

**Monopoly, Monopsony, and the Value of Culture in a Digital Age: An axiology of two
multimedia resource repositories**

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Abstract

Broadly speaking, axiology is the study of values. Axiologies are expressed materially in patterns of choices that are both culture-bound and definitive of different cultures. They are expressed in the language we use; in the friends we keep; in the clothes we wear; in what we read, write, and watch; in the technologies we use; in the gods we believe in and pray to; in the music we make and listen to—indeed, in every kind of activity that can be counted as a definitive element of culture. In what follows, I describe the axiological underpinnings of two closely related multimedia repository projects—Australian Creative Resources Online (ACRO) and The Canadian Centre for Cultural Innovation (CCCI)—and how these are oriented towards a potentially liberating role for digital repositories.¹

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Introduction

My argument here has formed over more than twenty years of experience in various aspects of the culture industries. The central assertion on which I base my argument is that mass mediated culture has lowered the default value of cultural materials to zero; that is to say unless people's words, dances, songs, music, movies, or scripts are bought, promoted, and distributed through the key institutions of mass mediated culture, they are generally considered to be of no financial worth. One key factor in misrecognising or overlooking this outcome is that studies in political economy of communication in particular, and critical media studies more generally, have tended to regard the major corporate persons who comprise the global culture industry as monopolies (Bagdikian, 1997; McChesney, 2000). However such a view is "consumption-sided" to some large extent, focusing on the effects that industry structures and practices have upon cultural "consumers", and therefore cannot recognise that having a small group of organisations as the largest *buyers* of cultural materials in a global media system has serious implications for the character and value of culture. This perspective, in which monopolies are seen from the view of producers, is called monopsony: one buyer, many sellers. This perspective provides a far reaching and very different view of cultural axiology than can be derived from monopoly-based perspectives.

However, new media always provide new opportunities, and the perplexing, contrary axiology of mass mediated culture provides interesting potentials in the emergent media environment comprised of networked digital technologies. With ever expanding technological facility to store, retrieve, reconfigure, and redistribute literally mountains of

cultural "junk" (the bulk of which is neither poor quality nor essentially useless); with ever increasing amounts of multimedia material being produced; and with copyright being exercised ever more strenuously by the "official" industries of mass culture, the opportunity, if not the impetus, exists for more people to participate in the development of local and global culture by exercising different choices than those typically made within the confines of the culture industries. Such an opportunity can be realised by making high-quality, yet ostensibly worthless cultural "junk" widely available. That is what ACRO and CCCI are designed to do: provide open access to high-quality multimedia materials under new and flexible licensing regimes, such as those developed by Creative Commons (www.creativecommons.org) and Aesharenet (<http://www.aesharenet.com.au/FfE/>). These licenses are designed to allow people to reuse existing materials without fear of breaching intellectual property, and for intellectual property owners to express the kinds of digital rights they wish to extend in order to allow their works to be shared as a continual and ongoing part of creativity and culture (Lessig, 2004).

The axiological "wager" made by the developers and funders of ACRO and CCCI is that providing widespread, open access to rich media resources will a) add value to "junk" material by promoting the adaptive repurposing of those materials; b) provide the basis for developing new content forms suited to new media environments, especially in the emerging context of broadband networks; c) promote new authorial and technological literacies; and, d) entail new conceptions about the value of cultural materials, and about the expectations that people have about being able to consciously and actively participate in the production of their cultures.

The rationale for doing so is straightforward:

The essential task of all sound economic activity is to produce a state in which creation will be a common fact in all experience: in which no group will be denied, by reasons of toil or deficient education, their share in the cultural life of the community, up to the limits of their personal capacity. Unless we socialize creation, unless we make production subservient to education, a mechanized system of production, however efficient, will only harden into a servile byzantine formality, enriched by bread and circuses. (Mumford, 1934/1962: 430)

Mumford's words were indeed prescient. The global culture industries have become servile and byzantine systems redolent of bread and circuses, and designed to provide mass distractions for special interests (Postman, 1985; Graham & Luke, 2003). Bill Hayton, Europe Editor of BBC's World Service makes the following observation in respect of the global news gathering and distribution practices, emphasising one way in which the logic of current media practices tend towards homogeneity:

There are two main news footage agencies - Reuters and APTN (AP having bought the third, WTN some years ago). You might have thought that this would double the amount of available material but it doesn't. Since neither agency wants to miss pictures which the other one can offer its subscribers exclusively, they follow each other around! This is exacerbated by the Eurovision system in Europe whereby public service broadcasters exchange material. This allows the agencies to send their pictures back to London (where they are both based) for free – they don't have to pay for their own satellite time. If the agencies both have the same pictures then they get what's known as a 'common' which means that APTN feeds their pictures and Reuters has access to them (or vice versa). Another incentive for both agencies to get the same shots rather than seek an alternative view! (Bill Hayton, Europe Editor, Newsroom, BBC World Service, email correspondence, August 26 2004).

Again we see the devaluation of cultural production in such a shift; its cheapening to the lowest possible price; and the resultant lack of creativity, novelty, and difference that

occurs as a consequence. While it would be anachronistic to wish for a return to the “village pump” model of newstelling, it is worth drawing the analogy to emphasise the participative way in which new information—*news*—has been historically introduced into cultures, and to foreground the cultural function of “news” more generally.

News is a unique and influential form of ‘ritual’ drama for cultures; ‘a portrayal of the contending forces in the world’ that positions people within the ‘dramatic action’ portrayed by what we call news; ‘a presentation of reality that gives life an overall form, order, and tone’ (Carey, 1989: 20-21). Briefly, news is ‘a form of culture’ that was commercialised during the eighteenth century, its impetus at the time being a middle-class desire to ‘do away with the epic, heroic, and traditional in favor of the unique, original, novel, new—news’ (1989: 21). It is an early precursor of mass mediated cultures and its progress towards an ironic lack of novelty, diversity, and creativity in its historical development typifies the progress of mass culture more generally. The hero is back. The *Old Testament* tradition of revenge has re-emerged as a staple theme of the monopsony’s culture. The epic struggle between good and evil has once again taken centre stage. In this respect, the historical trajectory of the culture industry is an example of what Horkheimer and Adorno (1947/1998) named the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the contradictory historical oscillation between *ratio* and *mythos* in culture.

To explain these apparently typical phenomena that pertain to massified, commercialised systems of cultural production, I rely on the following assumptions: Cultures extend as far in time and space as the systems of technologies and practices that mediate them permit, and so they rely for their existence on these systems (Innis, 1951a,

1951b). New patterns of mediation produce new cultural interactions and new ways of extending, reinforcing, and otherwise transforming the character of any culture that is touched by these new patterns (Silverstone, 1999). Cultures are primarily axiological, which is to say our cultures are identifiable as such because of the unique patterns of evaluation that its members have developed over many years; by the way the members of a culture express themselves; and by the choices they make in doing so. New media systems, especially those that span larger and larger geographical spaces, therefore tend to promote axiological conflicts and (sometimes) syntheses. During such moments in history, cultural axiologies change quickly, and at numerous levels, as exemplified by the strong globalising movements of the 1990s and the rapid cultural fragmentation that followed early in the 21st century (Graham & Luke, 2003). Therefore to understand the ways in which new media environments—in this case the development and use of digital repositories—might affect cultures, an axiological approach is necessary. An approach based in political economy of communication is therefore implicated because it is concerned primarily with how communication figures in the production of values and the distribution and exercise of power (Graham, in press).

Political economy of communication and the value of culture

The term ‘media monopoly’ is most often used in political economy of communication to describe the role of mass media in supporting the kinds of political economic environments that developed during the twentieth century (Bagdikian, 1997; McChesney and Foster, 2004; Smythe, 1981):

For a long time now it has been widely understood within economics that under the capitalism of giant firms, corporations no longer compete primarily through price competition. They engage instead in what economists call “monopolistic competition.” This consists chiefly of attempts to create monopoly positions for a particular brand, making it possible for corporations to charge more for the branded product while also expanding their market share. (McChesney and Foster, 2004)

This particular conception of ‘monopoly capitalism’ is developed by Dallas Smythe (1981) and is a communication-oriented derivative of V.I. Lenin’s theory of imperialism (Lenin, 1916). To summarise in Lenin’s words:

the principal stages in the history of monopolies are the following: 1) 1860-70, the highest stage, the apex of development of free competition; monopoly is in the barely discernible, embryonic stage. 2) After the crisis of 1873, a lengthy period of development of cartels; but they are still the exception. They are not yet durable. They are still a transitory phenomenon. 3) The boom at the end of the nineteenth century and the crisis of 1900-03. Cartels become one of the foundations of the whole of economic life. Capitalism has been transformed into imperialism. (Lenin, 1916)

Smythe shows the role that mass media plays in the extension of monopoly capitalism, which he defines as the form of global political economy in which a ‘relatively few giant monopoly corporations’ engage in the ‘deliberate collusive avoidance of price competition’ (1981: 11). For Smythe, mass media practices are essential to the development and maintenance of mass societies and monopoly capitalism. The most obvious example in this respect is advertising because it is designed to generate the ‘necessity for consumers to buy new products’ based on ‘stylistic’ obsolescence through the ‘calculated manipulation of public tastes’ (1981: 11).

McChesney (1999) argues that any understanding of how media ownership in monopoly capitalism inhibits the capacity of citizens to attain a 'democratic genuinely egalitarian participatory democracy' must include studies of how a system-wide propaganda that favours the system itself is maintained. Yet perspectives focused on consumption effects cannot comprehend how a self-sustaining systemic propaganda is achieved for the same reasons that one cannot derive the character of a political economic system by focusing solely on how staple foods affect different individuals or groups. Understanding how people *produce* is a necessary part of understanding the political economic character of a culture (Marx, 1976, 1981):

the capitalist process of production is a historically specific form of the *social production process* in general. This last is both a production process of the material conditions of existence for human life, and a process, proceeding in specific economic and historical relations of production, that produces and reproduces these relations of production themselves, and with them the bearers of this process, the material conditions of existence and their mutual relationships. (1981: 957)

If relations of production are definitive of a political economic system, then providing new ways for people to participate and relate in production is the key to changing political economic and cultural environments.

Even while taking the radical and edifying step of identifying that audiences in mass mediated societies perform a kind of productive labour, to do so, Dallas Smythe (1981) had to presuppose production of the materials on which audiences perform their labour: the products bought and sponsored by the cultural monopsony. The argument for a theory of audience labour runs as follows: the first task of a commercial media venture in

mass mediated societies is to produce an audience of consumers. Media corporations are therefore assumed to be a primary producer of mass culture and mass cultural groups, *pace* Horkheimer and Adorno (1947/1998). Audiences, in turn, are media corporations' commodities and are sold to advertisers. Smythe's theory of audience labour identifies a key fallacy in most consumption-sided media studies:

It is easy to see why conventional, bourgeois theory about communication is idealist. The entire literature—bourgeois and Marxist alike—about mass communications has defined their principle product of the mass media as “messages,” “information,” “images,” “meaning,” “entertainment,” “education,” “orientation,” “manipulation,” etc. *All* these concepts are subjective mental entities; all deal with superficial appearances, divorced from real life processes. The concepts of entertainment, education, orientation, and manipulation do not even refer to any aspects of mass media content but to its *effects*, or *purpose*.
(Smythe, 1981: 23)

No analysis, according to Smythe, had addressed the role of ‘Consciousness Industry from the standpoint of its historical materialist role in making monopoly capitalism function through demand management’ because none ‘take account of how the mass media under monopoly capitalism produce audiences to market commodities, candidates, and issues to themselves’ (1981: 25).

Still, even while recognising that any moment of labour is also moment at which values are created, that consumption is part of production, that any meaning making processes require interaction, and that elements of culture had become commodified, Smythe's most radical of perspectives cannot entirely grasp the political economic implications of mass culture because any audience-based theory is necessarily one-sided. Further, it results in sharp conceptual divisions between the producers of cultural material,

its consumers, and that mythical entity called “The Media” through which official culture presently flows. Rather than being monolithic in any sense, the bulk of what is called “The Media” is in fact comprised of an unruly group of more or less itinerant workers who specialise in symbolic artisanship of one kind or another (Creative Industries Report, 2003, ***). The organisations involved in production tend to be small and loosely allied (Hearn et al ***), and must constantly seek favour from advertisers, broadcasters, and media corporations in order that their wares are bought for distribution. The most “visible” part of cultural production—its numerous instantiations in magazines, films, books, music, newspapers, and so on—is the “final product”, which is branded, broadcast, and otherwise deployed by media corporations in order to produce audiences for sale to advertisers.

Making culture

The force, falsehood, and consequences of conceptually dividing “audiences” and “The Media” become most evident when one considers the entirety of what is meant by culture. The myriad elements of any given culture emerge from the history-bound interactions of *all* people who associate and live through the cultures they continuously help to make and remake (Carey, 1989). Yet a miniscule percentage of human cultural activity is included in “official culture”, by which I mean the materials commodified, bought, and distributed by the small group of corporations who ‘own’ the global culture monopsony: Viacom, General Electric, Disney, Time Warner, Vivendi Universal, Bertelsmann, and News Corp (Free Press, 2004). By excluding the mass of people and their cultural products from official culture, the monopsony has achieved a total devaluation of culture, if only because it is in its interests to continuously lower costs. Because the

monopsony is the only significant purchaser of cultural materials, and because the global pool of human culture is so rich with cultural products, the monopsony also has the power to devalue culture to the maximum possible extent. The production of *worthlessness* is the essence of monopsony.

Long before the radio was successfully deployed as the first instantaneous mass medium, the participatory character of culture had been diminishing for centuries, due largely to the influence of industrialisation and technologisation. Diminishing participation in music is a case in point well noted by Lewis Mumford:

The workshop song, the street cries of the tinker, the dustman, the pedlar, the flower vendor, the chanties of the sailor hauling the ropes, the traditional songs of the field, the wine-press, the taproom were slowly dying out during this period. Labor was orchestrated by the number of revolutions per minute, rather than by the the rhythm of song or chant or tattoo. ... No one any longer thought of asking the servants to come to the living room to take part in a madrigal or ballad. What happened to poetry had happened likewise to pure music. (1934/1962).

Music became, like every other industrial “occupation”, specialised and relegated to the rarified realms of expertise. Those people living with the effects of cultural monopsony typically do not sing or dance in public. Cultural vibrancy requires widespread participation, experience, and education in the Arts:

Art ... cannot become a language, and hence an experience, unless it is practiced. To the man [sic] who plays, a mechanical reproduction of music may mean much, since he already has the experience to assimilate. But where reproduction becomes the norm, the few music makers will grow more isolate and sterile, and the ability to experience music will disappear. The same is true with cinema, dance, and even sport. (Waldo Frank, cited in Mumford, 1934/1962: 343).

But under the influence of industrialisation, culture, like nature, appears as an alien force to be conquered, mastered, codified, objectified, disciplined, and deployed in the pursuit of profit.

The waning of Arts faculties in universities, and the corollary appearance of Creative Industries faculties in their place, is another indicator of the impact that monopsony has on culture: whether made by mind, mouth, or gesture, culture must enter the monopsony before it realises cultural worth. This is confirmed in the frenzy of intellectual and policy activity focused on the concept of “the creative industries” and their increasing value to society (DEST, 2002; NOIE, 2002). Such activities are most usually concerned with developing policies and curricula designed for the monopsony, and with how universities and other organs of education can best tailor their wares to the monopsony’s structures and practices. Yet the state of monopsony is the reason why the majority of people educated as visual artists, dancers, musicians, film makers, photographers, and writers rarely get to ply their trade as lifelong professionals, something that does not typically happen to other professional trainees. It is also, in part, why Arts faculties have been continuously devalued during 25 years of free market ideology. The simultaneous marketisation and devaluation of the Arts in universities, and of universities more generally, is at least in part an effect of a functioning global cultural monopsony. The practices of the burgeoning academic “industry” exemplify the practices of cultural producers in a monopsony: academics write research papers and manuscripts and submit them to publishers in the hope that they will be accepted, even though an acceptance will usually bring little or no direct financial reward. Prior to being accepted through official

channels, academic work is considered to have little or no “official” status as knowledge. The same is true for producers of music, film, dance, and theatre. To exacerbate the problems that cultural monopsony poses for the development of participatory culture, the axiology of its goods is inverse to that of every other kind of industrial commodity.

Cultural axiology in conditions of monopsony

The axiology of mass culture does not apply to more tangible commodities such as footwear and furniture. As shoes and chairs are used over and over, they typically become worth less with time (except in very rare circumstances, most of which are related to the culture industries). Conversely, when cultural materials are consumed *en masse* their worth increases, and the more the commodities of mass culture are used, the more they become valued as significant parts of the cultures in which they are used. While this is definitely an effect of monopsony, it is an interesting and worthwhile point to note. The present axiology of mass culture is in place because most cultural materials that people produce never become part of official culture. Even within the formally recognised sectors of the culture industries, many times more material is produced than is ever experienced by the monopsony’s audience-commodities. A 60 second advertisement, for example, can take as long as two years to produce and involve the work of many hundreds of people. Even a low-budget, 90-second promotional video takes a minimum of three hours to shoot, even longer to edit, thereby producing at least almost three full hours of supposedly “waste” material.

Add to the “waste” produced by mass culture the practically infinite amount of cultural production that continuously occurs throughout humanity, but which is never recognised as culture, and the extent to which the state of monopsony impedes participatory culture can be seen to be enormous. Billions of hours of conversations, dances, songs, ceremonies, audio recordings, and videos; acres of writing, diaries, photographs, and paintings are all regarded as worthless because they do not realise a price within the cultural monopsony. The axiology of cultural production is counterintuitive in an industrialised, allegedly capitalist world. More than a century of experiments on people by management researchers has been oriented towards efficiency and productivity, towards less wasted effort in the production of commodities and the management of work. Yet the cultural monopsony seemingly thrives on the opposite: the production of waste by rendering the greatest proportion of cultural productions, *including its own*, worthless.

Yet there is hope in this bleak assessment. The cultural monopsony first established its purchasing power based on the expense of its production processes. To participate in mass culture meant to participate in a system that relied on massive amounts of equipment and teams of experts sometimes comprised of hundreds of people. Today, though, the cost of production for cultural products favoured by the monopsonies has dropped to almost zero, and a single person may make an entire feature. The means of distribution are also cheaper and far more widely accessible than ever before.

Reclaiming cultural production and rehumanising culture

As someone informed by Marx's approach to political economy, a production perspective is a primary focus for analysis. I do not, however, believe automatically or dogmatically that widespread ownership of the means of production for cultural materials will necessarily translate into a powerful movement, or even to a self-consciously participatory culture. The widespread ownership or access to means of production is a necessary but not a sufficient condition. Currently a monopsony situation regulates distribution. That is largely because its products get mistaken for culture more generally. But cultural production processes have changed radically over the last 20 years largely due to rapid advances in production technologies and their corollary cheapening. These advances have greatly increased the number of people who have access to the means of cultural production. For example, to record a broadcast quality album in 1980, the cost of professional studio hire in Australia was around \$2000 per day. Add to this the cost of a producer, an engineer, several session musicians, the exorbitant cost of 2 inch tape (an industry standard at the time), and the cost of recording a single song to broadcast quality could easily run to about \$4000, and that would have been a relatively inexpensive recording. From 1980, through to the early 1990s, broadcast-quality studios could cost many millions of dollars to build.

Today however, professional quality audio recordings can be produced on personal computers at a cost that is fast approaching zero. Quite sophisticated software can be accessed legally without paying money (see www.sourceforge.net). The same goes for video production software, with Avid's DV program now available for free download (see

Avid's web site: www.avid.com). Similarly, Digidesign's Protools program is also available for free download (www.digidesign.com). Many other open source video editing and audio production programs are available for no cost on the World Wide Web. I use the Digidesign and Avid programs as examples because they have been industry standard digital production tools for some time. And even while the free versions of these programs come with some restrictions and less features than their paid-for versions, broadcast quality productions can still be made with these programs.

The low cost of the means of production for multimedia content has given rise to an entirely new class of cultural producers who would not previously have had the opportunity to be thus engaged. These include students, non-professional artists and producers, and professional artists who would previously have been required to buy or hire facilities that cost many thousands of dollars. In addition, high-quality audio and video recording equipment has made its way to the “consumer” market, turning cultural “consumers” more self-consciously into producers of culture. At the same time, the business model is changing for the monopsony, along with the character of cultural labour.

The changing composition of cultural labour and its potential effects for monopsony

Smythe's ‘free lunch’ approach to mass culture, the process I described above in which culture industries provide content that can bring the audience commodity into being to raise advertising revenues, entails a form of labour Smythe calls ‘consciousness labour’, the same kind of labour that all learning entails:

Consciousness is the total awareness of life which people have. It includes their understanding of themselves as individuals and of their relations with other

individuals in a variety of forms of organization, as well as with their natural environment. Consciousness is a dynamic process. It grows and decays with the interaction of doing (or practice) and cognition over the life cycle of the individual in the family and other social formations. It draws on emotions, ideas, instincts, memory and all the other sensory apparatus. (1981, pp. 270-271)

The free lunch model is, however, undermined by new media trends. One marker of this change, and of its extent, is the fact that for the first time since the inception of mass mediated societies, consumers now spend more on media in the US than do advertisers:

In a milestone that signals a fundamental shift in the economics of the media industry, consumers now spend more money on media than advertisers do. The shift, which occurred during 2003, but is just now coming to light via a report released Monday by investment banker Veronis Suhler Stevenson (VSS), reflects that advertising no longer is the primary business model for most media content, consumers are. (Mandese, 2004)

The trend, according to the report, is as follows:

Sources Of Communications Industry Revenues

	<i>Advertising</i>	<i>Marketing Services</i>	<i>Consumer End-User</i>	<i>Institutional End-User</i>
2002	\$170.4 bil	\$134.8 bil	\$167.5 bil	\$147.2 bil
2003	\$175.8 bil	\$141.0 bil	\$178.4 bil	\$153.1 bil
2004	\$188.5 bil	\$148.1 bil	\$191.3 bil	\$161.8 bil
2005	\$198.4 bil	\$156.4 bil	\$204.2 bil	\$171.8 bil
2006	\$211.7 bil	\$165.8 bil	\$218.0 bil	\$183.0 bil
2007	\$223.8 bil	\$176.4 bil	\$232.8 bil	\$194.2 bil
2008	\$241.1 bil	\$187.4 bil	\$248.7 bil	\$207.1 bil

Source: Veronis Suhler Stevenson's 2004 Communications Industry Forecast & Report, PQ Media as cited in Mandese (2004).

This trend toward an increased percentage of revenues from “consumers”, and a decreasing percentage of revenues from advertisers, portends fundamental changes in the character of the monopsony and its basic business model:

In 1998, the current base year of VSS' 2004 report, ad-supported media accounted for nearly two-thirds (63.6 percent) of the time consumers spend with media. By 2003,

advertising's share of consumer time had eroded to 56.4 percent and by 2008, VSS predicts it will dwindle to just 54.1 percent. Given the fact that time spent with consumer-supported media is growing at more than twice the rate of ad-supported media, it is conceivable that advertising could become a minority of the time consumers spend with media within a decade. (Mandese, 2004)

What this means is that the whole impetus for the way twentieth century media monopsonies developed is being eroded. With the emergence of electronic mass media, the first move towards monopsony was for the early culture industries to provide free programming and the technologies to disseminate those “programs”. This is how the first mass audiences were called into being by the architects of mass culture. The culture industries learned how to produce “audiences” for sale through the production of content. Now, however, advertising is retreating as the main source of the monopsony’s revenue becomes the group formerly understood as “audience”: its members have become the monopsony’s main *clients*.

Means of production are not enough

The free and inexpensive means of production and distribution are not enough by themselves to effect any massive change in the composition and structure of cultural production. The one similarity between the mass culture industries and other mass industrial forms is that both require raw materials: the presence of a steel mill, railroads, and trucks do not guarantee that steel will be successfully produced and distributed. Access to resources in the form of iron ore, as well as labour and expertise, is necessary. Similarly with the production of cultural materials, legal access to cultural labour, expertise, and raw materials is essential. In this respect, “open content” repositories oriented towards cultural

production processes have a unique role to play in providing legal access to “raw” cultural materials, and in providing an essential part of the means for producing participatory culture.

From the perspective of political economy, it is the distinction between production and “consumption” oriented digital repositories that foregrounds the first major functional split in digital repository types. Consumption oriented repositories, archetypically digital libraries and museums, are oriented towards the preservation and dissemination of more or less “official” knowledge, an undoubtedly important task. These repositories are organised largely along the lines of their non-digital historical counterparts in so far as their role is to maintain digital artefacts of materials that are considered to be of historical, cultural, and social significance. Their historical precedents can be traced to ancient Greece. Production repositories, on the other hand, are oriented towards providing resources that can be used and reused. Their historical precedents are fairly recent: “stock” sound effects, footage, photographic, and music libraries. Their primary purpose is to provide cultural producers with raw materials suitable for repurposing in the production of new cultural materials.

The difference between consumption and production oriented digital repositories is analagous to the differences between reading and writing. They require different literacies, different skills, and different attitudes towards the medium at hand. Their underpinning assumptions are entirely different: teaching people to write presupposes an innate ability for them to produce new meanings, to be creative. Teaching people to read begins with the assumption that people have an innate ability to comprehend. Creativity is not part of that presupposition, except in so far as it extends to a more or less novel understanding of texts.

The same holds true for production and consumption repositories. Consumption repositories are designed to allow people to comprehend the past and its relevance for the present and, perhaps, the future. Production repositories are designed to provide people with resources for the production of new cultural materials (see, e.g., American Broadcasting Corporation, 2004). Both types of repositories are, I believe, essential to the development of a participatory digital culture. But each requires different approaches to collection, design, architecture, and access. Successful design for each requires an understanding of the different axiological underpinnings of the functions they are designed for.

Implications of monopsony for participatory culture

In the context of monopsony, cultural products are assumed to be fairly much alike and exist to promote themselves and the monopsonies of which they are part. The result for audiences is the ‘freedom to choose what is always the same’ (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1947/1998: 167). That is a function of mass culture being mistakenly subject to the same axiologies as other industrial goods: the values of predictability, replicability, and homogeneity—the production of mass culture is essentially a risk averse endeavour and is inherently conservative in its approach to buying cultural products. The myriad elements of culture, no matter how mundane or elaborate, are assumed to be worth nothing “at birth” by the monopsony, unless of course they are born within, or later bought by, the media monopsony.

Worthlessness and Freedom

The promotion of widespread cultural worthlessness by the media monopsony has a potentially positive side: since cultural production is generally considered to be of little or no value, there is no disincentive for people to distribute their production free of charge. Paradoxically, the most successful products in new media environments are, *prima facie*, “free” (see, for example, www.jibjab.com). That is, they obtain cultural and economic value by being distributed free of cost. Consequently struggle over control of the means of distribution have become the focal point for all those concerned about the ownership of “official” culture. This is realised in the struggle over Intellectual Property regimes (Lessig, 2004) and, more dramatically, in the seizure of independent media servers from *Rackspace* (BBC, 2004).

The “free” model is not at all new to multimedia producers. Every time an advertising agency pitches to win a new client, that a musician submits work for a movie, or a moviemaker develops a pilot – just as academics submit academic articles for review – the authors are “giving away” something in the hope that an organ of the monopsony will buy it. The new media environment has done at least three things in respect of the monopsony: it has 1) emphasised the “free” and social character of creative labour; 2) it foregrounds the “worthlessness” of creative labour in a system of monopsony; and 3) it has multiplied the potential number of buyers, producers, and sellers in the market for cultural products, thereby threatening the stability of the monopsony. A major potential of open content repositories is that of a new media system that provides the myriad producers of culture a new space for conversation, cultural recombination, and participatory culture

unmediated by the axiology of cultural monopsony (see also, Barwick & Thieberger, ***; Kornbluh et al, chapt *** this volume; Willinsky, chapt 5, this volume).

Challenges and opportunities for digital production repositories

Thus far, I have outlined the axiological underpinnings of ACRO and CCCI: the set of contradictory value systems in play in the current climate. First, there is the inherent impetus of monopsony to drive the value of cultural production towards zero in order to keep its costs down. Second, there is the inverse commercial axiology of mass culture: the fact that its most “consumed” products (which are of course never really consumed) are its most valuable goods, with unused materials being considered as “junk”. Third, I have outlined a political economic view—that of monopsony—that provides a very different view of the culture industries than is available through the lens of monopoly capitalism: both views are necessary if we are to understand the political economic character, and hence the axiological underpinnings, of mass culture.

What remains is to identify the character and potentialities of the cultural production systems that production repositories such as ACRO and CCCI might engender, and the perils they might present. ACRO and CCCI are designed explicitly to provide open access to high quality cultural resources that can be used legally in the production of new materials. Like the means of production and distribution, the provision of resources is no guarantee of success in achieving a participatory official culture. All three are necessary, but even combined, they are not sufficient conditions. Most importantly in the achievement of participatory culture, people need to know how to read *and* write with new multimedia

resources and tools; they must learn to make meanings with them and, most importantly, be given permission to make music, videos, and other forms of art within new media environments. New literacies are an essential part of this, and an axiological change in the structure of mass culture will rely on multimedia and information literacies becoming part of curricula from the earliest ages. Given the current lack of novelty in the global system of “official” culture, understanding how to read and write multimedia has become a political, cultural, and economic imperative, if only to show people how easily sounds and images are manipulated in the digital environment.

There is of course the danger inherent in such an approach of turning education systems into a massive training grounds for cultural labour in a global monopsony—all new systems must be built upon the foundations of their predecessors. In much the same way that the monopsony has served up audiences for sale to advertisers, the proposed approach to participatory culture put forward here could conceivably be appropriated as a system for turning out armies of skilled producers for the existing monopsony, thereby further degrading potentials for culture to be rehumanised, revalued, and redistributed.

There is also double-edged sword in the business models that such a system might promote. On the one hand, we see examples such as the Prelinger Archive housed in the Internet Archive (www.archive.org). Rick Prelinger owns roughly 48,000 films and runs a stock footage archive. With some initial reticence, he put 1,000 of these online with open access to anybody with an internet connection. The result was that his sales skyrocketed (Prelinger, 2004): no free lunch, just free samples, a model used to great success in the internet by the pornography industry (Legon, 2003). Another example is the jibjab.com

political satire featuring caricatures of President G.W. Bush and Senator John Kerry, and cleverly reworded version of Woodie Guthrie's *This Land is Your Land*. The parody was propagated through emails and 'drew an impressive 10.4 million unique visitors in July, more than three times the 3.3 million Americans who collectively visited JohnKerry.com and GeorgeWBush.com' (Center for Media Research, 2004). JibJab has since become part of the monopsony by being appropriated and absorbed by the system. That is a function of the corporatist pattern of buying, rather than fostering and creating, innovative ideas (Saul, 1997).

Another challenge for participatory culture is that of creating virtual communities of a 'human scale' (Mumford, 1934/1962). That is to say, it is all well and good to promote mass participation in the production of a global media environment, but it is entirely another to foster conversations and communities that are of a size that can give meaning to participation—a digital, multimediated Tower of Babel is not a desirable outcome, and weaving the local into the global, as well as providing forums for developing global communities of interest, are problems not easily solved. Conversely, such an approach to fostering participatory culture also needs to recognise the potentials of a global balkanisation of interests in which cultures and communities become closed off from, or hostile towards, each other. These are just a few of the problems that face open content production repositories oriented towards participatory culture beyond those shared by digital repositories more generally (accessibility, useable metadata, format versioning, common standards and protocols, etc).

Finally, the axiological virtues of participatory culture require some qualifications. Any reader of my previous work will know that I am far from being a techno-utopian. Yet I am convinced that there is, indeed *must be*, a profound cultural shift inherent our new media environments. This shift may be either positive or negative. If it is to happen in a positive way it must, I believe, be based on an axiology of humanistic principles and aims: unqualified respect for persons; aspirations to the production of beauty and vibrancy in culture; a spirit of understanding and cooperation between people from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and countries; the full development of human faculties; and the betterment of the lot of peoples in general, which naturally includes access to resources, means of production, and means of distribution. The global cultural monopsony has turned itself inside out at almost every significant level, and despite the bleak political environment of the early 21st century, the potential now exists for a transformation in global culture. It will be a slow and fraught process, but it may be that it is possible, if not necessary, for people to engage in the production of culture in a self-conscious way. That is to say, people must take responsibility and respond to their obligations in respect of the cultural landscape they help make, especially in current circumstances.

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¹ To engage with these repository projects, navigate to www.uq.edu.au/acro and www.ccat.uwaterloo.ca .

Both are at an incipient stage of development and all suggestions for their improvement are welcomed.