goldberg Variations</i>	Simone Dinnerstein
9	<i>Maria</i>	Cecilia Bartoli
10	<i>New Impossibilities</i>	Yo-Yo Ma/The Silk Road Ensemble/Chicago Symphony Orchestra (Harth-Bedoya)
11	<i>Browns in Blue</i>	The 5 Browns
12	<i>Duets</i>	Rolando Villazon & Anna Netrebko
13	<i>Schoenberg: Violin Concertos</i>	Hilary Hahn/Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra (Salonen)
14	<i>Tchaikovsky: Nutcracker Favorite Selections</i>	Erich Kunzel/Cincinnati Pops Orchestra
15	<i>Masterpieces</i>	Andre Rieu
16	<i>Corigliano: The Red Violin Concerto</i>	Joshua Bell
17	<i>Vivaldi: The Four Seasons</i>	Sarah Chang/Orpheus Chamber Orchestra
18	<i>Voice of the Violin</i>	Joshua Bell
19	<i>Angel Voices: Liberia in Concert</i>	Libera
20	<i>Bach: The Art of the Fugue</i>	Pierre-Laurent Aimard
21	<i>O Holy Night</i>	Jenny Oaks Baker
22	<i>Voce d'Italia: Arias for Rubini</i>	Juan Diego Florez/Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia (Abbado)
23	<i>Andre Rieu in Wonderland</i>	Andre Rieu
24	<i>Dowland: Songs from the Labyrinth</i>	Sting and Edin Karamazov
25	<i>Fiesta</i>	Gustavo Dudamel/Simón Bolívar Youth Orchestra of Venezuela

Source: 2008 year-end charts (n.d.)

## Conclusions

A few years ago, the *New Yorker* magazine published a cartoon that depicted the entrance to Elvis Presley's Memphis mansion Graceland with two ticket windows, one labelled "Ironic" and the other "Non-Ironic." The former, of course, is for those higher up the social ladder who know what is hip and trendy, and the other window is for those who do not. In today's landscape of an endless array of commodities and the sign-values, signs do not simply float about in space: they are organized by how particular social groups use them, and they are structured increasingly by the advertising industry's conceptions of the trendy, which are frequently though not

always derived from what certain social groups – especially youth and young adults – believe to be trendy. The meanings the advertising industry attempts to give to commodities are not arbitrary; and neither are the meanings that people make of them.

Today, the new petite bourgeoisie in the advertising industry has managed to make its own ideology of the relationship to goods – the trendy – increasingly dominant, crowding but not yet replacing the bourgeoisie's use of art, by aligning itself with DJs, independent record labels, popular musicians, and so forth. The yardstick by which taste is measured is now more likely to be knowledge of trendy than knowledge of high art.

At the same time, however, this single yardstick competes with relatively autonomous systems (little cultures, as Grant McCracken [1997] calls them) – autonomous with respect to each other, and in relationship to a dominant culture – with their own hierarchies, their own ideas about the trendy; some of these little cultures, however, are youth cultures and one could expect youths to age out of them. The autonomy of today's little cultures is due in part to the advertising and marketing industry's expertise at niche marketing and the proliferation of identitarian practices, in which consumable goods – whether recordings, automobiles, or sneakers – play a crucial role. But, even with this knowledge, major brands still mount hugely expensive (inter)national campaigns, attempting to sell as many products to as many people as possible, frequently utilizing the ideology of the trendy.

I am thus not describing, as Bourdieu was in *Distinction*, a struggle within the dominant group over the definition of legitimate culture (between the old bourgeoisie with links to the past, and the new, which was more technocratic and commercially-oriented) but, rather, the ascendance of the values of the new petite bourgeoisie in its struggle to capture legitimacy from the dominant group. The new petite bourgeoisie's quest for legitimacy is increasingly effective as it erodes the value of high culture, and as its credibility as mediators, or discoverers – or even creators – of the trendy grows.

The overall system thus remains a hierarchical one as Bourdieu interpreted it, for educational capital and economic capital still matter; class/habitus still matter, as Philippe Coulangeon (2004) and Olivier Donnât (2004) have also concluded in the context of contemporary France. The rules of the game may have changed, but they continue to favour those higher up the social class ladder. Knowledge of the trendy is increasingly coming to legitimize social differences now, as knowledge of art had done exclusively in the past. As I commenced with Bourdieu, I may as well close, since I am not departing from some of his fundamental points – although one has to replace art or “legitimate culture” with the trendy, which:

fulfills a vital function by contributing to the consecration of the social order: to enable educated people to believe in barbarism and persuade the barbarians within the gates of their own barbarity, all they must and need do is to manage to conceal themselves and to conceal the social conditions which render possible not only culture as a second nature in which society recognizes human excellence or “good form” as the “realization” in a habitus of the aesthetics of the ruling classes, but also the legitimized dominance (or, if you like, the legitimacy) of a particular definition of culture –

authored by the new petite bourgeoisie consecrating the trendy (Bourdieu 1993, 236). The barbarians are those at the gates of Graceland who are thought to have no sense of irony and pass through, uncool and unhip.

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### Notes

1. “Cool”, “hip”, “trendy” – all are difficult to define in the usage of the advertising and marketing industry and are somewhat interrelated. For a history of “hip”, see Leland (2005); on “cool”, see MacAdams (2001). See also Heath and Potter (2004). For a recent industry perspective, see Kerner and Pressman (2007).
2. See their website: <http://www.mavenstrategies.com>.
3. See <http://www.myspace.com/bigmacchant>.
4. For a discussion of the rise of corporate sponsorship of tours, see Seiler (2000).
5. A good deal of what counts as “ethnography” among marketers is enough to make academic ethnographers cringe; one author characterizes ethnography as the observation of “consumer behavior in a natural environment”; ethnography is described as a “discipline” that “borrows its techniques from the science of anthropology and allows marketers to study consumers in their everyday habitats” (Wasserman 2003, 21).
6. Such as Mariampolsi (2006), Sherry (1995), and Sunderland and Denny (2007).
7. See <http://www.zandlgroup.com>. See also Grossman (2003).
8. For another report on this industry, see Gladwell (1999).
9. On the importance of the trendy in organizing “eclectic” tastes, see also Bellevance, Valex, and Ratté (2004).
10. Useful treatments of this new social group appear in Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich (1979), Gans (1985), Lash and Urry (1987), Pfeil (1990) and van Eijck (2001).

### Notes on contributor

Timothy D. Taylor is a Professor in the Departments of Ethnomusicology and Musicology at the University of California, Los Angeles. In addition to numerous articles on various musics, he is the author of *Global pop: World music, world markets* (Routledge, 1997), *Strange sounds: Music, technology and culture* (Routledge, 2001), and *Beyond exoticism: Western music and the world* (Duke University Press, 2007); he is currently writing a history of music used in advertising in the United States from early radio to the present.

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