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ABSTRACT

“The Sights That Hold the Crowd”: Political Science and the Politics of Popular Culture

Nick Dorzweiler

This dissertation argues that popular culture plays an integral and creative role in contemporary political life. Few resources exist within political science to justify such a position. In fact, political science – and political theory in particular – have paid surprisingly little attention to popular culture. I contend that this neglect is due in part, and ironically, to the lasting influence of the cultural analyses of Harold Lasswell and early Frankfurt School Critical Theory. Indeed, despite the apparent dissimilarities between Lasswell’s proto-positivism and the Frankfurt School’s normative political philosophy, both conceptualized popular culture as a collection of propagandistic symbols that elites use to maintain their social and political authority with a minimum of dissent. For these thinkers, popular culture served as the loudspeaker for more powerful political conditions, and was therefore ultimately *determined by* those conditions. To provide an alternative this dismissive viewpoint, I turn to the work of John Dewey and Michel Foucault. Drawing upon their treatments of ordinary activities such as art, discipline, education, and sexual conduct, I contend that in articulating socio-political problems felt especially pressing to its consumers – from racism to civic (dis-)engagement, liberal individualism, and gender norms – popular culture shapes the way such problems can be seen, heard, and engaged in everyday life. More than a propagandistic *mirror* of our existing political environment, I argue that popular culture helps to actually *create* this environment. Popular culture is, in this sense, a more dynamic political activity than the discipline of political science tends to assume.

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A NOTE ON CITATIONS

Given my interest in the intellectual history of the discipline of political science, I have included original publication dates for texts authored by Dewey, Foucault, and members of the Frankfurt School. These dates appear in square brackets in my in-text citations and bibliography. All of Lasswell's writings are cited by their original publication date only. Citations of certain texts, such as Dewey's *Lectures in China* or Foucault's Collège de France lectures, do not include square brackets because they constitute the first comprehensive or complete published edition of that text.

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Chapter One: Identifying a Problem¹

In some quarters the shift to cultural politics is buoyed by the belief that to interpret culture radically is the means of changing a changing world. The difficulty is, however, that instead of lagging behind scientific, technological, and industrial changes, contemporary popular culture...shares the same rhythms, perhaps has even redoubled them. [...] Under twenty-first-century conditions, if [the demos] were to rule they would first have to dominate culture instead of passively consuming it.

– Sheldon Wolin (2004, 581-582; 583)

I know that when I was in graduate school those of us who used to write about what used to be called pop culture or advertising or television were scorned by our older professors, who saw that stuff as kind of vapid and banal, and lacking a kind of platonic timelessness. And I remember it was a really big source of conflict because in lots of ways we just didn't get what they were saying. I mean, this was our world and our reality, the same way the Romantics' world was trees and babbling brooks and mountains and blue skies.

– David Foster Wallace (2012, 130)

Despite the subject of this dissertation, I can say – much to my relief – that my graduate school experience was far different than David Foster Wallace's. And though I have never met him, I doubt that Sheldon Wolin can be fairly characterized as the kind of derisive professor about whom Wallace was speaking. Still, when juxtaposed, the epigraphs above do help depict a problem I have felt since I began graduate school, and which served as the original stimulus for this project. In its initial formulation, my difficulty was simply that contemporary political theory, as I encountered it in the American academy, had little to say about the popular cultural activities that daily occupied me, my friends, and my community at large. Too often, political theory was isolated (or had isolated itself) from the everyday life patterns of the communities in which it was produced and increasingly rarely consumed.

¹ As will become clear, problems and their identification form a core interest of this dissertation, and a key component of what makes popular culture “political.” For further discussion, see Chapter Four.

This isolation of political theory was a problem because I believe a primary goal of contemporary political theory is to understand what it is that individuals and communities *do* – i.e. how they form and organize themselves, how they communicate within and between themselves, and how they engage in collective action. And whatever else might be said about it, popular culture is indeed something that many of “us,” as members of our postmodern American society, *do*. We plan our daily lives around (or in) it, and increasingly understand and interact with our communities through it.² If political theory has an interest in understanding, assessing, and critiquing the conditions that shape and regulate modern communities, then it should have something to say about popular culture. Yet by and large, I felt that it did not.

My problem was far too sweeping in its original formulation, however. Popular culture is not a common topic within political theory, to be sure, but neither has it been entirely ignored. The first generation of the Frankfurt School casts a long shadow, as I will soon discuss, but there are also a handful of contemporary scholars working on or around popular cultural issues, from a variety of angles and for a range of different purposes. They include, among others, Paul Apostolidis (2000), Jane Bennett (2001; 2010), Anne Norton (2004), Michael Rogin (1987; 1992; 1998), and Michael Shapiro (2004; 2009). In many ways, I take heart from such

² Some numbers might illustrate this: In 2013, the firm eMarketer reported that the average American spent, per day, thirty-two minutes reading newspapers or magazines, one hour and twenty-six minutes listening to the radio, four hours and thirty-one minutes watching television, and five hours and sixteen minutes interacting with digital devices, which included laptops and mobile devices (“Digital”). In 2008, the *New York Times* reported that the average American teenager listened to two and a half hours of music per day, though in 2009 the British Daily *The Telegraph* claimed the average American listened to more than five hours of music per day (Parker-Pope 2008; McCormick 2009). According to the Motion Picture Association of America, two-thirds of Americans and Canadians – 225 million people – went to the movies in 2012, and thirteen percent went more than once per month (Jenks 2013). In 2012, Nielsen found that there existed over 181,000,000 blogs worldwide, though most were hosted by US sites (“Buzz”). Finally, ESPN data indicates that in 2012 total attendance at Major League Baseball games reached nearly seventy-five million people, over twenty-one million at National Hockey League and National Basketball Association games, and over seventeen million at National Football League games (Gaines 2012).

work, and my dissertation has been in no small part inspired by it. In other ways, I remain dissatisfied with political theory's relationship to popular culture.

For instance, the subfield's relative disinterest in popular culture is distressing. Though some intriguing scholarship on the topic has been produced in recent years, it comprises only a sliver of mainstream political theory.³ As a consequence, political analyses of popular culture often begin (or feel the need to begin) on the back foot, defending the appearance of such a topic in serious academic scholarship.⁴ This is not to say that the political significance of popular culture should be obvious. On the contrary, a main goal of this dissertation is to demonstrate that there are multiple ways to describe *how* popular culture is political – how it “works” or “functions” as a political category. What I am saying is that it should not be necessary to defend *why* contemporary political theory ought to attend to popular culture in the first place. The domain has become an integral component in the life of modern communities. If political theory has done little to explore what that means, that is to its own detriment.

More troubling still is my sense that, on the rare occasions when political theorists *do* discuss popular culture, they can often – and ironically – wind up reinforcing disciplinary indifference toward the domain. Wolin's comments, above, are a case in point. For Wolin,

³ To provide an illustration, a search of Sage's electronic archives of *Political Theory* on January 20, 2015, turned up just twenty-seven uses of the term “popular culture” in the journal's pages since its inception in 1973. Many if not most of these deployments are incidental in nature, or part of the titles of cited sources. For instance, the database offers zero results when “popular culture” is searched either as a key word or in article abstracts. The term “mass culture” appears even more infrequently: fifteen times when searched in all fields, once in an abstract, not once as a key word. Searches of other widely read political theory journals yield similar results. A JSTOR search of the archives of *Polity* yielded zero results when “popular culture” was searched as part of an article title or article abstract, and only twenty-eight times when searched as in the full-text of any article since the journal's inception in 1968. A ProQuest search of the archives of *Contemporary Political Theory* yielded one result when “popular culture” was searched in any field except full-text, and only twelve results when searched in all fields.

⁴ See, for instance, the opening discussions of Costello and Worcester (2014), Jones (1993), Joyrich (1996), Norton (2004), or Street (1997).

popular culture does not just “share” the rhythms of modern life, but “redoubles” them. Popular culture is, in this sense, a kind of facsimile of political reality. The domain mirrors or reduplicates existing social, political, and economic conditions, and, in so doing, forces consumers to become “passively” obedient to them. This kind of approach is problematic insofar as it constrains the kinds of conversations we (as political theorists) can have about popular culture. For if popular culture is political only insofar as it “redouble[s]” an existing political reality, then it does not help *create* that reality, but merely *reflect* it. Indeed, what Wolin wants us get past or see through is precisely popular culture itself, so that we might actually touch – in order to bring under control – whatever is casting the duplicitous images we encounter in its products. Hence his remark that if the demos “were to rule they would have to dominate culture instead of passively consuming it” (Wolin 2004, 583). To be clear, my point is not that Wolin is *wrong* to suggest that popular culture is manipulative or power-laden. It is that, in conceptualizing popular culture as somehow different from if not opposed to the place where the thoughts, actions, contestations, and creativity of politics actually occur, he limits the reasons for and ways of speaking about the domain.

The Wolinian approach to popular culture is not unfamiliar to political theory. Over the past fifty years, several treatments of popular culture developed within the discipline of political science – many of whose stated aims and arguments appear quite dissimilar to one another – have described the domain as *mediating* political symbols or messages.⁵ In other words, popular

⁵ Consider, for instance, Gabriel Almond and Sydney Verba’s seminal behaviorist text, *The Civic Culture* (1963), which argued that political elites deployed cultural symbols to keep citizens from direct political participation. Compare this with Rogin’s critical psychoanalytic readings of popular American films – from *Birth of a Nation* to *Independence Day* – as escapist propaganda. Even Apostolidis, who desires to interpret Christian right radio programming as something more than “a pack of capitalist lies,” describes the genre as subversive only insofar as it fails to sustain a coherent ideological message (2000, 7). Apostolidis’ analysis is both skillful and convincing, but the conceptual framework on which it relies

culture has been frequently described as a loudspeaker for *transmitting* meaning from political elite to mass consumer. Usually, but not always, this mediating function has been understood to help political elites control or confuse the masses. As I will discuss in Chapters Two and three, I believe the immediate origins of this conceptual approach – at least within the discipline of political science – can be traced back to the 1920s and the work of Harold Lasswell and early Frankfurt School Critical Theory.⁶ It has, in any case, been a difficult one for political theorists to work without.

Given my twin dissatisfactions regarding the relationship between political theory and popular culture, the aims of this project are likewise twofold. In what follows, I argue that political theory should not only pay *more* attention to popular culture, in general. I will also argue that, in order to do so, the discipline may need to develop *new ways* through which to think and speak about popular culture. More specifically, political theory would benefit from engaging popular culture less as something that mirrors or mediates our political environment, and more as a unique and dynamic *material* out of which that environment is constructed. This means conceptualizing popular culture as a domain *of* politics, rather than as (or in addition to) a domain determined *by* politics. Absent such a conceptualization, the field's understanding of activities increasingly important to and characteristic of contemporary community life, particularly in the United States, will remain limited.

is still one of mediation. Thus, Apostolidis does assume that the *intent* of Christian radio programming is to convey its ideology to its listeners. His twist, however, is to suggest such programming does not convey its ideology as successfully as many Critical Theorists might believe. For further discussion of Almond, Verba, and Rogin in particular, see Chapter Two.

⁶ This general line may go back much further. Brantlinger (1983), for instance, begins his analysis of Western critiques of mass culture with a reading of Juvenal's tenth satire.

To explain how the dissertation develops these arguments, in the remainder of this introduction I would like to, first, summarize the structure and logic the chapters to follow, and, second, provide a brief definition of popular culture, at least as conceived in this project. Before doing so, however, two clarifications are in order.

First, in calling for a new conceptual approach to popular culture as a “material” of politics, I am not suggesting that it is incorrect to treat the domain as “mediating” politics. Not only would it be absurd to claim that popular culture does not often transmit powerful messages, but, more importantly, I wish to add *to* – rather than subtract *from* – the already meager tools available to political theorists interested in the politics of popular culture. Thus, I do not believe it is “false” to ask how popular culture functions as capitalist propaganda, how it enforces established forms of liberal individualism, how it conveys symbols that activate unconscious drives, or similar questions that presume the mediating capabilities of culture.⁷ What I *am* claiming is that such questions are not well designed to treat popular culture as a collection of political activities that are, like most political activities, complex, dynamic, and replete with overlapping and oftentimes contradictory forces. Instead, these questions tend to engage popular culture as an instrumental illustration for other, broader political theoretical arguments concerning – for instance – capitalism, liberal individualism, the modern psyche, and so on. For the political theorist interested in treating popular culture as a domain with its own unique political history, techniques, and effects, such an approach can be limited in its application.⁸

⁷ I am, of course, summarizing the arguments of some aforementioned scholars. On culture as capitalist propaganda, see Adorno ([1938] 2001), Horkheimer (1941a), and, as discussed above, Wolin (2004). On culture as reinforcing liberal individualism, see the Adorno and Horkheimer essays, but also Almond and Verba (1963) and Lasswell (1935c; 1936). On culture as activating unconscious drives, see Lasswell (1936) or Rogin (1987; 1992; 1998).

⁸ For an analogous argument, see Foucault’s methodological comments on power in his 1975-1976 lecture series, *Society Must be Defended* (2003). Power, stipulates Foucault, should be studied via “an ascending

Second, conceptualizing popular culture as political “material” does not at all imply that the domain is necessarily novel, liberating, revolutionary, or good. Wolin himself fears that such evaluations have become too easy to make in our “saccharine” postmodern era, and here I agree with him (2004, 583).⁹ Of course, this argument cuts both ways. Sweeping normative judgments of popular culture as obfuscating, propagandistic, vapid, or repressive – i.e. as “bad” – are just as facile and limiting as proclaiming it as “good.” This does not mean that popular culture is immune from normative judgment altogether. Taken as a whole, however, the domain is too complex, too adaptable, too diverse, and too widely distributed to shoehorn into one general normative category. Just as political theorists tend to resist universalizing judgments in other topics of political discourse, from ethics to identity to rights (or whatever), so too should we resist offering such judgments *vis-à-vis* popular culture. We will generate reductive analyses if we continue to define popular culture as simply good or bad, repressive or liberating,

analysis;” we must “begin with its infinitesimal mechanisms, which have their own history, their own trajectory, their own techniques and tactics” (30). Why? Because in beginning with general assumptions of how power works and whom it serves, “descending” or deductive analyses grossly simplify their objects of study. By way of illustration, Foucault turns to infantile sexuality. Following the psychoanalyst Wilhem Reich, Foucault says, “[w]e could ask how the rule of the bourgeoisie allows us to understand the repression of infantile sexuality Well, it’s quite simple: from the seventeenth or eighteenth century onward, the human body essentially became a productive force, and all forms of expenditure that could not be reduced to these relations...were banished, excluded, and repressed. Such deductions are always possible; they are both true and false. They are essentially too facile, because we can say precisely the opposite. [...] We can reach the opposite conclusion and say that what is needed is a sexual apprenticeship, sexual training, sexual precocity, to the extent that the goal is to use sexuality to reproduce a labor force” (Foucault 2003, 31). Give the instability of such analyses, “what we should be doing [is] looking in historical terms, and from below, at how control mechanisms could come into play in terms of the exclusion of madness, or the repression and suppression of sexuality; at how these phenomena of repression or exclusion found their instruments and their logic, and met a certain number of needs at the actual level of the family and its immediate entourage” (2003, 32).

⁹ Though it should be noted that Wolin does little to specify who he thinks is leveling these kinds of evaluations of culture, referring only generally to Lyotard’s attack on “grand narratives,” new forms of “Nietzschean pessimism,” and the spread of “deconstructionist techniques” (2004, 581 n.2; 582). My guess, however, is that recent work by, for example, Bennett, Norton, or Shapiro – who have suggested that practices of everyday life, including popular culture, hold radical political potential – would not meet with Wolin’s approval.

conservative or revolutionary, vital or disenchanting. These are descriptions difficult to drape wholesale over other complex political activities, and so too are they difficult to drape over popular culture. We must therefore engage the domain as we do most other difficult political domains (like ethics, identity, or rights): slippery to define, complicated and chaotic in operation, and yet crucial to the construction of our contemporary political environment.¹⁰

ORGANIZING THE PROJECT

With these points in mind, the dissertation is organized as follows. The next two chapters explore the origins of what I will call a *mediating model* of popular culture.¹¹ My purpose in undertaking this exploration is to (a) uncover the political theoretical assumptions and commitments on which the mediating model was developed, in order to (b) contextualize it as one of *several* ways in which political theory might approach popular culture. Thus Chapter Two, “Propagandist of Democracy,” engages the work of Harold Lasswell, perhaps the first political scientist to have offered a sustained analysis of the political significance of popular culture, and mass media in particular. Here I argue that despite his claims to the contrary, Lasswell’s definition of popular culture as a repository of propagandistic symbols was less the product of his unbiased empirical observations than of his unique interpretations of Deweyan pragmatism, Freudian psychoanalysis, and Marxian social theory.

¹⁰ Though this will become clearer as the dissertation progresses, it is important to note that I am not claiming that popular culture is *always* and *everywhere* political. Instead, I am arguing that popular culture is political *insofar as* it articulates and engages problems experienced as pressing within some given community. See Chapters Four and Five for further discussion. I thank Jeni Forestal for bringing this point to my attention.

¹¹ Throughout this dissertation, I mean the term “model” to refer to the set of assumptions, ideas, and theories – i.e. the conceptual framework or conceptual vocabulary – that one employs to describe the politics of popular culture.

Chapter Three, “Mirrors and Masks,” puts Lasswell’s interpretation of popular culture in dialogue with that of early Frankfurt School Critical Theory, and particularly the work of Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno. Staging such a dialogue is an unusual task, given that the normative political philosophy of the Frankfurt School is often assumed to have shared little in common with Lasswell’s proto-positivism. As I demonstrate through detailed archival research, however, Lasswell and the Frankfurt School developed a surprisingly close personal and intellectual relationship during the 1930s and 1940s, thanks in part to their shared approach the politics of popular culture. Indeed, for both Lasswell and the Frankfurt School, popular culture functioned as a loudspeaker for existing socio-political conditions, even as they disagreed over the normative value of the messages that this loudspeaker conveyed.

The final two chapters turn to the work of John Dewey and Michel Foucault to develop what I will call a *material model* of popular culture. Again, staging such a dialogue is an unusual task: several scholars from Richard Rorty (1982) on have suggested that joining Dewey and Foucault on any topic is a fundamentally flawed exercise. Similar to my reading of Lasswell and the Frankfurt School, however, I argue that such arguments overlook several important points of overlap between Deweyan pragmatism and Foucaultian genealogy. Thus Chapter Four, “The Politics of Practice,” uncovers and defines three concepts equally important to and present in Dewey and Foucault’s political philosophies: *practice*, *problems*, and *experiments*. Both thinkers deployed this trio of concepts to explain how mundane performances, from art to education to sexual conduct, helped construct and define the life patterns of contemporary political communities.

My final chapter, “Materializing Popular Culture,” adapts and expands upon these three concepts in order to apply them to popular culture specifically. Here I contend that popular

culture can be conceptualized as an everyday *practice* through which pressing social and political *problems* are articulated, and then, through a process of *experimentation*, transformed or modified. More than a mere echo or reduplication of our existing political environment, then, popular culture actually helps to create or fabricate that environment. To illustrate my meaning, I turn back to Lasswell and the Frankfurt School, and specifically to their treatments of film and jazz as conveyors of liberal ideology. Re-deploying their own case studies, I demonstrate that film and jazz can be described not merely as transmitters of liberal propaganda, but as material through which consumers define, test, and modify the beliefs and actions available to them within a liberal political environment.

In advancing these arguments, I intend for this dissertation joins in two distinct but complementary conversations ongoing in political theory. The first, which has been led by contemporary disciplinary historians including Robert Adcock, James Farr, and John Gunnell, has focused on uncovering how and why modern American political science developed around certain problems, themes, and objects of study, and also why the discipline excluded or understudied others that may have proven equally fertile for political analysis. The second, which has attracted the attention of political theorists from at least Dewey on – and in my view has also included a diverse group of later thinkers including, among others, Foucault, Rorty, Robert Putnam, and Richard Sennett – has endeavored to discover avenues of practical but meaningful political engagement within our (post)modern society, in which such avenues appear increasingly rare. Working at the intersection of these two conversations, I argue that by better understanding the unique evolution of certain problematic objects of study within the discipline of political science (and political theory more specifically), we may also unearth new ways to envision the political possibilities of our present.

DEFINING POPULAR CULTURE

The optimism of my project notwithstanding, it must be admitted that the object at the center of this project – popular culture – is a particularly difficult one to handle. The term “culture” is itself probably an essentially contestable term, or at least “one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language” (Williams 1985a, 87). The etymology and meaning of “popular” is only slightly less convoluted (Williams 1985b, 236-238). Arriving at a comprehensive definition of “popular culture” is, therefore, unlikely. The relevant signifiers are too slippery, the products and practices they are meant to signify too impermanent and adaptable.

In sketching a definition of popular culture, then, I do not want to draw clear boundaries between what “is” and “is not” part of the domain. Though there may be certain cases in which such a discussion is worth having, I do not believe that it would be meaningful to my aims here. Indeed, the stakes of this project have less to do with *re-defining* popular culture, than with *re-conceptualizing* the various products and practices that we currently refer to as popular culture. For my purposes, then, it is enough to describe popular culture in terms of its concrete history and current usage. It is enough, in other words, to peg my definition to the way the term has been and is used in ordinary speech.¹²

The historian Lawrence Levine (1993) provides a fruitful starting point for such a definition (296). For Levine, popular culture is, in the most “simple and instrumental” terms, “culture that is widely accessible and widely accessed; widely disseminated, and widely viewed or heard or read” (296). As such, it is a domain that comprises a vast array of products and practices, the most conspicuous of which include Hollywood films, television shows, mass print

¹² This approach is consistent with and is in fact modeled upon both Deweyan pragmatism and Foucaultian genealogy. For further discussion, see Chapters Four and Five.

media, radio programming, music, and sports.¹³ Yet if this definition is purposefully broad with respect to the content of popular culture, i.e. with respect to what kinds of objects and practices “count” as part of popular culture, it is more specific with respect to the domain’s origins and history. Characterized not by any particular form or style but rather by its patterns of mass production and consumption, Levine stipulates that popular culture is peculiar to industrial societies. It comprises the expressive objects and practices in and through which the “attitudes, values, and reactions” of industrial society are made manifest (Levine 1993, 295). Hence his description of popular culture as “the folklore of industrial society” (1993, 291).¹⁴

The origins of the domain can thus be located somewhere in the mid to late eighteenth century, amidst the various social changes characteristic of European industrialization, including urbanization, mass migration, rapid technological advancement, and rising literacy rates (Cullen 2002, 11-13).¹⁵ Popular culture emerged in the United States slightly later than in Europe, amidst a massive population boom between 1790 and 1820. During this period, the US population ballooned from 3.9 to 9.6 million, and also became increasingly concentrated in urban centers. This enormous demographic expansion and convergence led to a concomitant rise in mass-produced print media. Thus, as Cullen notes, “the nation had about 200 newspapers in

¹³ Besides Levine, I am also adapting language here from the Department of Popular Culture at Bowling Green State University: “We define popular culture as the expressive practices of everyday life (including mass media products such as television shows and video games, but also individualized forms of expression like food and holidays)” (“Department of Popular Culture”).

¹⁴ Certainly, one could argue that that the “bread and circuses” of Juvenal’s tenth satire might also fit Levine’s broad definition (see n.6, above). As I discuss in the following paragraphs, however, the massive production and rapid spread of mass media in Europe and American in the eighteenth century, which corresponded with huge expansions of literacy rates, sets modern popular culture apart from that produced in earlier eras. During the eighteenth century, in other words, both the production and consumption of culture became inextricable from larger patterns of industrialization, and therefore peculiarly modern.

¹⁵ Though it is not a history of popular culture *per se*, Donald Herzog’s *Poisoning the Minds of the Lower Orders* (1998) offers an excellent account of the rise of mass produced print media in England in the late eighteenth century, with a particular focus on its ramifications for contemporary political discourse.

1800, 375 in 1810, and 1,200 by 1835. And between 1820 and 1829, 128 novels were published – five times the number published between 1810 and 1820, and almost forty more than in the entire period from 1770 to 1820” (2002, 36). By 1840, the population of the United States had reached 17 million, making it the world’s largest reading audience (Cullen 2002, 36). This explosion of both people and print was quickly absorbed and translated into everyday language: the term “popular culture” was in common use by midcentury, at the latest (“popular, adj. and n.”).

From here, the history of popular culture is easier to trace, if also more difficult to encapsulate given the domain’s rapid expansion and diversification.¹⁶ The highlights might be summarized as follows. During the latter half of the nineteenth century, the dime novel, traveling circus, jazz music, personal photography, and vaudeville were all invented or became widely distributed. Popular culture thus became not just what Americans *read*, but also what they *saw* and *heard*. At the same time, the domain took on an increasingly professionalized and commodified character, much of which remains today. This development was due in part to economic and technological reasons specific to cultural production itself – printing presses, cameras, musical instruments, and theaters were expensive to buy and/or operate – but was also a manifestation of socioeconomic changes ongoing in other realms of American society during the Gilded Age (Cullen 2002, 91).¹⁷ Radio, film, and television appeared in the early and mid twentieth century, which again dramatically expanded the content and style of popular culture,

¹⁶ For general historical overviews of popular culture in the US, see Cullen (2002) and Levine (1993), but also Butsch (2000), Cullen (2013), and Storey (1998).

¹⁷ For examinations of the development of popular culture in the nineteenth century, see Levine (1990), Trachtenberg (1982), or Rosenzweig (1983).

while also binding it closer to patterns of mass production and consumption.¹⁸ In recent decades, the development of the Internet and its attendant technology – from e-mail to laptops, mp3s, blogs, and smartphones – has ensured that popular culture reaches deeper into American life than ever before, touching even those who profess indifference or hostility to the domain (Cullen 2002, 205).¹⁹ This is a rudimentary historical sketch, to be sure. I offer it only to underscore the difficulty in establishing a stable definition of the domain. Popular culture is, by design, a motley collection of expressive practices whose form, content, and style have been constantly shifting since its emergence over two centuries ago.

To conclude this sketch, however, I want to bring popular culture back to bear on the discipline of political science, given that the rise and development of the former paralleled the rise and development of the latter, in at least two ways.²⁰ The first parallel is chronological. Just as popular culture was cementing itself into everyday American life during the mid to late nineteenth century, so too was political science cementing itself into the American academy. This process began (at least institutionally) in 1858, with the creation of the first professorship in political science in the United States at Columbia University, a position assumed by the German émigré scholar Francis Lieber. In 1880, Lieber’s student, John Burgess, founded the first School of Political Science, also at Columbia. Programs at Johns Hopkins University, the University of

¹⁸ The historical literature on popular culture in the twentieth century is enormous, but see Maltby (1989), May (1980), Sklar (1994), or Susman (1984).

¹⁹ Recent discussions of popular culture in the Internet age include Anderson (2005), boyd (2014), Cullen (2002), Jenkins (2008), and Schulte (2013).

²⁰ The terms “profession” and “discipline” are, like popular culture, difficult terms. In this dissertation, I follow Gunnell’s (2006a) usage. Gunnell suggests that political science first emerged as a *discipline* in the mid- to late-1800s, meaning that the study of politics entailed forms of research, training, and instruction different from disciplines like sociology or economics. Only in the early twentieth century, particularly with the establishment of the American Political Science Association, did political science also coalesce as a *profession*, meaning that the discipline took on a distinct occupational and institutional identity. For further discussion, see Farr (1988), Farr and Seidelman (1993), Farr, Dryzek, and Leonard (1995), Gunnell (1993b), and Ross (1991; 1993).

Michigan, the University of Wisconsin, Brown University, and Harvard University followed shortly thereafter. By 1903, the discipline had matured enough to form its own professional organization, the American Political Science Association (APSA), helping cement its status as a core requirement of higher education in the US.

The second parallel is contextual. Much like popular culture, the emergence of the discipline of political science was inextricably linked to the “substantial social change[s] resulting from industrialism and the growth of cities,” particularly “declining religious authority, growing urban problems, and the prolonged depression and labor conflict of the 1870s” (Ross 1993, 88). It was so linked in two ways. On the one hand, the birth of political science was a byproduct of the social upheavals characteristic of modernization and industrialization. Indeed, the notion of a professional discipline organized around sharp divisions of labor and knowledge was in many ways a reflection of the broader social and economic environment in which it was formed (Ross 1993, 93-94).²¹ On the other hand, the discipline was also consciously designed as a response to those social upheavals. At the dawn of the twentieth century, many practitioners of political science understood their task to be that of comprehending, in order to better manage, the complex social forces that had so quickly erupted and transformed American society over the previous seventy-five years (Ross 1993, 87, 101).

And yet despite their abiding interest in and concern for contemporary social conditions, early disciplinary leaders such as Lieber and Burgess – as well as figures such as Frank Goodnow, Westel Woodbury Willoughby, and Woodrow Wilson – showed virtually no interest in the rapidly expanding domain of popular culture. For a number of reasons, some of which I discuss at the outset of the next chapter, popular culture was simply not understood to be

²¹ See also Gunnell (2006a).

politically relevant, even as it was becoming an increasingly dominant feature of collective life in the US. It therefore took a number of conceptual and historical shifts for anyone in the discipline to consider why popular culture had become so widespread in American society, and how it might possibly relate to politics. In fact, it was not until the 1920s and the work of Harold Lasswell that political science finally gave sustained attention to the domain. It is to a discussion of Lasswell's work that I now turn.

Chapter Two: The Propagandist of Democracy

The difficulties of liberalism's assumption of the alert citizen were well stated by Walter Lippmann in the early 'twenties. His point was that the citizen was unable to know what was going on politically, to think about it straight, or to act upon it intelligently. There was a great gap between individual men, on the one hand, and events and decisions of power, on the other; this gap was filled by the media of communication, which, in their necessity to compress the volume of communication into shorthand slogans, created a pseudo-environment of stereotypes that stood for the unseen political world and to which the citizen reacted. (Mills 1951, 325)

Prior to the 1920s, the discipline of political science tended to speak of popular culture – if it spoke of it at all – in one of two ways: as undeserving of serious consideration, or as inimical to the social and pedagogical goals of the profession. Though seemingly contradictory reactions, both can be explained as products of the peculiar state-centered discourse that dominated the discipline¹ during its inception in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.² According to leading scholars at the time, such as Francis Lieber and John W. Burgess, the state was the axiomatic object of political study. Characterized as “all-comprehensive,” “exclusive,” “permanent,” and “sovereign,” it was an entity existing behind and underwriting the various mundane behaviors, actions, and ideas of national communities, up to and including processes of government (Burgess [1891] 1993, 51).³ Everyday administrative procedures and policy were thus conceived as subsidiary objects of study relative to the state itself. Commonplace social

¹ For my understanding of the terms “discipline” and “profession,” see Chapter One, note 19.

² A lengthier analysis of this point would seek to answer why advocates of this discourse were adamant that modern mass culture stood in opposition to and even subverted the ideal community concept of the state in the first place. This discussion would need to engage the philosophical tenets of the juristic model, as well as a sociological account of the establishment of political science itself. See Gunnell (2006b), Farr (1993) and Ross (1993) for interesting analyses of both these angles.

³ This traditional concept of the state was a direct inheritance from nineteenth century German political and academic discourse, in which Lieber, Burgess, and many of the discipline's early participants – having obtained their academic training in Germany – were steeped. For further discussion, see Dryzek (2006), Farr (1993; 1995a), and Gunnell (1995).

practices such as mass culture were transitory phenomena, at best. At worst, they were distractions hindering the public from fully grasping the deeper nature and potential of the American polity (Lieber [1858] 1993, 26-27).

In the closing decade of the nineteenth century, this paradigm was critiqued by a second generation of scholars, including Woodrow Wilson, Westel Woodbury Willoughby, Frank Goodnow, and Jesse Macy. For these authors, the statist approach of Lieber and Burgess was not only historically inaccurate, but also disconnected from the unique realities of the modern American republic (Gunnell 1995, 22-23). A more credible analysis of US politics, they argued, would look to the various factions, bureaucracies, institutions, and interest groups that actually animated the liberal democratic Leviathan. This “pluralist” approach was soon adopted and elaborated by a subsequent group of political scientists, such as Arthur Bentley, Charles Beard, George Catlin, Mary Parker Follett, and Harold Laski (though the latter spent the bulk of his career in England). By the early 1920s, pluralism had supplanted its statist predecessor as the dominant discourse in the discipline, generating an important shift in its primary objects and domains of study.⁴

Talk of a transcendent, monolithic state determining the ephemeral phenomena of daily activity notably moderated. Pluralists instead claimed that modern liberal democracy was “grounded...in society” (Gunnell 1995, 31; emphasis in original). Political reality was conceptualized as a complex intermingling of empirically observable interests and actions that

⁴ See also Ross (1991). It is important to note that for both Gunnell and others, most notably Dryzek (2006), pluralism was not a paradigmatic revolution (in the Kuhnian sense), nor a normative rejection of the state-centric paradigm. Indeed, both authors suggest that the state still figured as an implicit (if unattainable) ideal in pluralist scholarship. Nevertheless, the pluralists were instrumental in turning the discipline toward the study of concrete activities and behaviors that challenged earlier, more abstract concepts of the state.

emanated from myriad locations within any given community, from the individual to the interest group. Hence Laski declared in 1917 that the “State is but one of the variety of groups to which the individual belongs, [and] there is no thought of unity in his allegiance” ([1917] 1999, 11). Ten years later, Catlin described political science not as a “study only of the state, which is a form of social organization resulting from one species of political action,” but as an analysis of “human behavior characterized by the recurrences of specific behavior patterns” (1927, 255). If it was not entirely rejected, then, the state-centric paradigm of Lieber, Burgess, and others was considerably reformed. For pluralists, politics – and especially US politics – was a concrete, contingent, and mundane field of experience, at least relative to the conceptualizations of their predecessors.⁵ Accordingly, if American political science was to become a more accurate and comprehensive discipline, it needed new techniques and methods with which to competently measure the vast number of policies, practices, and behavior patterns that constituted the actual functioning of American politics.

It was in this context that Charles Merriam and several like-minded colleagues at the University of Chicago, including Leonard White, Harold Gosnell, and Harold Dwight Lasswell, rose to prominence in the 1920s. Several factors contributed to the remarkable success and influence of the “Chicago School of Political Science,” but the group became renowned mainly for their groundbreaking adaptation of positivist and natural scientific theory and methodology.⁶ Responding to pluralists’ desire to reassess political science’s traditional understanding of

⁵ This did not mean that pluralists necessarily saw US society as more democratically inclusive, however. On the contrary, several pluralists, from Beard to Bentley to Walter Lippmann, argued that the will of the people could not be heard (and perhaps could not even be formed) above the din of so many competing interests, voices, and opinions. Others, such as Laski and Follett, were more hopeful. See Dryzek (2006) and Gunnell (1995) for further discussion.

⁶ See Almond (2004), Dryzek (2006), Farr (1995b), Gunnell (1993b), Heaney and Hansen (2006), and Monroe (2004).

political reality, Merriam and his cohort developed an impressive array of empirical research methods, including field experiments, surveys, statistical analysis, and content analysis, which they then applied to a variety of everyday phenomena, from urban politics to political psychology, voting behavior to mass communication. Even though Merriam and his colleagues were not the first to call for a “scientific” approach to politics, their innovative work provided what was, at the time, the most detailed description of what a rigorous analysis of “real” political activity could be. The Chicago School was therefore crucial in establishing a less abstract as well as more comprehensive understanding of political reality in the United States (Heaney and Hansen 2006, 589).

Given their status as among the first, and certainly most influential, political scientists interested in politics as an everyday activity, the Chicago School represents an intriguing point of departure for an analysis of popular culture as a domain of study within the discipline. On the whole, of course, the Chicago School was not especially devoted to the study of US culture. Despite their shared interest in the concrete realities of American society and politics, few in the group were interested in mass culture specifically. The notable exception was Harold Lasswell, one of the School’s most prominent and eclectic members.

Pairing Merriam’s scientific approach to political analysis with decidedly select interpretations of Dewey, Freud, and Marx – non-standard figures by the criteria of mainstream political science at the time – Lasswell wrote voluminously on mass culture. In books, chapters, and articles littered throughout his long career, Lasswell claimed that the products and practices of popular culture played an increasingly significant role in the modern American political environment. Thus, before the arrival of Critical Theory and other Continental perspectives to the American academy in the 1940s and 1950s – perspectives that frequently chastised domestic

political scholarship for its obliviousness to the cultural and psychological embeddedness of (liberal democratic) politics – there was Harold Lasswell. Though certainly not as condemnatory as these later émigré scholars, Lasswell represents one of the first and, still, one of the few political scientists/theorists to offer a comprehensive, consistent, and methodologically robust analysis of the political significance of mass culture. A thorough investigation of his work on this topic therefore provides a fitting entrée into the broader ambitions of this dissertation.

In the following, then, I describe Lasswell’s conceptualization of popular culture as composed of three basic arguments: it was (a) a *tool* by which (b) suggestive or otherwise powerful *symbols* were conveyed, in order to (c) *manipulate* the thoughts and actions of its consumers.⁷ Put succinctly, Lasswell viewed culture as a repository of codes that could be – and often were – deployed by political elites to elicit desired public opinions.

This functional⁸ interpretation meant that Lasswell conceived popular culture as politically significant, but not because the domain *actively shaped* politics. That is, popular culture could do political things, but only at the behest of actors or forces working beyond or outside culture itself. In this sense, the domain was not a practice *of* politics, but was rather determined *by* politics. As I will suggest, this position reflected and also helped justify Lasswell’s own ambivalent assessment of the problems and possibilities of democracy in the modern world.

⁷ “Consumers” is my own term: Lasswell usually referred to audiences of popular culture simply as “the masses” (1933; 1935b)

⁸ Throughout this dissertation, I will use the terms “function,” “functioning,” and “functional” to refer to the way in which culture works or operates as a political phenomenon. In asking how popular culture functions politically, then, I will be investigating what popular culture “does” politically, i.e. what kinds of political activities, tasks, or roles popular culture performs. As such, my understanding of the term functional has nothing to do with the specialized language of functionalism as it was developed in the social sciences in the early twentieth century.

Before elaborating this reading in detail, however, I want to first retrace the intellectual path Lasswell trod in order to arrive at this particular functional description of popular culture, focusing especially on his amalgamation of Dewey, Merriam, Freud, and Marx.⁹ This initial contextual account is important, because it sets the stage – in both this chapter and the next – for a reconsideration of Lasswell’s work on culture in terms of Deweyan pragmatism and Frankfurt School Critical Theory. Of course, conventional disciplinary knowledge suggests there is little to reconsider here. Lasswell’s allegiance to Deweyan pragmatism has been widely noted, as has the Frankfurt School’s intense dislike of the philosophy, which its members saw as an impoverished twin of positivist social science. Yet I believe the origins and influences behind Lasswell’s interpretation of mass culture tell a rather different story. The historical record in fact shows that the connection between Dewey and Lasswell was not as strong as many believe, and that the separation between the Frankfurt School and Lasswell on mass culture is not as clear as is usually assumed, due largely to a shared fascination with Freud and Marx. Prefacing my substantive analysis of Lasswell’s conceptualization of mass culture with its intellectual history is crucial, then, as it provides a preliminary account of how two distinctly divergent political theoretical projects – Chicago School positivism and Frankfurt School Critical Theory – developed remarkably similar explanations of the political significance of mass culture.

⁹ While a comprehensive personal and intellectual biography of Harold Lasswell has yet to be written, several excellent overviews of his life and work have been published since his retirement in 1970. See, for instance, Almond (1987), Marvick (1977), Muth (1990), Rosten (1969), and Smith (1969) for especially good biographical portraits of Lasswell. Easton (1950), Eulau (1969), and Farr, Hacker, and Kazez (2006) offer more detailed accounts of Lasswell’s intellectual influences and ambitions. As such, I will only provide a brief biographical sketch here, and will focus particularly on the origins and influences regarding Lasswell’s interest in culture and media.

CONSTRUCTING A CONCEPTUAL MODEL: DEWEY, MERRIAM, FREUD, AND MARX

Lasswell was born and raised in rural Illinois, the son of a Presbyterian minister and high school teacher (Smith 1969, 42). Despite his relatively humble origins, Lasswell's parents and educators offered him an intellectually stimulating environment and encouraged his scholarly activities (Muth 1990, 2). Later in life, Lasswell even claimed that his interest in the "symbolic environment" and its implications for both elites and masses was his attempt to carry on, in a secularized way, his father's career as a preacher (Janowitz 1969, 157). In high school, Lasswell read widely, and took a particular interest in social and political philosophy via the writings of Havelock Ellis and Karl Marx. During this time, Lasswell was also able to secure a personal introduction to John Dewey, who apparently had a profound and lasting effect on him. As Marvick notes, the American philosopher would become "the intellectual whom Lasswell... was most deeply influenced by" (Marvick 1977, 18). The question of how compatible Lasswell's work on culture is with Deweyan pragmatism will become an important one as this dissertation progresses, therefore it is worth cataloging some preliminary evidence concerning the relationship between Dewey and Lasswell.

Lasswell's Dewey

As Marvick and others observe (Muth 1990; Smith 1969), it is clear that Dewey and other pragmatists – primarily George Herbert Mead – had a meaningful impact on the young Lasswell. The first meeting between Dewey and Lasswell when the latter was in high school is noteworthy, as is the fact that Lasswell took one or more classes with Mead while at Chicago. Through his connection to Mead, Lasswell was even able to re-introduce himself to Dewey, and apparently conversed with the philosopher on multiple occasions during his time as an undergraduate

(Marvick 1977, 21-22; Smith 1969, 52). Besides these personal encounters, Dewey shows up by name in Lasswell's printed work, though not as often or extensively as one might expect were Dewey indeed as significant to Lasswell as his biographers claim. In Lasswell's first published volume, a co-authored textbook on American labor attitudes that appeared in 1924, "students were encouraged to read Dewey" in addition to "Park, Lippmann, Veblen, and a paraphrased version of a popular account of Freud" (Marvick 1977, 20). After this, though, Dewey vanished from the indexes of Lasswell's major texts, including *Propaganda Technique in the World War* (1927a),¹⁰ *Psychopathology and Politics* (1930), *World Politics and Personal Insecurity* (1935d), and *Politics: Who Gets What, When, How* (1936). He appeared again in 1941, in *Democracy Through Public Opinion*, but only once, and in cursory fashion.¹¹ Nine years later, Dewey emerged in the co-authored volume, *Power and Society: A Framework for Political Inquiry*, but, again, only once, and in a footnote (1950, xii).

The most significant tribute Lasswell paid to Dewey in print came very late in Lasswell's career, shortly after he retired from Yale. In the preface to his 1971 book, *A Pre-View of Policy Sciences*, Lasswell stated that the work was "a contemporary adaptation of the general approach to public policy that was recommended by John Dewey and his colleagues in the development of American pragmatism" (xiii-xiv). Despite the fact that Dewey appears nowhere else in the book, Marvick and others cite this sentence as the most significant evidence of Dewey's impact on

¹⁰ It should be noted that while Dewey is not in the index of *Propaganda Technique*, he is mentioned once, in passing, in a long list of authors who engaged German culture prior to the outbreak of World War I (Lasswell 1927a, 93).

¹¹ "From the wisdom of Confucius to the wisdom of John Dewey," Lasswell ruminated, "the social heritage has been enriched by definition, comment, example, exhortation" (1941a, 130). See also Farr (1999b) for a comprehensive discussion of Dewey's reception by Lasswell and other prominent contemporary political scientists, including Merriam.

Lasswell.¹² In this account, here Lasswell openly admitted his esteem for Dewey's normative and methodological project, in particular his conceptualization of knowledge as a tool with which to solve common problems commonsensically (Marvick 1977, 17).

Yet if Lasswell was as much a Deweyan pragmatist as Marvick, Muth, and Smith maintain, there is still some question as to how or to what extent Lasswell actually employed Dewey's philosophy. Indeed, if Dewey was the most influential figure in Lasswell's intellectual development, why does the philosopher turn up so rarely in Lasswell's work, and, when he does, why is he treated so cursorily, even in the text supposedly most indebted to American pragmatism? As Farr (1999b) notes, there are several plausible explanations. Perhaps Lasswell felt extended treatment of Dewey's thought was irrelevant to his immediate aims. Perhaps Lasswell did not want to be too easily identified as a Deweyan or a pragmatist. Or perhaps Lasswell had "so absorbed Dewey's influence that references were unnecessary" (Farr 1999b, 536). Regardless, what is clear is that "it is an act of interpretation just to get Dewey on the screen in any significant way, and other aspects of Lasswell's numerous projects seem far removed from Dewey's own" (Farr 1999b, 536). As I suggest later in this chapter, a conspicuous example of such removal can be found in Lasswell's political theorization of culture. For now, however, I leave the question of Lasswell's use of Dewey as an open problem, and return to the origins and development of Lasswell's interest in mass media and propaganda via Merriam, Freud, and Marx.¹³

¹² See also Muth (1990, 3). I would also argue that Lasswell's tribute to Dewey in the preface to *Policy Sciences* does not appear quite as absolute as Marvick suggests. Lasswell does note that Dewey has been an inspiration to his work on the "policy sciences approach through the years," but says nothing to imply that Dewey was a foundational or formative influence in his intellectual development in general (1971, xiii).

¹³ I return to a discussion of Lasswell's interpretation of Dewey on pp. 56-59.

Lasswell's Merriam

Upon graduating from high school, Lasswell matriculated at the University of Chicago, where he specialized mainly in economics. As an undergraduate, he collaborated with a junior economics professor to produce his aforementioned first publication, a textbook on labor attitudes (Marvick 1977, 19).¹⁴ Shortly after his graduation, in 1922, he was admitted into Chicago's Ph.D. program in political science, and placed under the mentorship of Charles Merriam. At this time, Merriam was not yet the chair of Chicago's Department of Political Science (he would be elevated into the position the following year). Still, by the time Lasswell gained entry into the Ph.D. program there – a process that Merriam encouraged and oversaw in Lasswell's final undergraduate years – the older scholar was well on his way to implementing his programmatic vision for a new, scientific approach to political analysis (Smith 1969, 53).

Merriam himself was not new to the University of Chicago, having been on the faculty since his own graduation from Columbia University in 1900. For much of his early career, however, Merriam had focused more on participating in politics – he unsuccessfully ran for mayor of Chicago, twice – than studying it. Yet by the early 1920s, Merriam recommitted himself to academia, and in 1921 he published the first of several essays and addresses outlining his plans for the substantial methodological reform of his discipline (Heaney and Hansen 2006, 590).¹⁵ The core of Merriam's plan involved the adoption and adaptation of advanced research methods that had been developed in fields such as psychology, statistics, and biology (1921,

¹⁴ While the bulk of *Labor Attitudes and Problems*, co-authored with Willard Atkins, was written while Lasswell was an undergraduate, the textbook was not published until 1924, after Lasswell had entered Chicago's Ph.D. program.

¹⁵ See also Merriam ([1923] 1993). For additional accounts of Merriam's early career at Chicago, see Almond (2004), Karl (1974), Monroe (2004), and *The New York Times*' 1953 obituary for the late chair ("Dr. C. E. Merriam").

175).¹⁶ The benefits of such an approach, Merriam argued, were twofold. Not only would this research produce increasingly objective accounts of political reality; in so doing, it would also distance the discipline from normative and interpretive argumentation, which was simply not the proper remit of any science, political, natural, or otherwise.

Already interested to some degree in watchwords of pragmatism such as “science,” “instrumentalism,” and “problem solving,” the young Lasswell was taken with Merriam’s vision, which Merriam himself of course encouraged. In implementing his programmatic reforms during the early to mid-1920s, Merriam worked hard to create department unified under his vision. This he accomplished in two ways. The first was by handpicking many of the department’s graduate students and new faculty hires, the latter of which he often selected from the ranks the former.¹⁷ Given this remarkable degree of control, Merriam was able to create a coterie in the department, which included Merriam, Lasswell, Leonard White, and Harold Gosnell, was a tight-knit, collaborative group (Almond 2004, 92). Merriam’s second strategic move, which Lasswell would have witnessed first-hand upon his entry into the Ph.D. program, was to completely reorganize the department’s graduate curriculum.

¹⁶ This is not to say that Merriam’s predecessors never spoke or conceived of the study of politics in terms of “science” (see Gunnell [1995] and Heaney and Hansen [2006]). Some of the earliest figures in the discipline, including Burgess (who was Merriam’s mentor at Columbia University), made mention of a scientific approach to the study of politics. In 1909, APSA president Harvard professor A. Lawrence Lowell urged members to “borrow from the natural sciences and seek ‘scientific knowledge of the physiology of politics’” (Heaney and Hansen 2006, 590; quoting Lowell 1910, 3). What was unprecedented about Merriam’s vision was the extent to which he believed political science could adopt the methods of its natural counterpart, as well his determination and actual success in steering the research activities of an entire department toward his stated goals and methods.

¹⁷ This practice was only slightly less unusual in the 1920s than it is today. Merriam was able to accomplish this kind of internal hiring, however, because of assurances given to him by the University of Chicago that, as chairman, he would be granted considerable freedom of action to shape the department as he saw fit (“Scope Note”).

As late as 1921, Chicago divided political science into five subfields: theory, politics and administration, public law, private law, and international law and diplomacy (Heaney and Hansen 2006, 591). These research divisions were holdovers from the department's earlier, more traditional juristic approach. After 1923, however, these subfields and their attendant seminars were significantly altered or simply erased in order to better emphasize Merriam's pursuit of the "scientific study of political behavior" (Heaney and Hansen 2006, 591). The most notable course additions were geared toward the design and development of empirical research methodology. In the 1929-1930 academic year, for instance, Merriam, White, and Gosnell formed "Introduction to Political Research." This ran alongside other classes such as "Systematic Politics" and the "Scope and Method of Political Science," the latter of which Merriam taught "continuously from 1920 until his retirement in 1940" (Heaney and Hansen 2006, 591-592).¹⁸ In offering these modules, Merriam and his cohort effectively institutionalized a new subfield dedicated exclusively to the invention and refinement of research techniques.

Alongside its new methodological curriculum, the School also developed a series of courses dedicated to the study of everyday political activity and behavior. This group of seminars served primarily as testing grounds for the department's latest research models, but also underscored Merriam's belief in a more detailed, concrete conception of political reality. Representative courses in this vein included "The Electorate," "Research in Politics and Citizenship," and "Comparative Political Parties" (Heaney and Hansen 2006, 591).

¹⁸ Heaney and Hansen note that 71.9% of those completing their political science doctorates at Chicago took Merriam's "Scope" course, and that "[e]very graduating student who did not take Scope and Method took one of his other courses" (2006, 592). Statistics like these explain how Merriam was able to form such a focused, integrated department, as well as the influence of his and his colleagues' methods on later behavioralist scholars. Many of the leading members of that next generation of political scientists, such as Gabriel Almond, V.O. Key, Herbert Simon, and David Truman, were educated directly by Merriam and his colleagues.

During his time as a graduate student at the University of Chicago, Lasswell would have been fully immersed in the development of Merriam's new "scientific" program. Guidance from Merriam himself would have come both directly – Merriam was Lasswell's dissertation chair – and indirectly, in the form of a broader departmental culture and philosophy. It is therefore not unreasonable and perhaps more obvious to argue that it was in fact Charles Merriam, not John Dewey, who played a larger role in Lasswell's early intellectual development and scholarship. Not only did Merriam handpick Lasswell as his student while the latter was still an undergraduate, but, upon entry into the Ph.D. program, Lasswell was quickly initiated into a culture and curriculum focused on cementing the Chicago School approach.

Perhaps the most persuasive evidence of Merriam's impact on Lasswell's study of popular culture, however, is the fact that it was Merriam himself who urged Lasswell to pursue a dissertation on the political uses and implications of propaganda, especially as it had been developed in Europe during the First World War (Smith 1969, 55-57).¹⁹ Such a topic would likely have appeared attractive to both Lasswell and Merriam because it filled a gap in Chicago School research, which, until that point, had been focused primarily on the domestic political environment.²⁰ Leonard White, for instance, was interested in public administration, while

¹⁹ Marvick, Muth, and Smith all stress Merriam's influence on Lasswell's research on propaganda during his graduate years. Smith in particular notes several significant facts: That Merriam's thoughts on European politics "were to have great implications for Lasswell," that Lasswell's two articles from 1925 on Prussian citizenship and propaganda were "very close to Merriam's own experiences and concerns," and that Lasswell's dissertation "reflected many of Merriam's interests" (1969, 56). Marvick also claims that, while at Chicago, Lasswell was known mainly as "a versatile protégé of Merriam's," and that his work on wartime propaganda and political personality types were extensions of Merriam's "pet ideas" (1977, 26-27). In any case, even if Merriam did not directly suggest the topic of propaganda to Lasswell, it is certain that the department chairman significantly shaped the methodological and substantive parameters of the topic, and that he was instrumental in securing research funding for Lasswell, which the latter used to underwrite two different trips to Europe.

²⁰ It is also possible that Merriam's encouragement of Lasswell stemmed in part from Merriam's own participation in the Committee on Public Information during World War I.

Howard Gosnell studied race and urban politics. Quincy Wright worked on American foreign relations and the causes of war, but had not touched propaganda or mass communication patterns. Given his duties and interests as chair of the department, Merriam himself was not a particularly active scholar, but, even so, his research interests in methodology and the history of political thought did not engage propaganda studies.

With Merriam's support, then, Lasswell chose to undertake a dissertation on the political significance of wartime propaganda. His first step, in 1923-1924, was to spend fifteen months in Europe researching mass communication and the dissemination of news and information during World War I. He returned to the Continent in the summer of 1925, spending considerable time in the Prussian State Library looking for data on "international attitudes," public opinion, and civic education (Muth 1990, 9). Upon his return from these two research trips, Lasswell published two articles (1925a; 1925b), both of which were carefully researched surveys of mass political communication, modeled on the empirical methodology Lasswell had been studying in Chicago. Though "[t]he methods used were rather simple," the essays were some of the "earliest examples of the technique that was to become known as 'content analysis' or 'quantitative semantics,' and that, in far more elaborated terms, was to make Lasswell famous in later years" (Smith 1969, 56). Methodologically speaking, then, the period between 1923-1925 represents Lasswell's first attempt to apply Merriam's scientific research techniques in the field. Substantively speaking, however, it also marks Lasswell's first sustained engagement of aspects of popular culture and mass media.

In 1927, Lasswell completed his doctorate degree and published his dissertation, *Propaganda Technique in the World War*. The book was essentially an extension of the research and themes he had broached in his 1925 articles. Shortly after the completion of his dissertation,

Merriam hired Lasswell as an assistant professor, and, in 1928-1929, the latter returned to Europe with the help of a grant from the Social Science Resource Council. This time, Lasswell's trip was significant less because of the research he did there than because of the relationships he developed with several leading Continental scholars and intellectuals. As a result of the many meetings and discussions he had on this trip, Lasswell resolved to incorporate into his conceptual toolbox perhaps the two most prominent figures of European thought at the time: Freud and Marx.

Lasswell's Freud

Of the two thinkers, it was undoubtedly Freud who most enticed Lasswell. Thanks to Merriam, Lasswell had been introduced to and taken an active interest in political psychology whilst at Chicago. It is therefore unsurprising that the most significant relationships Lasswell developed while in Europe were with prominent Freudians, including Adolf Adler, Anna Freud, Hans Kelsen, Sandor Ferenczi, and Karen Horney (Muth 1990, 10; Smith 1969, 62-63). Smith also notes that Lasswell met Erich Fromm during this time, though neither Marvick nor Muth mention Fromm as one of Lasswell's European associates. If true, however, it might help explain the warm reception Fromm later received in Chicago prior to the emigration of the Frankfurt School.²¹ In any case, what is clear is that, after 1928, Lasswell took an active interest in the study and application of psychoanalysis. That same year he himself even underwent analysis in Berlin with Theodor Reik, a first-generation disciple of Freud (Smith 1969, 57).

With respect to contemporaneous trends in American social science, Lasswell's enthusiasm for Freudian psychoanalysis was radical, even for the progressive research methods

²¹ See Chapter Three for further discussion.

of Merriam and the Chicago School.²² Though Merriam had encouraged the study of political psychology and personality types, he had also always stressed the importance of empirical observation – of things “in the world.” From a sober scientific perspective, Freud – with his talk of unconscious drives and desires – could be interpreted as something of a mystic. Lasswell, however, saw no incompatibility between these two approaches (nor, incidentally, did Freud himself). For Lasswell, psychoanalysis was simply a new, exciting tool for the empirically oriented social scientist. Precisely because it sought to explain the psychological *origins* of observable behavior, Lasswell believed psychoanalysis could be used to produce even more detailed and robust social scientific studies. Indeed, given sufficient training and detailed enough psychological records, analysts could begin tracing all political and economic behavior back to “the nursery,” “the bedroom,” or “childhood sexual and excretory experiences and reveries” (Smith 1969, 59). Psychoanalysis would not mystify the scientific study of politics developed by Merriam, then. On the contrary, in taking account of a “whole network of interpersonal contacts generally thought of as ‘private,’” it could actually expand and deepen the discipline’s purview (Smith 1969, 59). Psychoanalysis thus held great potential for social scientific research, particularly with respect to those questions Lasswell had raised but could not fully answer in his previous work on propaganda. Why, for instance, did political elites resort to “duplication and irrationality” in moments of crisis (Smith 1969, 57)? Perhaps more puzzling, why were masses so willing to go along with the irrational decisions of their elites? In other words,

²² Lasswell’s interest in Freud would have been unusual enough, but was compounded by the fact that Lasswell envisioned himself as an actual practitioner of psychoanalysis. According to Marvick, Lasswell “scandalized the more orthodox psychiatrists in Chicago by analyzing volunteers (some were fully his patients, although none was considered more than slightly neurotic) and measuring the concomitant physiological changes. He ventured to record verbalizations, pulse rate, skin resistance, and body movement in an ‘intuitively controlled’ but also calculatedly stressful interview” (1977, 27).

what were the functional mechanisms that made propaganda – especially when disseminated through mass culture and media – so effective?

Answering these questions occupied Lasswell in his next major work, *Psychopathology and Politics* (1930). It was here Lasswell first stated his famous formula, $p \} d \} r = P$, where P (“political man”) was determined by the expression of private motives (p) displaced onto public objects (d) unconsciously rationalized in terms of public interest (r). This explanation, which Lasswell restated in several forms over the remainder of his career,²³ would become a guiding formula for his studies of culture and media.

A second but related outcome of Lasswell’s newfound interest in psychoanalysis was his assertion that political science should dedicate itself to the active prevention of future political conflicts. Doubtless some portion of Lasswell’s call for a “preventive” science of politics can be attributed to his reading of Dewey, who often spoke of social melioration and “problem solving” (Lasswell 1930, 197).²⁴ But in *Psychopathology and Politics* and later writings, especially those concerned with analyses of popular culture and mass media, Lasswell mainly saw conflict prevention as a product of the successful application of psychoanalytic methods (and therefore distinct from pragmatism).²⁵ For instance, Lasswell spoke of the need to reduce the “level of strain and maladaptation in society,” and to help mitigate the “‘discomfort of civilization’ of which Freud recently wrote” (1930, 197; 199). Later readers of *Psychopathology*, such as Heinz Eulau,

²³ The most extensive reconstructions of this position appeared in *World Politics and Personal Insecurity and Politics*.

²⁴ Dewey’s most well-known statements on social problems and melioration appear in *The Public and its Problems* ([1927] 1984b), though this was a constitutive component of his thought throughout his career. See Chapter Three for further discussion.

²⁵ See, for instance, “The Propagandist Bids for Power” (1939), “Radio as an Instrument of Reducing Personal Insecurity” (1941b), “The Structure and Function of Communication in Society” (1948b), or the much later essay, “Freedom and Responsibility,” which appeared in the edited volume, *The Future of Commercial Television: 1965-1975* (1965).

observed that the book inaugurated Lasswell's "strong and lasting commitment to political science as a therapeutic enterprise" (1969, 17). Similarly, Smith notes that the purpose of the text was to depict "society as a patient," and to demand a new class of "social doctors" made up of "political scientists, sociologists, economists, teachers, judges, attorneys, and all others in positions of authoritative decision-making" to be trained in "preventive mental hygiene" (1969, 60-61).

Therapeutic language was far afield from that of Dewey.²⁶ Whatever his pragmatist leanings, Lasswell's "preventive" project was built around a definitively psychoanalytic framework. The underlying logic of his approach was that if social scientists could understand how elites and masses functioned psychologically – that is, how society projected private fears and desires onto public objects – then it stood to reason that social scientists could also help channel such displacements into more self-conscious, less destructive manifestations. Analogously, if mass culture could be effectively appropriated to promote war, duplicity, and paranoia (as he had shown in *Propaganda Technique*), then it could and should also be used to convey messages of harmony, dialogue, and social adaptation. In this sense, Lasswell's idea of preventive politics was in effect a kind of psychotherapy for the modern public. And it was here, on the issue of adapting the average individual his or her social environment, that Lasswell took an interest in – but ultimately diverged from – Marx(ism).²⁷

²⁶ Though Dewey sometimes spoke of "experts," but he always treated this category with ambivalence if not hostility, especially when speaking of it in relation to politics ([1927] 1984b, 312-313). It is also true that early in his career Dewey took an interest in psychology, but he never approached psychoanalysis in any detail. In any case, similar to his treatment of experts, Dewey was adamant that "psychology will never tell us just what to do ethically, nor just how to do it" (1900, 124). See Westhoff (1995) for further discussion Dewey's treatment of both these issues.

²⁷ I use this parenthetical addition since Lasswell often collapsed criticisms of contemporary Marxism – and especially orthodox Marxism – into criticisms of Marx himself. See, for instance, Lasswell's 1933 essay, "The Strategy of Revolutionary and War Propaganda."

Lasswell's Marx(ism)

As with Freud and psychoanalysis, Lasswell had been engaged Marxist thought during his trip to Europe during 1928-1929. Unlike his reception of Freud, however, Lasswell treated Marx with ambivalence. This is not to say that Lasswell rejected Marx or Marxism *per se*. In fact, given Lasswell's early interest in labor attitudes, as well as his increasing fascination with the manipulation of mass consciousness by elites, Lasswell acknowledged the German philosopher as perhaps the most influential theorist of modernity. As Lasswell read him, Marx's overarching claim that political unrest in Western society was intensifying due to unequal "distribution of rewards and deprivations" was undeniable (Marvick 1977, 27). But Lasswell also sensed that Marx(ism) could benefit from precisely the kind political (psycho)analysis Lasswell had developed in *Psychopathology and Politics*. Upon his return from Europe, then, Lasswell – now convinced of the "general intellectual superiority of intellectual life in Europe" – began assessing yet another Continental figure relatively unknown to his colleagues (Smith 1969, 63).

By 1932, Lasswell felt sufficiently able to express his interpretations of Marx(ism) in public, which he did in a series of lectures from that year (Marvick 1977, 27-28). These talks eventually formed the core of his 1933 essay, "The Strategy of Revolutionary and War Propaganda," and were again reconstructed in *World Politics and Personal Insecurity* (Lasswell 1933; Marvick 1977, 28; Smith 1969, 66). In both of these texts, Lasswell was careful to open his discussions of Marx and Engels (the latter of whom he never clearly distinguished from Marx

himself²⁸) with a measure of praise and admiration. For instance, he found their “singularly comprehensive theory” of the development of Western society stimulating, if also controversial (1933, 196). Innovative, too, was their use of copious amounts of non-traditional research material, including “books, newspapers, periodicals, manuscript documents, and general observation” (Lasswell 1935d, 22-24). The sheer volume of data they employed gave their arguments, which claimed to establish “the total meaning of the developing situation for social values,” an air of incontrovertible authority (Lasswell 1935d, 24).

Most impressive about Marx and Engels, however, was their creation of a revolutionary discourse that proved irresistible to large numbers of the European public. In Lasswell’s view, Marx and Engels were *the* master symbol manipulators, which meant that their theoretical models and exhaustive research methods were actually less impressive than their achievements as propagandists. In fact, it was precisely the style of their work – their clever interweaving of historical narrative, theory, and data – that made Marxism so attractive to the disaffected masses. In creating an aura of erudition around their utopian theory of inevitable social transformation, Marx and Engels had effectively embedded subconsciously stimulating symbols behind the veneer of a rational justificatory framework (Lasswell 1933, 190-191; 196-197; Lasswell 1935d, 128-137. This manipulation, Lasswell suggested, was accomplished primarily through rhetorical device and theoretical sleights of hand, including elaborate explanations of the “transitory nature of the present social order,” redefinitions of the current “social environment” as “immoral and hostile,” and purposefully “ambiguous” descriptions of a future utopian society (Lasswell 1933, 202-207). Such strategies accomplished three primary objectives. First, they allowed the reader

²⁸ In fairness to Lasswell, this was a fairly common practice in the American academy at the time. Dewey, for one, also never fully separated his understanding of Marxism from Engels’ more reductive interpretations. For further discussion, see Farr (1999a).

to project his or her own personal anxiety and self-hatred onto an external object, i.e. an “oppressive” society. Second, they assuaged the reader that his or her personal pain, while the fault of society, would eventually pass away because society itself was in the process of an unavoidable transformation. Finally, since the direction of this transformation went relatively unspecified by Marx and Engels, the reader was encouraged to cast the ideal communist society of the future in terms of individual desires and personal fantasies. All this, Lasswell argued, was presented in such a way – i.e. “objectively” or “scientifically” – that the communist convert would remain unaware that s/he was simply displacing personal fantasies into the public sphere. Given such an adept propaganda campaign, it was no surprise to Lasswell that the work of Marx and Engels had come to dominate contemporary revolutionary discourse: “No competing proletarian symbolism rose to such heights of compulsive construction; no rival was able to offer self-determination in utopia in the guise of overwhelming external coercion” (Lasswell 1933, 209).

But precisely because they were such effective propagandists, Lasswell could not accept Marx and Engels as responsible social scientists. Their work, while it contained several general social truths, was essentially an advertising campaign presented in the guise of philosophy. It was as a sober advocate for the *scientific* study of politics, then, that Lasswell criticized Marx for “deviat[ing] from sound political analysis” when he “foretold of the doom of the state.” Such hyperbole was merely “a verbal concession to the anarchists and to the propagandistic advantage of rendering the ‘class-less’ society as seductive as possible” (1935d, 22 fn. 2).

Even worse, Lasswell seemed unsure whether Marx and Engels actually understood how psychologically manipulative their analyses were. Their entire framework, he argued, suffered from an inability to self-analyze, to subject itself to the kind of auto-critique Lasswell had drawn

from his reading of Freud and psychoanalysis. And for good reason: were it to do so the core of Marxism's critical project would be revealed as nothing more than the displacement of private desires onto public objects. In its current form, then, Marxism was essentially irrational. Encouraging individuals to project their own psychological traumas onto society at large, Marx and his followers clung to a destructive, rather than a preventive, vision of politics (Lasswell 1935d, 24-26).

Lasswell's appreciation for Marxist analysis was in this sense backhanded (at least from a Marxist perspective). According to Lasswell, political science needed to heed Marx, but not because he offered a useful program for the scientific study of political behavior. Instead, the philosopher was important because he represented the most influential public relations expert of the modern era. Whether he realized it or not, Marx had shown how powerful mass communication could be when suffused with symbols, signs, and messages that activated unconscious desires, turning them toward public expression.

The Four Pillars of Lasswell's Thought

Given the general anti-communist attitude in America at this time, Lasswell's critical psychoanalytic interpretation of Marx was well received at Chicago and beyond. By the mid-1930s he had even "gained a local reputation" for his "critical but informed" treatment of socialist thought (Marvick 1977, 28). But Lasswell's amalgamation of Freud and Marx – or, rather, Freudian reading of Marx – was also a significant moment in terms of his general career trajectory. With these two figures sufficiently "mastered," at least to his own satisfaction, by 1935 Lasswell had reached something of a terminus in his scholarly development.

This was certainly evident given his professional achievements to date. At age thirty-three, the Chicago scholar had already published two major works, *Psychopathology* and *World Politics*, along with a dizzying number of articles, reviews, and book chapters. Not one to rest on his laurels, he was also preparing *Politics: Who Gets What, When, How* for publication the following year, which, when it appeared, instantly became a “small classic” (Muth 1990, 13). Due in no small part these accomplishments, the collective reputation of the Chicago School was at its zenith during this time (Heaney and Hansen 2006, 595). Merriam was still the guiding force of the department, but the success of Lasswell and others, including Gosnell and White, had greatly enhanced the stature of the group.

In addition to these professional triumphs, Lasswell, having completed his incorporation of both Freud and Marx, had now effectively branded his own unique intellectual approach. It was a conceptual framework based on four core pillars: Dewey, Merriam, Freud, and Marx. I have suggested – contrary to some of Lasswell’s biographers – that the proto-behavioralist, semi-positivist vision of Merriam was the primary strut of this structure. Indeed, before, during, and after his engagements with Dewey, Freud, and Marx, Lasswell continued to pledge allegiance to the scientific study of politics, which he defined, following Merriam, as the “state[ment] of conditions” rather than the “justifi[cation of] preferences” (1936, 3). It is for this reason that Lasswell’s enduring legacy is that of a “political behavioralist who exemplified and encouraged empirical field-work, cross-disciplinary methods, and quantitative methods when it was unpopular to do so” (Marvick 1977, 4).²⁹

²⁹ Lasswell would not likely have quarreled with this description. His definitions of politics and political science, when offered, routinely emphasized systematic analysis, data collection, and the construction of practical solutions. I have already quoted from *Politics* his definition of the “science of politics,” which he opposed to value-laden approach of “political philosophy” (1936, 3). Lasswell repeated such

Freudian psychoanalysis represented the second major component of Lasswell's intellectual development, and, after Merriam, was doubtless the most influential. Through Freud, Lasswell saw an opportunity to expand Merriam's scientific vision for politics, employing systematic studies of psychosocial development to better explain existing political behaviors and attitudes. Such knowledge could then be used, Lasswell argued, for socially productive ends, i.e. the construction of a preventive or therapeutic politics. Of course, Lasswell's adoption of a psychoanalytic approach entailed certain methodological commitments. Much like Freud, Lasswell came to understand politics as a domain replete with obscure symbols, signs, and messages. Hence one needed to approach the field like a coded text: expert knowledge was needed to understand the psychological origins of political behavior, and to help prescribe psychotherapeutic remedies.

Dewey, as the third column, provided Lasswell's proto-behavioralist methods with some sense of philosophical validation, in two senses. First, Dewey appeared to affirm, for both Lasswell and the Chicago School as a whole, that knowledge was a tool to be applied in the service of practical, not ideal ends. In addition, Dewey confirmed that the object of social science – indeed, of all science – should be the amelioration of problems common to everyday experience. Both statements, Lasswell believed, fit perfectly with Merriam's instrumentalist vision for political science.

statements throughout his career. For instance, in a late work, *The Future of Political Science*, he claims: “[B]y politics we mean the largest arena of interaction in which goals are clarified, degrees of achievement are described, conditioning factors are analyzed, future developments are projected, and policy alternatives are invented and evaluated” (1963, 241).

Marx(ism), the fourth and final pillar, served Lasswell as a kind of negative heuristic (to borrow Lakatosian terminology). That is, Marx illustrated the danger in advocating desired political preferences absent objective analysis. Without a scientific understanding of actual “conditions,” one risked sponsoring an ultimately irrational and therefore destructive politics (Lasswell 1936, 3). Nevertheless, Marx also usefully (if unintentionally) showed how susceptible modern publics were to psychological manipulation. Due to the increasing levels of “strain and maladaptation in society,” combined with the rising inequality of “rewards and deprivations,” the “masses” had become easy targets for modes of communication that preyed on subconscious fears and desires (Lasswell 1930, 197).

Given these four foundations of Lasswell’s intellectual development, one can see why the study of propaganda and mass communication first interested and then fully occupied him throughout his career.³⁰ In these fields Lasswell saw a vast network of symbols and signs that, given their pervasiveness in modern life, could convince, cajole, or manipulate society to believe and behave in any number of ways. The challenge facing the social scientist was to determine under what conditions such manipulation would prove effective, and to what social and political ends. It was these twin problems that motivated Lasswell’s many investigations of culture, media, and communication, from his first book on war propaganda to his late work on television programming. It is to a more detailed analysis of these writings that I now turn.

³⁰ This is not to say Lasswell was *primarily* or *solely* a theorist of propaganda. Alongside this topic, he produced comprehensive investigations of labor, law, public policy, human rights, and more besides. Nevertheless, it is fair to characterize propaganda as an abiding, if not central, concern of Lasswell’s life. For similar characterizations, see Eulau (1969), Farr (2006), Horwitz (1962), Janowitz (1969), and Marvick (1977).

INSTRUMENTS OF MASS MANIPULATION: LASSWELL AND POPULAR CULTURE

For Lasswell, propaganda was a phenomenon of especial importance in the modern world. In many ways its ubiquitous presence in contemporary society exemplified the degree to which social and political life had transformed since the mid-nineteenth century. Though it had become more interconnected, in Lasswell's view Western society had also become more unstable, modulating with great rapidity and unpredictability. Many of these changes could be traced back to industrial and technological innovation. Modern publics, newly enveloped by urban environments, enmeshed in bureaucratic state apparatuses, increasingly subject to global economic fluctuations, constantly bombarded with mass advertisements and other partisan information flows, were experiencing radically new configurations of communal life patterns.

Particularly vulnerable to these changes were traditional social networks based on personal contact and local knowledge. As Lasswell observed in one of his first essays on propaganda, in modern society “[i]mpersonality has supplanted personal loyalty to leaders. Literacy and the physical channels of communication have quickened the connection between those who rule and the ruled” (1927b, 631). This meant not only that “argument and persuasion” had replaced old-fashioned political tools like “violence and intimidation,” but also that publics were more dependent upon modern modes of media and communication for information and guidance (Lasswell 1927b, 631). Indeed, precisely because modern life was so unstable, so complex, so fast-paced, mass publics had become gradually more susceptible to subconscious signs or symbols that promised peace, security, and comfort. In contrast to pre-modern ages, then, when propaganda was only of “transitory importance” during periods of social unrest, today it was an “ever-present” feature of modern life given the high-constant level of “social

disorganization... precipitated by the rapid advent of technological changes” (Lasswell 1927b, 631).³¹

Of course, Lasswell was not alone in portraying the modern condition as a tenuous one. His arguments essentially reduplicated a popular narrative that he would have found present in Dewey, Freud, and Marx, among others.³² What was unique about Lasswell’s perspective, however, was his especial focus on mass propaganda technique. Dewey, Freud, and Marx had in their own ways commented on disruption, disorder, and instability as distinguishing features of modernity. But none had set to work on analyzing – in any rigorous way, at least – how these changes had affected the development of mass culture, and particularly the subdomain of mass media. Here Lasswell was closer to the work of contemporaries like Edward Bernays (1923; 1928) or Walter Lippmann (1922; 1925), who were producing pioneering work in the new field of public relations. Like these authors, Lasswell charged that intellectuals needed to come to grips with the central role psychological manipulation played in modern politics: How did political elites use channels of transmission to disseminate information? Were these projects effective in shaping the “value patterns of society,” particularly those concerning “safety, income, and deference” (Lasswell 1935d, 3)? Under what conditions were mass publics most susceptible to propaganda campaigns?

³¹ Lasswell expressed a similar sentiment in *Propaganda Technique*, published the same year as this APSR essay: “Certainly, there is reason for believing that the propagandist who works upon an industrialized people, is dealing with a more tense and mobile population than that which inhabits an agrarian state. Industrialism has apparently increased the danger from those secret mines which are laid by repression, for it has introduced both the monotony of machine tending, and the excitement of much secondary stimulation. The rhythm and clang of exacting machinery is no less characteristic of the industrial way of life, than the blazing array of billboards, window displays, movies, vaudevilles, and newspapers, which convey abundant and baffling possibilities of personal realization” (1927a, 191).

³² And which would appear again with a vengeance in the work of the Frankfurt School. See Chapter Two for further discussion.

Culture as Tool

These were the central questions motivating Lasswell in his doctoral thesis and first major work, *Propaganda Technique in the World War*. Unlike his later writings, which were often notoriously eclectic, the substantive and methodological boundaries of this early project were decidedly narrow: Lasswell insisted that his inquiry was simply an empirical survey of the propaganda strategies employed by belligerents in World War I. But the work was more than this. Between long and detailed descriptions of governmental bureaucracies, misinformation campaigns, and the shifting aims of leaders from both the Allies and Central Powers, Lasswell also began developing – quietly – an identifiable theoretical framework concerning propaganda and mass communication, which he would remain committed to throughout his career.

The outlines of this theoretical model Lasswell established in the opening chapter of *Propaganda Technique*, which he entitled, rather unassumingly, “The Matter in Hand.” As its name suggests, this short section was designed as a straightforward introduction to the book’s subject matter: it contained a brief literature review, a statement on the significance of the topic for students of politics, and a descriptive definition of the term propaganda itself. As Lasswell himself noted, the express intent of the chapter was simply to identify his object of study inductively, demarcating propaganda from other observable tactics such as coercive military pressure or economic interference (1927a, 9). As the chapter unfolded, however, something quite different from an inductive or empirically grounded definition of propaganda emerged. Here Lasswell fabricated an elaborate *theoretical* definition of his object of study, which relied upon tacit assumptions concerning the functional operation of propaganda and its mediums of conveyance, i.e. mass communication and popular culture.

Consider the following classification, worth quoting at length:

By propaganda is not meant the control of mental states by changing such objective conditions as the supply of cigarettes or the chemical composition of food. Propaganda does not even include the stiffening of moral[e] by a cool and confident bearing. It refers solely to the control of opinion by significant symbols, or, to speak more concretely and less accurately, by stories, rumours, reports, pictures and other forms of social communication. Propaganda is concerned with the management of opinions and attitudes by the direct manipulation of social suggestion rather than by altering other conditions in the environment or in the organism. (Lasswell 1927a, 8-9)

Lasswell assumed several arguments here, all of which were characteristic to his unique intellectual commitments at this period in his career. The first was that propaganda, as disseminated via channels of mass communication, has no immediate material effects; it operated on a purely psychological or ideological plane. The goal of propaganda is thus to intentionally *obscure* the consumer's understanding of objective reality, and political reality in particular. Second, propaganda achieves its obfuscating goal by deploying "significant *symbols*." These symbols, while not consciously apparent to the consumer, nevertheless prey in some way on certain psychological fears or desires. Third and finally, the channels that carry propagandistic messages (e.g. stories, newspaper reports, radio broadcasts, music, printed pictures or posters) are ultimately *tools* employed by the skilled propagandist to realize his or her aims. That is, the products of popular culture are purely instrumental: some elite or group of elites uses them to convey psychologically suggestive symbols, thereby manipulating the thought and behavior of the masses (Lasswell 1927a, 220).

This last notion of mass culture-as-tool was the most general of Lasswell's conclusions, and actually underwrote the first two, more specific depictions of propaganda as a conveyor of obfuscating symbols. More precisely, Lasswell's description of propaganda as a field that (a) used symbols to (b) manipulate the psyches of targeted audiences rested on (c) the larger theoretical argument that the objects of mass communication and culture were, quite literally, instruments to be applied by political elites to society at large. Thus cultural products – newspapers, films, radio shows – were conceived much like wrenches or screwdrivers: they were not actually part and parcel of the social machine, but were rather applied to it by expert mechanics. Before discussing Lasswell's depictions of culture as symbol conveyor and democratic propaganda, then, I want to first survey his basic characterization of culture-as-tool.

After 1927, Lasswell expanded his analysis of wartime propaganda to cover communication patterns in everyday social life. Writing for the magazine *The American Scholar* in 1939, for instance, Lasswell claimed that “advertising” was now the “mainstream of propaganda” (351). Indeed, “the most specialized propagandist” in modern society was no longer the government bureaucrat, but the “public relations counsel,” who had acquired considerable power in shaping social mores to fit desired consumption habits (Lasswell 1939, 352-353). As he had done in 1927, Lasswell maintained that the degree of social control achieved by media corporations, advertisers, and publicists derived from their technical mastery over the tools of their trade, i.e. the products and practices of mass communication and culture. Like the government propagandist, the “public relations counsel” recognized that popular objects like “[f]ilms,” or, indeed, “words of any kind,” could “inculcate attitudes and transmit *skill* in varying degrees” (1939, 354). As such, popular culture could be instrumentally *used* in order to

tweak consumer behavior, pushing her toward this lipstick brand, refining his taste in that sports car.

Two years later, Lasswell extended this line of thought in an article published in the English-language journal of the *Institut für Sozialforschung*,³³ but with a peculiar twist. Here he explored how the *political scientist* – following in the footsteps of the government propagandist and the public relations expert – might employ the tools of culture for his or her own ends. The substantive content of the essay’s argument will be explored in more detail in the following chapter, as will its rather surprising place of publication. But the title of the piece alone – “Radio as an Instrument of Reducing Personal Insecurity” – is worth calling attention to here. In the essay, Lasswell argued that if popular radio broadcasts could be used to inculcate consumer tastes and even mobilize populations for war, they could also be used to alleviate psychological maladies generated by unstable social and political conditions. Were political scientists to have any influence in modern society, Lasswell declared that they needed to achieve mastery over – in his words – the “instruments” of popular culture, and thereby promote a more harmonious and ostensibly democratic way of life (1941b, 64).

Lasswell remained wedded to this conceptualization of culture-as-tool throughout the 1940s. In his 1942 essay on “The Relation of Ideological Intelligence to Public Policy,” for instance, Lasswell argued that social science could quantify the degree to which democratic “thoughts and feelings” had permeated everyday social life by “examining the contents of the channels of mass communication” (27). Lasswell suggested that this research agenda proceed via a systematic analysis of the “usual instruments” of “ideological” control (1942b, 29). By

³³ Hereafter I refer to the *Institut* by its English title, the Institute for Social Research, or by its conventional colloquialisms, the “Frankfurt School” and “Critical Theory.”

“usual instruments,” Lasswell meant those objects that conveyed particular “thoughts and feelings” through symbolic manipulation, and which therefore managed the political disposition of the public. Such objects included “speeches, news conferences, news releases, magazine articles, photographic stills, newsreels, film shorts, feature films, leaflets, books, cartoons, charts and tables, broadcasts, plays, rumors, maps, exhibits, demonstrations, letters, telephone messages” (1942b, 29). Meant to be virtually exhaustive, this catalogue made clear how manipulable Lasswell saw the various products and practices of mass culture.

Four years later, Lasswell offered a comparable list of propaganda instruments in a co-authored volume on propaganda, communication, and public opinion. He and his colleagues argued that virtually all of popular culture was available for political use: “An all-inclusive census of the stream of public communication,” the authors wrote, “would survey all programs of all broadcasting stations in the world, all issues of all newspapers and periodicals, all newsreels, documentary and feature films, all posters, leaflets, emblems, insignia, all trade books, textbooks and lesson guides, to say nothing of all speeches, songs, theatrical performances, ceremonies, lectures, formal discussions, demonstrations and celebrations, and architectural and monumental expressions” (Smith, Lasswell, and Casey 1946, 1). Such products and practices, argued the authors, needed to be carefully analyzed because of their ability to “*influence mass attitudes on controversial issues*” (Smith, Lasswell, and Casey 1946, 1; emphasis in original). The language of culture-as-tool appeared yet again in 1948, in an essay devoted to “The Structure and Function of Communication in Society.” Here Lasswell noted that the “controllers of printing plants, broadcasting equipment, and other forms of fixed and specialized capital” were at an “enormous” political advantage given the degree of control they exercised over the “modern instruments of mass communication” (Lasswell 1948b, 42). Reiterated in all of these

articles was the notion that cultural objects were, literally, implements designed for the conveyance of suggestive symbols.

After 1947 and his move to Yale Law School, Lasswell published less frequently on issues of mass culture and propaganda, due largely to the end of the Second World War and his departure from the Office of War Information. Yet even when he returned to these topics, he remained firmly committed to the conceptual framework he had developed during the 1930s and 1940s. As late as 1965, Lasswell spoke of mass culture as a toolkit to be implemented by political elites and their expert advisers for the purposes of social engineering. That year, Lasswell gave a keynote speech to “influential men in the television industry, advertising agencies, sponsors and program package producers,” to help them “work, to think and to plan the future of commercial television” (Donner 1965, 1). In his remarks, Lasswell suggested that if guided by the proper authorities with proper intentions, television could positively “affect health, safety, and comfort” (Lasswell 1965, 114). Tracking ideas that he had developed as early as 1941 in his essay on radio and personal insecurity, Lasswell even postulated that television could mitigate mental illness by incorporating “built-in therapy” into its programming (1965, 113). To the very end of his career, then, Lasswell remained committed to a theoretical model that envisioned products and practices of popular culture as mechanistic instruments. As such, these objects were, quite literally, applied to the social machine, modifying its operation for better or worse.

Before moving on to consider how this notion of culture-as-tool underwrote Lasswell’s depictions of culture as symbol conveyor and psychological propaganda, it is worth asking how closely Lasswell’s instrumentalist understanding of popular culture accorded to Deweyan pragmatism. For Lasswell’s use of instrumentalist terminology was certainly inspired, to some

extent, by his reading and interpretation of Dewey. Indeed, for a time Dewey's own preferred term for his brand of pragmatism was "instrumentalism," and he expressed his understanding of knowledge as a tool for the solving of practical problems in all of his major texts, including *Human Nature and Conduct* ([1922] 2002), *The Public and Its Problems* ([1927] 1984b), and *The Quest for Certainty* ([1929] 1988).³⁴ Dewey's conception of knowledge-as-tool was widely disseminated in the American academy during the 1920s and 1930s, and was therefore familiar to many of Lasswell's contemporaries. Some pluralists – most notably Merriam – even tried to depict Dewey as a philosophical precursor to their own intellectual projects. Lasswell was not alone, then, in adopting Deweyan language for his own purposes (Farr 1999b).³⁵ But as so often happens in such cases, many political scientists, including Lasswell, employed an extremely reductive version of Dewey to fit their own needs.

Part of the blame for the discipline's mistranslation of Dewey must be attributed to Dewey himself, if not also to his popularizers and detractors: he redefined and qualified key terms like "instrumentalism" and "science" to such an extent that, in his hands, they were almost neologisms. When speaking of "science," for instance, Dewey was at pains to clarify that the term for him did not refer to a specialized field of knowledge accessible only to trained experts ([1927] 1984b, 337). In sharp contrast to political scientists like Lasswell and Merriam, who

³⁴ *Quest for Certainty*, for instance, describes "[k]nowing" as "itself a mode of practical action and is the way of interaction by which other natural interactions become subject to direction" (Dewey [1929] 1988, 86; emphasis in original). Accordingly, "scientific knowing is undertaken not so much for its own sake as in order to supply material for projecting a hypothesis about something less technical and of wider and more liberal application" (Dewey [1929] 1988, 86). In *Human Nature and Conduct*, Dewey attacked epistemological idealism by characterizing knowing as a practical impulse, akin to the desire to "aviate, to run a typewriter[,] or to write stories for magazines" ([1922] 2002, 185). Education or "knowledge-getting," was, as such, a practical and applied domain, a "definite occupation" (Dewey [1922] 2002, 186). In his most famous political work, *The Public and Its Problems*, Dewey equated political knowledge as the accumulation of "techniques and instrumentalities," which, when organized and codified, represented a "science" ([1927] 1984b, 336-337).

³⁵ See also my discussion of the Frankfurt School's reception of Dewey, in Chapter Three.

clearly envisioned political science as a highly specialized discipline of experts, Dewey meant a general attitude or approach to social inquiry. In negative terms, then, science entailed “freedom of control by routine, prejudice, dogma, unexamined tradition, sheer self-interest. Positively, it is the will to inquire, to examine, to discriminate, to draw conclusions only on the basis of evidence after taking pains to gather all available evidence” (Dewey [1938] 1988, 273).³⁶ This broad definition of scientific inquiry led Dewey to a pointed critique of positivism and its “unreasoning devotion to physical science as a model” (Dewey [1931] 1985, 64). As he stated in *The Public and Its Problems*, the “assimilation of human science to physical science represents...only another form of absolutistic logic, a kind of physical absolutism” ([1927] 1984b, 359-360). More than this, to imagine that social science would seek to “reduce human beings to the plane of inanimate things mechanically manipulated from without” was barbaric. Treating people and their social activities – including education, politics, and culture – simply as things to be worked on implied that the province of social science was “something like the training of fleas, dogs, and horses” (Dewey [1927] 1984b, 359).³⁷

Thus while Dewey certainly spoke of knowledge as a tool with which to solve everyday social problems through constant experimentation and inquiry, his instrumentalism was far more capacious than Lasswell’s. In fact, in his 1925 essay on the development of American pragmatism, Dewey openly censured those who would interpret instrumentalism in reductive terms, i.e. as advocating that knowledge and social action are merely tools, in a *literal* sense: “When an American critic says of instrumentalism that it regards ideas as mere servants which

³⁶ This capacious, critical definition of “science” appears repeatedly in Dewey’s work, though I have only selected a few examples here. See, for instance, *Experience and Nature* ([1925] 1987, 134-135), or *Freedom and Culture* ([1939] 1989, 102-118).

³⁷ The Frankfurt School would also misunderstand Dewey’s use of the term “science.” See the following chapter for further discussion.

make for success in life, he only reacts, without reflection, to the ordinary verbal associations of the word ‘instrumental,’ as many others have reacted in the same manner to the use of the word ‘practical’” ([1925] 1984, 21). Instrumentalism was not a “mere mechanism,” nor was it “an attempt to re-establish the dignity of reason by making of it a machine for the production of beliefs useful to morals and society.” It was, rather, the “formation of faith in intelligence.” According to Dewey, this meant that “[t]he more one appreciates the intrinsic esthetic, immediate value of thought and of science...the more one should feel grieved at a situation in which the exercise and joy of reason are limited to a narrow, closed and technical social group” ([1925] 1984, 21).

Lasswell’s depiction of culture as a domain of tools to be used by political elites and trained experts was therefore divergent if not outright juxtaposed to Dewey’s own concept of instrumentalism. Again, some of the blame for Lasswell’s misconstrual must fall to Dewey. His definition of terms like “science” and “instrumentalism” were idiosyncratic, and he himself later lamented his use of such language.³⁸ Nevertheless, like many other contemporary political scientists interested in reconstructing the discipline in the image of the natural sciences, Lasswell was not particularly attuned to such niceties. Though he consistently presented his research on

³⁸ See, for instance, his comments in the recent posthumous publication, *Unmodern Philosophy and Modern Philosophy*: “In the past, I have usually employed ‘instrumental’ to designate the intermediate position and function of the subject matter of knowledge in the inclusive complex of the transactions constituting human living as a going concern. Events have proved, in the case of many persons, the word is so linked with linguistic uses that give *instruments* a mechanical sense, which perforce renders knowledge subservient to ends externally set that they have been unwilling and impotent to examine what was said to see what the word stands for, and the kind of liberal and liberating instrumentality which knowledge as instrumentality is shown to be by the analyses I have attempted to execute” (2012, 242). As early as 1927, though, Dewey noted that pragmatism had been the subject of its fair share of misunderstanding, for which its own terminology was partly responsible: “Even such new movements as pragmatism and instrumentalism already have their accretion of myths which stand in the place of the ideas themselves. Probably the unfortunate names themselves invite the creation and encourage the spread of these myths” ([1927] 1984a, 145).

propaganda and mass culture in Deweyan *terminology*, Lasswell's instrumentalist interpretation of these (and other) topics was overly reductive relative to Dewey's actual *philosophy*.

Therefore while Dewey conceived of social scientific research as a kind of critical democratic enterprise, Lasswell saw it as a specialized, expert-driven domain. While Dewey envisioned instrumentalism as a kind philosophical ethos, which might help individuals pursue aesthetic, moral, and political knowledge, Lasswell took the term much more literally, conceiving of social practices (like culture) as tools to be manipulated by the skilled mechanic. Finally, while Dewey conceived both "science" and "instrumentalism" as names for the dynamic, interactive relationship that existed between the individual and his/her environment, Lasswell believed these terms denoted skills more narrowly conceived, which the individual could wield or apply to an external world (as in the natural sciences).

Given his crude interpretation of Deweyan pragmatism, and in particular his employment of the term "instrument" and "tool" to refer to popular culture, Lasswell's description of the domain as both symbol conveyor and psychological manipulator can now be more easily understood. As I will show, neither description has much to do with Deweyan pragmatism, and can in fact be traced back more directly to Lasswell's interest in certain strands of Freudian and Marxist theory.

Culture as Symbol Conveyor

Lasswell's reading of Freud most clearly influenced his interpretation of mass communication and culture as a conveyor of psychological symbols. In some sense, this description was necessarily connected to his basic conceptualization of culture-as-tool. That is, if culture was in fact an instrument, as Lasswell believed he had established via his reading of

Dewey, the question was: What kind of instrument? How exactly did the products and practices of culture operate such that they were politically efficacious? To answer these questions, Lasswell shifted his language from pragmatism to psychoanalysis.³⁹

As discussed in the intellectual history offered in the first half of this chapter, hints of Lasswell's interest in psychoanalysis and its connection to popular culture appeared as early as 1927, before he had developed his most significant relationships with European psychoanalysts. By the mid-1930s, however, his use of psychoanalysis became clearer and more detailed. Not only did he begin referencing Freud and other psychoanalysts more explicitly, he also started to flesh out with more precision how he saw symbols of mass culture functioning, psychologically and politically. The first major investigation in this vein was the 1935 essay, "The Study and Practice of Propaganda." Here Lasswell outlined a "psychoanalytic system of classification" that he argued could be used to analyze the "symbol patterns" – or the arrangement of "collective attitudes" – of a given community (1935c, 12; 3). The system was built around three basic analytic distinctions:

Symbols that arouse the anti-social impulses of most of the members of the community may be called the *counter-mores* patterns, such as the use of obscene or sacrilegious language. Those that arouse the fervently held and socially acceptable ideals and practices are the *mores* patterns; pious exhortations or pictures of the national hero are illustrations. The patterns of *expediency* are the expressions of matters-of-fact. (Lasswell 1935c, 12; emphasis in original)

³⁹ As with Dewey, the degree to which Lasswell was a responsible reader of Freud and psychoanalytic theory is open to question. What I am emphasizing here is not the accuracy of Lasswell's reading of Freud, but the fact that Lasswell himself saw his work on the symbolic power of culture as more directly influenced by his understanding of psychoanalysis than Deweyan pragmatism.

The challenge for the social scientist was to assess the various “channels of propaganda” existing within a community – from films to radio programs, newspapers to popular speeches – and describe which symbol pattern was being deployed, by whom, to what end, and to what effect (Lasswell 1935c, 14). The ultimate goal of this classification scheme was to aid actual propagandists and political elites in the effective manipulation of symbols via the products and practices of mass culture. Indeed, given that “the task of the propagandist is to re-define the responses toward certain objects by the management of the available supply of symbols,” s/he required precisely the kind of systematic knowledge that Lasswell’s system was designed to generate (Lasswell 1935c, 13). In this sense, Lasswell’s classificatory model was meant to be readily applicable: the tools of culture could only be used effectively if one understood how best to direct their symbolic flows.

Lasswell extended his symbolic analysis of culture in his next major work, *Politics: Who Gets What, When, How*. Here he tried to flesh out the psychoanalytic system of classification he put forth in “The Study and Practice of Propaganda” by examining several concrete political efforts to “remodel the psychological environment” through symbol manipulation (Lasswell 1936, 33). Thus in one particularly notable section, Lasswell engaged a series of popular American films to illustrate how mass cultural products used techniques of subconscious suggestion to instill norms and values that undergirded the US political and economic system. That constant barrage of symbols disseminated in support of liberal individualism was, for Lasswell, particularly striking:

In the United States, as one among the bourgeois nations, the life of personal achievement and personal responsibility is extolled in song and story from the very beginning of consciousness. [...] Not untypical of [these] motifs are the

following motion pictures seen in succession by a movie addict: In ‘I’m No Angel’ the ex-carnival girl marries a society man. In ‘Morning Glory’ a stage-struck country girl is shoved into the star part on the opening night of a play and makes a hit. In ‘My Weakness’ a servant girl made into a lady wins a society man. In ‘Emperor Jones’ a negro porter rises to kingly heights before he fails. In ‘Footlight Parade’ a young producer makes good with one night of strenuous work. (Lasswell 1936, 30; 32).⁴⁰

Given this overabundant emphasis on the (white) individual as the essential element and measure of social existence, Lasswell argued that the American public’s social reality was organized solely around an almost radical individualism. What was more, films and other popular cultural objects actually encouraged the American public to *desire* this ideological system. Such products suggested that instinctual cravings for success, fame, or love – or, in Lasswell’s terminology, “deference,” “income,” and “safety” – could only be fulfilled through individual actions and behaviors (Lasswell 1936, 3). In effect, then, these films stimulated deep fears and desires in order to reinforce specific social “mores” and “counter-mores.”

But if Lasswell was adamant that objects of popular culture were of great political consequence, his psychoanalytic interpretation led him to a rather peculiar description of *how* they were politically significant. On the one hand, Lasswell claimed that mass culture was politically powerful because of its ability to influence public consciousness. On the other hand, his description of cultural objects as “channels” for symbol manipulation meant that whatever political power these objects had, it did not derive from the objects themselves. That is, cultural products did indeed have political power, but this was only because savvy propagandists or

⁴⁰ See Chapter Five for a lengthier analysis of this passage.

political elites implanted manipulative messages *into* those products. Thus, whatever political things culture did, it did at the behest of actors or forces more powerful than itself. Popular culture was not a dynamic activity *of* politics, precisely because it was subservient *to* external political commands. Despite the central role it played in modern politics, then, popular culture could not be described as politically important in the same way that, say, elections, popular revolutions, or government institutions were. These things were the dynamic activities of politics; this was where political action “really” happened. By contrast, popular culture was politically *useful*; it could only predispose mass publics to think or behave a certain way once they engaged in these activities. For Lasswell, popular culture was not a political activity that created and conditioned political reality, but rather an *intermediate mechanism* of politics. Culture was politically relevant only insofar as elites implemented it for symbolic manipulation; absent this usage, it was an inert tool, waiting to be picked up.⁴¹

Culture as Democratic Propaganda

This description of popular culture as a manipulative symbol conveyor was emphasized in virtually all of Lasswell’s writings on the topic throughout the 1930s and 1940s, but was

⁴¹ Even in *Democracy through Public Opinion* – a text some saw as representative of Lasswell’s turn from an “elitist model of research” to one based on democratic “morality” – “instruments of mass communication” were described as conveyors of “one way communication” (Easton 1950, 468; Lasswell 1941a, 24). The average individual was, on a daily basis, simply “bombarded by songs, instrumental music, dramatic recitations, commercial ‘plugs,’ and news reports. Thousands of words – and word substitutes – spray upon the listener,” rendering him/her dangerously susceptible to psychological manipulation (Lasswell 1941a, 24-25). Elsewhere Lasswell concluded that “channels of communication are parts of the environment specialized for the transmission of signs” (Lasswell 1946, 82). He also designed a “World Attention Survey” to catalogue the degree to which mass disseminated symbols “indulged” or “deprived” psychological instincts, such as “safety,” “power,” “loyalty,” “propriety,” and “dysphoria” (Lasswell 1941c, 460-462). In all these writings, the political significance of mass media and culture was located in its ability to transmit a constant barrage of messages that would be received semi- or subconsciously by a large audience, and which would, in turn, render that audience open to psychological suggestion or direct ideological control.

perhaps most remarkably expressed in his account of American political culture in *World Politics and Personal Insecurity*. Here, in the chapter entitled “Personality, Culture and Politics: The American Case,” Lasswell sought to put US society on the couch, to diagnose “the vocabulary of American public life” (1935d, 214). The purpose was ultimately therapeutic, for, according to Lasswell, the dominant “political symbols and practices” of domestic discourse were abnormally underdeveloped, if not outright regressive (1935d, 214). This was evidenced by the fact that the primary modes of political and cultural expression in the United States were “legal, ethical, and theological rather than analytical,” and that even where they were analytical, they were “personal and partisan rather than impersonal” (Lasswell 1935d, 214). There were a variety of reasons for this psycho-cultural retardation, but the bottom line was that American political symbolism was of a “parochial character.” Clinging to its peculiar religiosity, superstitions, and political and economic anachronisms, the US lacked a vocabulary with which to confront the most important political, economic, and social changes of the modern world (Lasswell 1935d, 214-216).

Such developmental neuroses were troubling, particularly when compared to the intellectual development of Europe. Marx’s *Capital* was undoubtedly the most recent and spectacular illustration of this dominance, which Lasswell characterized as a “systematic work of social analysis” the likes of which the US had never seen (Lasswell 1935d, 217). For in confronting modernity in its own language (rather than with “parochial” archaisms), Marx had successfully galvanized an entire continent around a cohesive political symbology. To be sure, this symbology had generated a great deal of instability and unrest. But this was precisely what made Marx’s work such an interesting case relative to the US: even though *Capital* was an arcane piece of scholarship, it had also become one of the most politically potent objects of

modern European culture. Thus, even though the book was – in Lasswell’s opinion – turgid, dense, and obscure, it had also effectively tapped into a vast reservoir of unconscious cravings, fears, and anxieties. More than any author in American history, Marx had been able to exploit the symbol patterns underlying the whole of public discourse on his continent. In so doing, Marx had produced something more than a philosophical treatise. According to Lasswell, *Capital* was powerful not because all Europeans had read it (most had not), nor because those that had read it understood it (most did not), but because of what it seemed to represent to the masses whether or not they had read it or understood it: an expression of collective anxiety over the management and direction of modern life (Lasswell 1935d, 129ff.; 216-217).

If America were to re-energize its political and cultural environment, Lasswell argued that it had to produce a piece of public scholarship that could compete with Marx’s crowning achievement: an American *Capital*. The US masses needed to be mobilized around an equally potent (but decidedly non-Marxist) set of political symbols. To accomplish such a feat, one had only to mimic Marx’s own recipe for success, which Lasswell boiled down to nine specific guidelines:

- (1) The title must be a slogan. The title *Capital* has become a diagnosis and by implication a prescription.... An example of what to avoid is V. Pareto’s *Treatise on Sociology*, regardless of the brilliance of analysis.
- (2) The book must be thick. Thickness conveys authoritativeness and discourages reading by the masses who must revere the book as a symbol.
- (3) The book must be systematic and quantitative (“scientific”). The analytic pattern of thinking has now become so current in society that the volume must appear to possess imposing categories and sub-categories. [...]
- (4) The vocabulary must be more than analytic – it must be

ethical, legalistic (constitutional), technological, sporting, individualistic, nationalistic. (5) The selected “facts” must allude mainly to American experience. (6) The key words and the style must be invidious. [...] (7) The volume as a whole should be ambiguous, obscure, and somewhat contradictory. This facilitates the redefinition of the book to serve the purposes of the self-selected revolutionary elite. (8) The style must be dull, in order to reduce the danger that the work will be extensively read or that the illusion of comprehension should sprout too widely and too readily without aid of centralized interpreters. (9) The prescription should be activistic; join a specific organization, obey the revolutionary elite, prepare for revolutionary acts! (Lasswell 1935d, 219).

These directions are stunning, and not just for their implications regarding Lasswell’s interpretation of mass culture and propaganda. It should be noted that Lasswell never explicitly argued for such a book to be written, only that were a domestic political movement to arise that could reframe Marxism in an American vernacular, it would likely have to crystallize around a work exhibiting these characteristics. Second, some authors – David Easton (1950), most prominently – have argued that such blatantly cynical and elitist passages in Lasswell’s work overshadowed, and indeed were supplanted by, later writings supportive of American democracy.⁴² I will return to these issues in a moment.

⁴² Easton cites *Democracy through Public Opinion* as inaugurating Lasswell’s shift toward a more clearly pro-democratic position. Here Lasswell admits, for instance, that the health of the American political system depends upon the ability of the “receiving mass” to speak back to and reflect upon potent social symbols disseminated via mass communication. Both elite and public must attend to “the strength and weakness of existing methods of carrying on discussion in public” (1941a, 27-34). In his 1951 essay, “The Democratic Character,” Lasswell also discusses at length the concept of a “democratic community” as founded on “human dignity and shared values” (Muth 1990, 134). Thus, if Lasswell’s prescription for an American *Capital* in *World Politics and Personal Insecurity* was particularly cynical, in other writings he tried to mitigate such claims by emphasizing that an educated, critical public was crucial to the proper

I want to reiterate, however, how clearly this passage articulates Lasswell's unique functional conceptualization of mass culture as an instrument of politics. In Lasswell's eyes, an American *Capital* was politically important solely for its propagandistic potential. The text would be written only in order to implant suggestive political symbols into popular discourse; its exclusive purpose would be to enable elites to control and manipulate the political behavior of the masses. This obviously meant that Lasswell believed popular cultural symbols – of which an American *Capital* would certainly count as one – carried remarkable political power. Yet this power was always circumscribed by forces and conditions beyond popular culture itself. In other words, when consuming popular culture, audiences could only see, hear, and touch the kind of political themes that elites allowed them to see, hear, and touch. Popular culture did not really create or condition politics, then – not in any dynamic way, at least. It was simply a veneer that covered “actual” political reality, i.e. that regulated the ways in which the masses spoke, thought, and behaved.

In light of this observation, it is worth raising a final question concerning Lasswell's understanding of democracy. For if he indeed conceptualized the objects of mass culture as I have described, i.e. as instruments to be used by political elites to manipulate mass publics, and if he also advocated that elites in all societies use mass culture as propaganda, was he indeed a democrat? It is undeniable that Lasswell's engagements with culture betrayed, at the very least (and *pace* Easton), a deeply ambivalent attitude toward democracy, even if, throughout his life, Lasswell considered himself an “avowed democrat (and voting Democrat)” (Farr, Hacker, Kazee

functioning of a democratic society. For other defenses of Lasswell-as-democrat, see Brunner (2008), Marvick (1977), and Smith (1969).

2008, 24). But his interpretation of culture, spectacularly illustrated by his glowing appraisal of *Capital*, suggests a more complicated picture.

For instance, Lasswell was attracted to Marx's work precisely because it seemed to support the troubling notion that Lasswell himself had developed as early as 1927 and *Propaganda Technique*: objects of mass culture had the ability to convey suggestive symbols, and these symbols could in turn significantly condition and control the "psychological environment" of a political community (Lasswell 1936, 33). On this point Lasswell was in accord with certain strands of revolutionary Marxism, which implied that the hearts and minds of the masses would yield to the best propagandist. Thus, just as Marx and (some of) his followers used popular propaganda (like *Capital*) to support and reinforce communist values, so Lasswell believed that democratic governments needed to use similar channels to support and reinforce democratic values. Absent such guidance, the American politico-cultural environment was likely to remain, at best, parochial, confused, and fragmented, and, at worst, susceptible to socialist takeover.

If Lasswell was a democrat, then, he was of a paradoxical sort. Democratic elites, he argued, should mimic the strategic success of revolutionary Marxism. Given the psycho-political power of mass culture in modern society, it only made sense that its products and practices be shaped in such a way that the masses would be encouraged to accept democratic norms and values: "Propaganda, if vigorously used on all sides, makes for the maintenance of public interest in political affairs. The propagandist who is retained for political purposes has to compete with the rising competition of many other forms of social activity: sport, amusement, crime. That it is desirable to stimulate public attention to political matters is an axiom of every democrat" (1928,

263).⁴³ Given such statements, Lasswell can be – and has been – characterized as elitist and entirely *undemocratic*, or at least ambivalent on the issue.⁴⁴ Indeed, by beginning with the assumption that objects of mass culture tools that conveyed psychologically suggestive symbols, Lasswell’s work on culture was confined to ask only one, rather narrow evaluative question: What kind of political messages would we like our popular culture to transmit? In the end, Lasswell’s answered that it depended on one’s pre-established political commitments. Socialists would seek to imbue socialist messages into cultural objects; democrats would seek to imbue democratic messages. The degree to which these messages would permeate the psychological environment of the public hinged only on the matter of who controlled cultural production within a community, and how well those supervisors understood the symbol patterns of that community.

CONCLUSION

Lasswell is now a poorly remembered figure in political science. Despite exercising immense influence during his own time, his innovative work was quickly transformed (if not superseded) by a next generation of scholars, who came to constitute the vanguard of the behavioralist revolution during the 1950s and 1960s (Farr 1995b). The obvious question, then – and perhaps one with which this chapter might have started – is: What is the importance of reviewing Lasswell’s work on culture, communication, and propaganda? Why turn to a relatively neglected (if nonetheless memorialized) figure in the discipline’s past to investigate the political significance of mass culture? There are, I believe, several responses.

⁴³ “Lasswell,” Marvick writes, “is prepared to be manipulative. He has always deplored the political quietism of academic life. Knowledge can change people’s minds; men of knowledge can legitimately be advocates and activists” (1977, 9).

⁴⁴ See, for instance, Dryzek (1989), Horwitz (1962), and Merelman (1981).

First, the fact that Lasswell's name has been lost in the attic of a profession generally disinterested in its own history does not mean that his work had an insignificant impact on the discipline, or that it is irrelevant to current debates.⁴⁵ Among other things, this dissertation is an investigation of the history of popular culture as an object and concept of study in political science. Though my aim is not to provide a comprehensive survey of this history, I do take seriously the notion that such a task, however partial or preliminary, must try to "trace and reflect upon the discursive pathways" that have constituted this object and concept of study within the discipline (Farr 2004, 7). As one of the first political scientists to undertake a rigorous exploration of the political significance of mass culture – at the time, he was certainly the most well known – Lasswell represents a particularly important path to retread.

Second, the concepts and language that Lasswell used to analyze popular culture have appeared – and continue to appear – in works both directly and indirectly indebted to him. Perhaps the most well-known illustration of this is Gabriel Almond and Sydney Verba's seminal behavioralist text of 1963, *The Civic Culture*.⁴⁶ Lasswell's influence on the work should not be

⁴⁵ As noted previously in Chapter One, I use the word "profession" and "discipline" carefully here. Certainly political science – political theory in particular – has maintained an interest in, for instance, the study of the history of political thought. The discipline has long been concerned with recovering and re-establishing its intellectual pedigree in the work of various Western luminaries, from Plato to Nietzsche. The history of political thought cannot be defined as *disciplinary* history, however, so much as a research interest internal to the discipline itself. In this sense, meta-investigations of the *profession* of political science – e.g. how, when, and why it has chosen to pursue certain research programs/interests/paradigms over others (including the history of political thought) – are rare. For discussions concerning the discipline's own self-understanding, as well as notable exceptions to disciplinary disinterest in its own history, see Farr, Dryzek, and Leonard (1995), Farr and Seidelman (1993), or Gunnell (1993b; 2006a)

⁴⁶ At the time of its publication, *The Civic Culture* was deemed a "contemporary classic" for its groundbreaking use of statistical methodology and expansive theoretical agenda (Converse 1964, 593). One reviewer called it "an innovation on the literature of comparative politics," opening up "new perspectives on the theory of democratic politics," demonstrating "the potentialities of a new method of data gathering and analysis," and pointing to "a series of problems for further research and theorizing on the sources of national differences in the character of the relationships between government and the governed." It is, remarked the reviewer in sum, "a great book" (Rokkan 1964, 676). In 1980, a collection

surprising: Almond was a student of Lasswell's at Chicago, and Verba was a student of Almond's at Princeton. The entire project was, at heart, a very Lasswellian one. Using what were at the time advanced empirical research methods, Almond and Verba created a comparative study of five different countries to determine what form of culture – i.e. what kinds of practices, behaviors, feelings, and common knowledges – would be most conducive to a stable democratic government. This echoed Lasswell's own voluminous writings on culture and communication as instrumental in reinforcing “collective attitudes” concerning political and social order (Lasswell 1935b, 189; Lasswell 1935c, 3).

Lasswell's concepts and language have also extended beyond the reach of his first- and second-generation students, if somewhat more indirectly. One example is Michael Rogin's work on the psychoanalytic dimensions of popular films like *Independence Day* (1998). At first blush, Rogin's political theoretical project could not appear more different from Lasswell or his direct descendants, Almond and Verba. Not only did Rogin show little interest in empirical methods, but his political commitments were also decidedly more radical than the Chicago School's liberalism. An avowed leftist, much of his work was dedicated to a thoroughgoing critique of American society and history, which he believed to be constituted by “violence and domination” despite its overt commitments to “equality and liberty, pluralism and tolerance” (Shulman 2002, 316). In support of this position, Rogin argued that while American art, literature, and popular culture presented a veneer of easy entertainment and sometimes even appeared to trumpet democratic values, they were also hidden repositories of deep-seated anxieties, fears, and desires. Subjecting popular culture to psychoanalytic interpretation, Rogin discovered a host of repressed

of essays revisiting the impact and significance of the book to political science was published, and included contributions from Almond, Verba, Carole Pateman, Arend Lijphart, and Alan Abramowitz.

impulses – many of them gendered, racist, or otherwise oppressive – that played on the collective unconscious of its consumers. In this sense, mass culture was *not* mindless amusement. On the contrary, though its products may have been mindlessly consumed by the American public, they were “something more than benign entertainment and often nothing less than propaganda disguised as escapism” (Stimson and Thomas 2013).⁴⁷

Simply because Rogin was interested in psychoanalysis does not mean he was also Lasswellian, of course. Rogin never cites Lasswell in *Independence Day*, nor does the Chicago scholar get mention in earlier works on similar themes, such as *Ronald Reagan, the Movie* (1987) or *Blackface, White Noise* (1996). Most obviously, Rogin shared none of Lasswell’s enthusiasm for the democratic potential of mass communication. Nevertheless, there are clear conceptual similarities in their interpretation of popular culture as a political domain. For both Rogin and Lasswell, culture conveyed psychologically suggestive and manipulative symbols to its consumers. Just as Lasswell saw popular films as diffusing an individualist ideology amongst the masses in 1930s, so in the 1990s Rogin saw these objects as transmitting similarly powerful messages concerning gender, race, and American supremacy. In both cases, popular

⁴⁷ In the film *Independence Day*, for instance, Rogin discovered an assault on social categories deemed threatening to the fabric of “traditional” American values, such as racial intermixing, Jewish intellectuals, AIDS, feminism, and technological innovation (1998, 13; 80). Disguised as “entertainment fantasy,” *Independence Day* was actually an attempt to “re-fight [World War II] as virtual reality,” so that its audience might renew allegiance to a pure America – a white, male, imperial America – under attack from the “alien” forces of modernity (1998, 13). Rogin thus saw *Independence Day* as replete with subconscious symbolic suggestion. If the average consumer felt entertained while watching a down-but-not-out US president destroying extraterrestrial invaders, s/he was also, unbeknownst to her/him, celebrating the destruction of everything “un-American” about modernity. Indeed, watching the ruthless efficiency of the hive-minded invaders – “uniform, all alike” – the consumer was subtly told of the dangers of multiculturalism and racial mingling. Seeing their “foetal, fluid, and slimy” bodies, the audience was encouraged to despise their un-masculinity (Rogin 1998, 40). Cheering as the protagonists fly a stolen alien spaceship into the “V-shaped orifice” of the invaders’ mothership, the viewers were reminded that the stability of American society depended on the destruction of the “monstrous feminine” (Rogin 1998, 59-60).

culture was political to the extent that it functioned as propaganda: its purpose was to manipulate the “psychological environment” in order to keep the masses from questioning, much less engaging, their political environment. Thus, while the political projects and commitments of Rogin and Lasswell are certainly divergent, their language and conceptual understanding of popular culture are not.

The final reason for canvassing Lasswell’s work on culture – apart from his status as “first on the scene,” and apart from his direct and indirect conceptual influence on later scholars – is that his research engaged him in active dialogue with a group of contemporaries who shared his interest in the political effects of culture, but who were pursuing an otherwise different if not entirely antithetical intellectual agenda. That Lasswell and central figures of the Institute for Social Research, including Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, and Herbert Marcuse should have spoken to one another at all is surprising. As noted above, Lasswell was an outspoken critic of Marxism as a political program, and the work of the Frankfurt School was notoriously anti-empirical and anti-positivist. In fact, disciplinary historians have figured Lasswell and the Frankfurt School as representative of two divergent strands of professional political science that emerged during the 1940s and 1950s (Barber 2006; Dryzek 2006; Katznelson 2003; Gunnell 1993a, 1993b, 2006a). Thus while Lasswell and others (such as Merriam, Easton, and Almond) were pursuing a “scientific” or “objective” vision of political science, a group of mainly émigré scholars, including the Frankfurt School, Leo Strauss, Hans Morgenthau, and Hannah Arendt, deliberately spurned this model in favor of normative political theory.

In the next chapter, I suggest that this narrative is more complex than suggested by Gunnell and others. Certainly Lasswell and the Frankfurt School stood in opposition to one another on a variety of political, theoretical, and methodological issues. Their work also

overlapped on select issues, however, most notably that of popular culture. In fact, in addition to being well versed in each other's scholarship on the topic, these figures actually collaborated on a series of significant essays and projects related to it. In many ways, then, Lasswell's political conceptualization of popular culture found remarkable resonance with that of the Frankfurt School, despite the supposed divide that emerged in the 1940s and 1950s between empirically minded American political scientists and normatively oriented émigré political theorists.

Chapter Three: Mirrors and Masks

In the dreams of those in charge of mummifying the world mass culture represents a priestly hieroglyphic script which addresses its images to those who have been subjugated not in order that they might be enjoyed but only that they be read. (Adorno [1942] 2001, 93)

The Critical Theory as practiced by the Institute for Social Research during the 1930s and 1940s is rightly remembered for condemning “scientism”¹ and its imminent colonization of the social sciences. The Institute’s assault on scientism and its alleged epigoni, positivism and pragmatism, became especially pointed after its immigration to New York in 1934. By 1937, director Max Horkheimer declared them all the bankrupt byproduct of the “present sad state of the middle class” (Horkheimer [1937] 1972a, 140).

Given this sustained assault, one might assume that leading advocates for the scientific study of politics in the American academy like Harold Lasswell would have come in for repudiation by Horkheimer and his Institute colleagues. But this never happened. Despite Lasswell’s pioneering work in and emphatic support for scientific methodology, members of the Frankfurt School did not focus any of their withering criticism on Lasswell or indeed any his other colleagues at the University of Chicago, such as Charles Merriam.² In fact, during its

¹ The term scientism refers to the belief that “the characteristic inductive methods of the natural sciences are the only source of genuine factual knowledge and, in particular, that they alone can yield true knowledge about man and society” (Bullock, Trombley, and Eadie 1988, 762). This definition follows Horkheimer’s usage, and is also repeated in much of the extant secondary literature on the Institute, including in Jay (1973) and Wiggerhaus (1994).

² It should be noted that while much of Merriam’s career was consumed by his efforts to “scientize” political science, Lasswell’s career was far more diverse, and included forays into psychoanalysis, cultural anthropology, Marxist theory, and pragmatist philosophy. Still, both during and after his life Lasswell was widely known as an empirical social *scientist*, if not a proto-behavioralist. He himself described his work as that of a “scientific mind,” preoccupied “not with prophecy, but with prediction” (1931, 318). Elsewhere he declared that “[t]he science of politics states conditions” while the “philosophy of politics justifies preferences,” and that he squarely identified with the aims of the former (1936). Such comments inspired Lasswell’s students, such as Heinz Eulau and Gabriel Almond, to

American exile, the Institute – and particularly Horkheimer and Franz Neumann – developed a remarkably constructive relationship with Lasswell in particular, a principal member of the so-called “Chicago School of Political Science.”³

Little critical attention has been paid to these surprising liaisons. This oversight is due in part to the fact that, during the early 1940s, many disciplinary observers began depicting normative political theory (like that developed by Horkheimer and his Institute colleagues) and empirical political science (like that developed by Lasswell and his Chicago colleagues) as standing on opposite sides of a number of intellectual, political, and methodological binaries. Oftentimes the source of those binaries was traced back to an elementary divide between “philosophy” and “science,” or “European” and “American” modes of thinking.

As early as 1943, the American political scientist William Foote Whyte warned that an alarming number of his colleagues had turned to “political philosophy,” when they should be “concern[ing] themselves primarily with the description and analysis of political behavior” and “leaving ethics to the philosophers” (693, 697). Whyte’s article occasioned a stinging rebuttal by John Hallowell (1944), an early domestic proponent of the work of European émigrés such as

eulogize their teacher as “the most uncompromising member” of the early “behavioral revolution,” and as the innovator of “an array of methodologies” that were to become “the common property” of behavioralists during the 1950s and 1960s (Eulau 1969, 15-16; Almond 1987, 249). For further examples of Lasswell’s appreciation of scientific methodologies, see, for instance, Lasswell (1941c; 1942a; 1948a). For further secondary discussion of Lasswell’s approach to science, see Almond (1966), Easton (1950), Farr, Hacker, and Kazee (2006), Horwitz (1962), and Janowitz (1969). Merriam advanced his position on science most explicitly in Merriam (1921; [1923] 1993). See also Heaney and Hansen (2006) and Karl (1974).

³ Though the “Chicago School” appellation is often used to denote members of the Sociology Department at the University of Chicago during the 1920s and 1930s, historians of political science also use the designation to refer to the Department of Political Science at Chicago as it was developed and chaired by Charles Merriam between 1923 and 1940. As Kristin Renwick Monroe has noted, the department was “[I]ed by Merriam and two key colleagues, Harold Gosnell and Harold Lasswell,” and was “instrumental in shifting the study of politics away from a reliance on historical and constitutional approaches and toward the more systematic and objective testing of political propositions through empirical data” (2004, 95). See also Almond (2004) and Heaney and Hansen (2004).

Hannah Arendt, Hans Morgenthau, Leo Strauss, and Horkheimer and his colleagues.⁴ Hallowell claimed that American political science had not become increasingly philosophical but rather “increasingly positivistic,” and as such risked “denying our [ethical] responsibilities as human beings” (1944, 640, 655). The oppositional narrative intensified throughout the 1940s such that by 1949 the Columbia sociologist Robert Merton could depict European social thought, characterized by “its large purposes,” as “almost disdain[ing] to establish the very facts it purports to explain” ([1949] 1968, 497-498). The “American variant,” by contrast, “with its small vision, focuses so much on the establishment of fact that it considers only occasionally the theoretic pertinence of the facts, once established” (Merton [1949] 1968, 498). A decade later, the poet and critic Francis Golffing (1959) suggested that European and American intellectuals actually held an entirely “different structure of ideas and emotions” (507). In 1966, Gabriel Almond claimed that such divisions had split the discipline of political science almost in two. Much contemporary political *theory*, Almond claimed, was stubbornly rooted in its “Mediterranean and European...origins,” while contemporary political *science* – characterized by its “emphasis on systematic field research” and “rigorous logical methods” – was “relatively new, and at the present time...almost entirely American” (1966, 870). Sheldon Wolin (1969) reinforced this characterization three years later with his depiction of “epic theory” and its solemn struggle against “methodism” (1082).

Recent work by John Gunnell,⁵ Ira Katznelson (2003), and others⁶ has usefully contextualized and critiqued many of the combative narratives that emerged between political

⁴ For further discussion of the Whyte-Hallowell *contretemps*, see Gunnell (1993a). For more detailed accounts of the early history of the “split” between political theory and political science, see Adcock and Bevir (2007) and Gunnell (1993b; 2006a).

⁵ See the aforementioned works by Gunnell, as well as Gunnell (2006b).

theory and political science during the early 1940s. Gunnell, for instance, has noted that few of the attacks leveled by either side during these years could “withstand much analytical scrutiny,” and that much of the lofty rhetoric deployed during the contretemps belied what was oftentimes a quite practical struggle for professional status, intellectual authority, and limited funding sources (1993a, 180-181).⁷ Nevertheless, he has also affirmed that the political thought of European émigrés in the US academy at the time “could not, in most cases, have been more at odds with the substantive content and purpose” of much mainstream American political science (2006a, 777). There was, in this sense, little individuals associated with these two groups could talk about with one other, save their mutual animosity.

Katznelson has perhaps gone furthest in undermining the supposed divide between “European” and “American” approaches to political studies, arguing that the work of Arendt and fellow émigré Karl Polanyi actually shared with American political scientists such as Lasswell, David Truman, and Robert Dahl a deep commitment to preserving and revitalizing Enlightenment values in the wake of the desolation of the Second World War. He has thus argued that it would be a mistake and, indeed, an impoverishment of our intellectual resources, to presume that during the 1940s European theorists and American social scientists simply “inhabit[ed] separate universes” (2003, 117).⁸ At the same time, however, Katznelson has pointedly *excluded* the political thought of the Frankfurt School from this more capacious grouping. The Institute’s brand of “totalizing critique’ was so thorough, complete, and

⁶ See, for instance, Barber (2006), Farr (2006), Dryzek (2006), Guilhot (2008), Kettler (2006), O’Neill and Uebel (2004; 2008), and Oren (2008).

⁷ See also Hauptmann (2006).

⁸ I thank an anonymous reviewer for bringing Katznelson’s work to my attention.

pessimistic,” he has argued, that it could not sustain productive dialogue with the critical but nevertheless hopeful liberalism of Arendt, Polanyi, Lasswell, and others (2003, 38-39).

Given the continued reluctance to see empirical political science as sharing much in common with normative political theory during the mid-twentieth century – and especially not with the Institute’s brand of theory – it is tempting to explain away the displays of mutual restraint and even periodic collaboration between Horkheimer, Lasswell, and their colleagues as simply professional propriety, with ultimately no bearing on the intellectual aims of each camp. In what follows, I challenge this supposition. Though their liaisons were influenced by many factors, including professional propriety, they often extended beyond this. As I will show, these scholars took an active interest in and even substantively aided each other’s work throughout the 1930s and early 1940s, *especially* as it related to the politics of popular culture.

On its face, such a claim may seem implausible. As I discussed in Chapter One, Lasswell identified popular culture as an effective means for the dissemination of democratic propaganda, civic ideals, and even psychotherapy. The Institute, on the other hand, remains well known for its characterization of mass culture as a vapid, manipulative reflection of an oppressive politico-economic order.

In this chapter, I argue that while Lasswell and the Institute indeed came to different *normative* conclusions on popular culture, both developed remarkably similar understandings of how the domain *functioned*, politically speaking.⁹ Lasswell, it will be recalled, held an exceptionally instrumentalist view of popular culture: it was a tool that elites used to convey

⁹ As noted in Chapter Two, I am using the term “function” to refer to the political activities, tasks, or roles that popular culture is understood to perform, or have the ability to perform. This concept is intended to follow a standard dictionary definition of the word “function,” and therefore has little if anything in common with the specialized language of *functionalism*.

suggestive symbols and messages. Thus for Lasswell, popular culture was politically significant, but not in any active or dynamic sense. The domain performed political functions only when elites used the domain to transmit propagandistic messages. Here I argue that the Institute's studies of popular (or mass) culture forged a remarkably similar conceptualization of how the domain "worked."¹⁰ For the group's leading members, mass culture operated as a mirror and mask of pre-existing political and economic forces. In this sense, the domain was not politically active or dynamic, since it could only reflect an existing socio-political order back to its consumers. Popular culture was politically significant to the Frankfurt School, then, but, as with Lasswell, this was because culture was determined *by* politics; it was not an activity *of* politics.

To develop these arguments, I divide the remainder of this chapter into three sections. In the first, I recount the Institute's criticisms of scientism, positivism, and pragmatism during the 1930s and 1940s, focusing especially on their treatment of John Dewey. This survey lays the groundwork for the second section, in which I draw upon archival sources from the Max Horkheimer Archive to uncover the Institute's relationship with Lasswell, as well as their collegial though less substantive communication with Merriam, particularly as it related to their respective work on the politics of culture during the late 1930s and early 1940s.¹¹ In the third section, I turn to a more detailed analysis of the Frankfurt School's political analyses of popular culture. As I proceed more or less chronologically through a selection of the Institute's most representative writings on the subject, I argue that the group's functional description of the

¹⁰ The term "mass culture" is the Institute's own, and was intended to be derogatory. Throughout this dissertation I will use the term "popular culture" to refer to prevalent products and practices including television, film, radio, visual art, sport, and so on. In this chapter, however, I will sometimes use "mass culture" when referring to the Institute's own treatment of such products and practices.

¹¹ As per the guidelines of sixteenth edition of the *Chicago Manual of Style*, my full bibliography does not include citations to each specific document referenced in the Max Horkheimer Archive, but only one citation to the collection as whole. For the reader's sake, however, I will provide the date and location information in-text when referring to specific documents from the Archive.

domain parallels Lasswell's own work on popular culture, in spite of the obvious normative differences separating their analyses.

A final introductory note is required regarding my selection of authors and texts. In this chapter, I focus mainly on the work of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, given their central status within the history of the Institute as well as the prominent role the critique of mass culture played in both their collective work. I also briefly note the later work of Herbert Marcuse, especially his continuation and elaboration of Adorno and Horkheimer's analyses of culture during the 1960s and 1970s. As such, this chapter focuses on selected works of members of the "first generation" of the Institute for Social Research as it existed from 1924 to, roughly, 1969 and the death of Adorno.¹² I thus set aside for the time being those affiliated in looser ways with the Frankfurt School or "Critical Theory" more generally, both during and after the time period outlined here. Beyond practical considerations, this is due to the fact that this dissertation is as much a study of the political theoretical status of popular culture as it is an intellectual history of the changing status of this domain within the discipline of political science itself. Focusing on leading members of the Institute makes sense for such a task precisely because of the group's direct impact on and literal embeddedness in the developing profession of political science in the United States in the mid-twentieth century.

ATTACKS ON POSITIVISM, PRAGMATISM, AND DEWEY: 1931-1947

¹² Bottomore (2002, 11-14), Jay (1973, xv), and Wiggershaus (1994, 1) use similar periodization nomenclature.

Max Horkheimer was undoubtedly the foremost critic of scientism within the *Institut für Sozialforschung*, and also articulated one of the group's first public criticisms of the approach in his inaugural address as Director in 1931. The position had been vacated two years earlier owing to the ill health of the Institute's former director, Carl Grünberg. Under Grünberg's watch, the Institute had favored a relatively orthodox Marxist approach, concentrating "on studies of economic history and the development of the labor movement" (Institute for Social Research 1944, 2).¹³ In his first speech, Horkheimer signaled a shift away from the approach of his predecessor toward a more comprehensive, dialectically informed "social theory" (Institute for Social Research 1944, 2). This change in emphasis was clearly but tactfully outlined in Horkheimer's address as he called for a new research program for the Institute that would continually "[fuse] philosophy and the various branches of science" in order to address current philosophical questions, and particularly those related to social oppression (Wiggershaus 1994, 38-39).

The next year, Horkheimer articulated a more sharply critical assessment of scientism in a short piece written for the Institute's new publication, *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, entitled "Notes on Science and the Crisis" ([1932] 1972).¹⁴ In the essay, Horkheimer argued that without a comprehensive understanding of "the true nature of society, built as it is on contrarities," science "lacks a theoretical grounding" (Horkheimer [1932] 1972, 7-8). This was not intended as a complete dismissal of empirical analysis; indeed, the essay opened with a brief recognition of the integral role science played in Marxist historical materialism. Nevertheless, Horkheimer was insisting, as he had done in his address of the previous year, that a comprehensive social

¹³ See also Bottomore (2002, 12).

¹⁴ During this time, Horkheimer was also developing critiques of positivism in his lecture courses at the University of Frankfurt. See Wheatland (2009, 109).

theory needed to guide and ultimately determine the research goals of empirical analysis. Without such guidance, empiricism lacked normative purpose and was therefore dangerously relativistic (Horkheimer [1932] 1972, 8).

In opening these lines of criticism, Horkheimer believed he had placed himself at odds with both positivism and pragmatism, which he identified as the two most pervasive strands of scientism. As he declared in “Notes,” both philosophies idolized science for its “productive power” alone, subordinating value to utility ([1932] 1972, 3). He repeated this assessment three years later in “On the Problem of Truth” ([1935] 1995). Taking aim at William James and John Dewey, Horkheimer declared pragmatism to be “closely related to positivism,” since both “attribute[d] to the positive, exact sciences a primary purpose of control” ([1935] 1995, 196, 201). I will in short order review several of the more obvious problems with Horkheimer’s equation of positivism and pragmatism, especially as it pertains to Dewey. For now, however, it is enough to note that from 1932 on, the Institute director viewed the two philosophies as virtually indistinguishable and therefore equally condemnable instantiations of scientism.¹⁵

Horkheimer’s growing anxiety toward scientism culminated in 1937, with the publication of two long essays in the *Zeitschrift*, “Traditional and Critical Theory” ([1937] 1972b) and “The Latest Attack on Metaphysics” ([1937] 1972a). The “Metaphysics” article was particularly damning, and arguably still represents the Institute’s clearest articulation of its grievances regarding empirical social science, at least as construed by positivism and pragmatism. In the

¹⁵ As Wiggershaus has noted, Horkheimer’s increasingly critical treatment of positivism and pragmatism after emigration was motivated as much by his understanding of their philosophical tenets as it was by his sense that these two approaches were fast occupying a place of unquestioned dominance in the American academy. In 1936, for example, Horkheimer complained to long-time Institute member Henryk Grossman that logical empiricism “is currently the favourite philosophical fashion in academic circles.” It was “impossible to exaggerate,” Horkheimer continued, “the way in which this approach has triumphed across the whole field in scientific circles, particularly in the Anglo-American world” (quoted in Wiggershaus 1994, 184).

essay, Horkheimer claimed that in its efforts to mimic the natural sciences by consciously separating data collection from critical valuation – a move he traced back to thinkers such as Descartes, Locke, Hume, and Comte – contemporary social science had become increasingly unable to challenge, question, or meaningfully interpret social phenomena. To mount this critique, Horkheimer focused on the tendency of positivism to construct its particular objects of study, such as “society” or “the individual,” as given entities unconditioned by observation or interpretation ([1937] 1972a, 141; 144-145). Such an approach was problematic, precisely because social (and even natural) categories were *not* given beyond their construction in thought and language (Horkheimer [1937] 1972a, 155; 157-158).¹⁶ To reduce all social phenomena to received data points was to strip these phenomena – including human beings – of the unique intellectual, moral, and emotional qualities that differentiate them from one other, or indeed from any other natural object (Horkheimer [1937] 1972a, 137).

Positivism’s efforts to mimic the natural sciences entailed a troubling *political* corollary. In treating humans as mere data points, Horkheimer argued the philosophy surreptitiously reinforced the social and political *status quo*, and thereby stood in the way of true human emancipation. Of course, Horkheimer acknowledged that imputing political sympathies to positivism sounded paradoxical, since the method was purposefully designed to be value-neutral. Yet he argued that it was precisely this value-neutrality that underpinned positivism’s conservatism. By associating facticity with the immediately observable, the philosophy implied

¹⁶ As Horkheimer argued: “The development of idealistic philosophy in Germany, from its beginning with Leibniz to the present, has been able to confirm the insight that the world of perception is not merely a copy nor something fixed and substantial, but, to an equal measure a product of human activity. Kant proved that the world of our individual and scientific consciousness is not given to us by God and unquestioningly accepted by us, but is partially the result of the workings of our understanding” ([1937] 1972a, 157-158).

that the world, as it exists now, could not be otherwise (Horkheimer [1937] 1972a, 143-144). For positivism, critical assessment of any sort, which might seek to historicize data, or perhaps question the purpose of an experiment beyond its immediate applications, was rejected outright, since it would ostensibly “color” the data, destabilizing its scientific status as an unmediated reflection of the natural world. Thus while positivist studies of society *could* be used to predict and mitigate deleterious things like market fluctuations, infant mortality rates, or public displeasure with specific policies, they could just as easily be used to make predictions regarding a population’s “observance of stringent regulations, their frugality during a wartime food shortage, their passivity in the face of the persecution and extermination of their best friends, their manifestations of joy at public festivals and at the favorable outcome of the election of a brutal and deceitful bureaucracy” (Horkheimer [1937] 1972a, 159). Without a deeper understanding of *what* social science is for, *why* it pursues particular goals over any other, and *how* its results will be employed in a broader social context – in short, without a guiding critical theoretical framework sensitive to the social totality and its historical antagonisms – empiricist social science risked cooptation.

From “Notes” to “Metaphysics,” Horkheimer’s writings between 1931 and 1937 supplied the model for the Institute’s public attitude towards scientism, and towards positivism and pragmatism especially. Members continued to engage these two philosophies after this time period, but none of their later assessments considerably deviated from the basic position established by their director in the 1930s. Some of those assessments are worth noting here, however, because of their continued criticism of John Dewey – a *pragmatist* – as the chief representative of modern *positivism*.

Horkheimer himself offered the Frankfurt School's most extended criticisms of positivism after 1937 in *Eclipse of Reason* ([1947] 2004), a book designed as a companion piece to his and Adorno's seminal theoretical work, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* ([1944] 2002).¹⁷ The central argument of the book was that modernity had witnessed the obliteration of an essential category of thought called "objective reason." In times past, this form of rationality had served as the basis of religion and the "great philosophical systems," and its function was to develop an "objective structure" of human valuation, or a "measuring rod for individual thoughts and actions" (Horkheimer [1947] 2004, 4). With the rise of capitalism and the disenchantment of both religion and philosophy, however, objective reason had been replaced by "subjective" or "instrumental" reason, which "merely concerns itself with the choice of technically or economically suitable means to given ends" (Joas 1993, 82). Consequently, Horkheimer argued that modern life lacked an intellectual, moral, or emotional compass; subjective reason authorized the pursuit of individual utility and self-preservation only.

At its core, then, *Eclipse* was intended as an expansive critique of modernity itself. Yet Horkheimer employed many of his earlier attacks against positivism, and especially those against pragmatism, to advance the broader arguments of the book. Indeed, here he identified John Dewey as the contemporary standard-bearer for instrumental rationality. Tracking "Notes" and especially "Problem of Truth," Horkheimer made this judgment in light of Dewey's supposed veneration of science:

¹⁷ Though *Eclipse* was only published in 1947, Horkheimer had begun work on a series of lectures that would form the basis of the manuscript as early as 1943, and which took up themes he was developing around this time in essays for the *Zeitschrift* and its English-language counterpart, *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science* (Wiggershaus 1994, 344-345).

Modern positivists seem inclined to accept the natural sciences, primarily physics, as the model for correct methods of thinking. Perhaps Mr. Dewey gives the main motive for this irrational predilection when he writes: ‘Modern methods of experimental observation have wrought a profound transformation in the subject matters of astronomy, physics, chemistry and biology’ and ‘the change wrought in them has exercised the deepest influence upon human relations.’ (Horkheimer [1947] 2004, 51; quoting Dewey 1943, 26)

The problem with this attitude, according to Horkheimer, was that while science had undoubtedly “played a role in bringing about good or evil historical changes,” it was not “the sole power by which humanity can be saved” ([1947] 2004, 51). In fact, the opposite was often the case – something the Nazi gas chambers had shown all too clearly. Thus in worshipping the physical sciences for their “so-called objectivity,” modern positivists – with Dewey at their head – emptied them of all “human content” ([1947] 2004, 51-52).

Horkheimer was not the only Institute member to take aim at Dewey during the 1940s. Herbert Marcuse had anticipated many of *Eclipse*’s criticisms in a 1941 review of Dewey’s *Theory of Valuation*, published in the Institute’s English language journal, *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science* (hereafter abbreviated as *SPSS*). Like Horkheimer, Marcuse never questioned Dewey’s alleged identity as a positivist, asserting that *Valuation* “provides an appropriate occasion for discussing the social function of positivism” (1941, 145). Marcuse then critiqued Dewey on grounds similar to those Horkheimer would soon stake out in *Eclipse*. Because Dewey’s “positivism” judged values in terms of their observable outcomes, it could provide no explanation of which values should be pursued in the first place: “The positivist can weigh the ends against the means necessary to achieve them,” Marcuse observed, but “this is all

he can do” (1941, 147). While Marcuse went on to allow that Dewey *intended* to promote values like freedom or autonomy, he nevertheless argued that Dewey’s “positivist” philosophy implied that *any* value could be deemed “good,” provided it achieved its desired end in an efficient manner (1941, 147). This meant that Deweyan “positivism” could even be used to sanction the most terrifyingly efficient political system the world had ever seen: fascism.

Alongside Horkheimer and Marcuse, the other key figure to take up the Institute’s campaign against positivism was Adorno.¹⁸ During the Institute’s time in exile, Adorno collaborated with Horkheimer on the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, which, like Horkheimer’s *Eclipse*, employed a critique of positivism to illustrate the implosion of modern rationality into irrationality and myth. Though *Dialectic* was in many ways a much more theoretically sophisticated assessment of modernity than *Eclipse*, Adorno did not significantly alter Horkheimer’s position on positivism. Thus the opening chapter of *Dialectic* declared that that positivism glorified the *status quo* and reduced talk of social emancipation to “senseless prattle” (Horkheimer and Adorno [1944] 2002, 19).¹⁹ Here, as well, was repeated Horkheimer’s equation of positivism and pragmatism as symptom and cause of the destruction of objective reason. In their 1944 preface, for instance, the authors charged pragmatism with “forfeiting its...relation to truth” in its desire to dominate the natural and social worlds merely for utilitarian ends ([1944] 2002, xvi).

¹⁸ Though it should be noted that Adorno’s most pointed comments against positivism were written after his return to Germany. See in particular the essays “Scientific Experiences of an European Scholar in America” (1969) and “Contemporary German Sociology” (1959).

¹⁹ The authors also returned to positivism in a later chapter on mass culture, which was primarily written by Adorno. Here they focused on positivism’s obfuscatory character, its power to surreptitiously reduplicate existing social conditions by equating observation with fact: “The blindness and muteness of the data to which positivism reduces the world passes over into language itself, which is limited to registering those data. Thus relationships themselves become impenetrable, taking on an impact, a power of adhesion and repulsion which makes them resemble their extreme antithesis, spells” ([1944] 2002, 133-134).

Over the past quarter century, several scholars have disputed at length and in detail the Frankfurt School's treatment of Dewey as a fascist apologist and positivist *par excellence*.²⁰ I need not recount those arguments here, then, but only point to some of the more obvious problems that plagued the Frankfurt School's readings of Dewey.

Their first and undoubtedly most apparent error was terminological concerning the relevant philosophical traditions: Deweyan pragmatism descended differently from and had little to do with positivism. Indeed, its heritage had more in common with the "critical" philosophies of Kant and Hegel than with Hume or Comte (two thinkers the Institute routinely labeled as forerunners of modern positivism).²¹ This is not to say that the Institute's criticisms of positivism could not have applied, in principle, to Dewey's pragmatism. It is at least *prima facie* possible that Dewey did idolize science for its instrumental utility, for instance. Nevertheless, in condemning pragmatism *as* positivism the Institute demonstrated ignorance of what pragmatism in fact was, or at least where it stood in relation to other schools of modern philosophy.

Second and more substantively, Dewey never produced a work that employed empirical social scientific methods, and certainly none that took a science like physics for its "model" (as Horkheimer had argued). Dewey *was* an ardent supporter of "science" – an attitude that caught the attention of Lasswell himself²² – but his definition of the term was idiosyncratic and purposefully broad. As discussed in Chapter Two, Dewey was often at pains to clarify that

²⁰ See the aforementioned works by Festenstein, Joas, and Kadlec. Roudy Hildreth and Robert Westbrook have also taken up the Frankfurt School's reading of Dewey, though in broader and briefer terms. See Hildreth (2009, 781) and Westbrook (1991, 187 n.142).

²¹ See Dewey ([1925] 1984), Farr (1999b), Martin (2002), and Westbrook (1991).

²² As discussed in Chapter Two, toward the end of his career Lasswell would state that his approach to the policy sciences was "a contemporary adaptation of the general approach to public policy that was recommended by John Dewey and his colleagues in the development of American pragmatism" (1971, xiii-xiv). As Farr has noted, however, there is little other evidence that Lasswell was a wholehearted adherent of Deweyan pragmatism (1999b, 536).

“science” did not refer to a specialized field of knowledge accessible only to trained experts, but implied a general attitude or approach to (social) inquiry that promoted “the will to inquire, to examine, to discriminate, to draw conclusions only on the basis of evidence after taking pains to gather all available evidence” ([1938] 1988, 273; [1927] 1984b, 337). He was therefore quite clear that natural science did not provide a model for the social sciences. To repeat his statement from *The Public and Its Problems*, the “assimilation of human science to physical science represents...only another form of absolutistic logic, a kind of physical absolutism” ([1927] 1984b, 359-360).

Third, Dewey *did* hold that social values such as freedom and autonomy were desirable, and that their opposites were not. Horkheimer seemed to have missed the normative content of Deweyan pragmatism entirely, despite its prominence in Dewey’s work, particularly during the late 1930s and early 1940s.²³ Marcuse’s analysis was on relatively safer ground in his admission that Dewey at least *intended* to promote progressive social values. Whether or not Dewey’s philosophy failed in this endeavor is a question I will not attempt to answer here. It is worth noting, however, that in the final analysis Marcuse rejected Deweyan pragmatism not because it did *not* value freedom, but because it believed the masses *did*. In other words, Marcuse simply felt that Dewey’s philosophy was too optimistic. Society cared nothing for freedom, but rather desired “strong protection,” “lust[ed] for cruelty,” and wanted “liberation from the burden of autonomy” (Marcuse 1941, 147). This argument may have had some merits to his readers. In pursuing it via a review of *Theory of Valuation*, however, Marcuse was constructing a foil for a

²³ Such concerns animated the bulk of *The Public and Its Problems*, published in 1927, but were the sole focus of *Freedom and Culture*, published in 1939. See also several of the essays and lectures Dewey gave between 1939 and 1941, including “Creative Democracy,” “The Basis for Hope,” and “Higher Learning and War.” All are published in Dewey (1988).

much broader claim, one which had less to do with Dewey's actual work than with modernity itself.

What should be clear is that throughout the 1930s and 1940s the Frankfurt School was (a) openly hostile toward positivism, and (b) saw John Dewey as the chief representative of this approach, at least in the American academy. These facts are not precisely new, but they do raise some puzzling questions that have as yet gone unanswered. For instance, was the Institute unaware of other US scholars that could be more aptly termed positivist, or at least more inclined to the tenets of scientism? Even granting the Critical Theorists' assessment of Dewey, why did they limit their critiques of contemporary scientism almost exclusively to him? Several other émigré scholars had developed fierce critiques of empirical social science during the 1940s and 1950s – most notably Hans Morgenthau and Leo Strauss, both of whom settled at Chicago's Political Science Department after Merriam's influence had declined there – but few of them were as fixated on Dewey as the Institute.²⁴ One therefore wonders if the Frankfurt School's critiques of Dewey were informed by anything beyond simple misreading or misrecognition.

²⁴ Morgenthau's and Strauss's relationships with Lasswell are themselves fascinating, though I do not have the space to discuss them fully here. Still, it is worth noting that Morgenthau's most pointed attack against scientism, *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics*, refrained from attacking Lasswell or Merriam by name – much like the Institute's work. Strauss showed no such compunction, as evidenced by his development and support of an edited volume in which Lasswell was pilloried as a purveyor of “scientific propaganda” (Horwitz 1962, 225). Why were Strauss and his associates more than willing to name names in their attacks on scientism, while Morgenthau (and the Institute) were not? In Morgenthau's case, professional propriety may have played a determining factor (while for the Institute it was one reason among others). In 1938, Morgenthau had been introduced to Lasswell via a personal letter of recommendation written by none other than Max Horkheimer (15 February 1938). It is at least conceivable that Morgenthau did not wish to trample upon that earlier show of support, offered by both Horkheimer and Lasswell. Moreover, as Nicolas Guilhot (2008) has discussed, during the early 1950s Morgenthau was seeking research funding through the Social Science Research Council at the University of Chicago, and was doubtless aware that it originated as an endeavor of Merriam's. Strauss was not similarly beholden, professionally speaking. Nor did his scholarship share much of anything in common with Lasswell or Merriam, which was not the case with respect to the Institute.

In the next section, I show that the Frankfurt School was well aware of the work and reputation of several more scientifically-inclined social scientists, including and especially individuals associated with the Chicago School of Political Science. In fact, throughout their stay in America, Institute members maintained a surprisingly close working relationship with central figures of the Chicago group, but Lasswell in particular. These associations are surprising, given the Institute's withering treatment of scientism throughout the 1930s and 1940s, and the eagerness with which both groups were shoehorned into ostensibly incompatible disciplinary classifications just emerging in the American academy around this time. Nonetheless, Lasswell and the Institute were curious interlocutors, if not mutual supporters of each other's work. This does not mean that these scholars were motivated by and pursued identical political theoretical projects. Still, their contact indicates that mutual interests did exist, particularly concerning the political significance of mass culture. Thus while Institute members doubtless had several motives for retaining Dewey as their chief positivist adversary, I contend that their constructive relationship with Lasswell was one among them.

THE INSTITUTE COMES TO AMERICA: COLLABORATION WITH LASSWELL

The first time that members of the Frankfurt and Chicago Schools came into contact, it is unlikely that either had anything but a cursory knowledge of each other's work. This is because the circumstances of their initial interaction were somewhat unusual: the Institute, having fled Frankfurt for Geneva in 1933 after the rise of Hitler, was looking to leave Europe entirely and set up a new base of operations in the United States. Beginning in the winter of 1933, then, the Institute, still in Geneva, tried to secure sponsorship at an American university. According to Thomas Wheatland (2004a; 2004b; 2009), during their search Horkheimer and company focused

on social scientists and sociology departments they thought would likely sympathize with their intellectual and methodological approach. By way of an introduction, Horkheimer mailed a biography of the Institute and a sampling of its work to a number of schools, including Yale University, Harvard University, Columbia University, and the University of Chicago. Each of these institutions had been suggested as possible hosts because either an individual scholar or department had demonstrated some interest in themes relevant to the Institute's own research, such as issues concerning "authority, the family, social psychology, economics, and labor" (Wheatland 2009, 44). Ultimately, Horkheimer accepted an invitation from Robert McIver's sociology department at Columbia University, where the Institute would remain officially housed until 1946.²⁵

Before mid-1934, however, when the Institute began negotiations with Columbia University in earnest, the Frankfurt School had been in fairly consistent communication with the University of Chicago, and had apparently seriously considered selecting the school as its new home (Wheatland 2009, 44; 380 n.77). The primary connection between the Institute and Hyde Park was Erich Fromm, who had developed several important contacts at both the University and the Chicago Psychoanalytic Institute over a period of several years. The first of these contacts was made in 1932, when the German psychoanalyst Karen Horney invited Fromm to become an affiliate at the CPI. Fromm accepted the invitation, though he left Chicago after only a short stay. Yet in late 1933, after the Institute had begun its search for an American host institution, Fromm returned to Chicago to continue his work with the CPI and explore the possibility of the

²⁵ Even after 1946, however, the Institute maintained a presence in and around Columbia University. Herbert Marcuse and Leo Lowenthal taught occasional courses during the late 1940s, Franz Neumann was hired as a full-time faculty member in 1949, and the Institute kept a residential apartment near campus until the central members of the group finally returned to Frankfurt (Wheatland 2009, 94).

Institute's relocation to the city (Wiggershaus 1994, 143). During this second visit, Fromm rekindled contact with his CPI acquaintances such as Horney and Franz Alexander, but also introduced himself and the Institute to social scientists at the University of Chicago, including W.F. Ogburn, Donald Slessinger, and Harold Lasswell. According to Wheatland, all three of these scholars were intrigued by the Institute's work, and were especially interested in "the Horkheimer Circle's use of social psychology in their studies of authority and the family" (2009, 44). It is likely that Lasswell in particular saw resonances between the Institute's research and his own work on political psychology, culture, and propaganda. Ultimately, however, Fromm's negotiations with the University of Chicago were abandoned after a lesser-known Institute member, Julian Gumperz, informed Horkheimer of Columbia University's enticing offer to move the group there.²⁶ Nonetheless, the first contact between the Frankfurt and Chicago Schools was characterized not by intellectual misgivings, but mutual curiosity and even professional support.

If this had been the extent of the two groups' interaction, little could be made of it. There is nothing in Fromm's initial contact with the University of Chicago to suggest that it (or Lasswell in particular) was interested in anything more than advancing and broadening social science scholarship at the University while at the same time providing much-needed shelter for an intriguing group of political exiles. Yet this proved *not* to be the final communication between members from these two groups.

The first indication of more substantive collaboration came with the Institute's publication of an article by Lasswell on the Taos, a pueblo-dwelling Native American tribe, in a

²⁶ For a more detailed account of the Frankfurt School's relocation to Columbia in the summer of 1934, see Wheatland (2009, 35-60); Wiggershaus (1994; 140-148); and Jay (1973, 39-40).

1935 issue of the *Zeitschrift*. At first glance, the essay itself was not particularly remarkable, since its subject matter was not obviously reflective of either Lasswell's or the Institute's more typical interests in socio-political life in the late-modern industrial era.²⁷ What *was* remarkable, however, was not just that the Institute chose to publish Lasswell at all, but that it had in fact *invited* Lasswell to submit an original piece of scholarship. Upon receipt of the essay, in fact, Horkheimer wrote to Lasswell, welcoming him as an Institute "collaborator" (21 May 1935, box I, folder 16, document 99).²⁸

These events are noteworthy, given that the *Zeitschrift* was a largely insular, German language-only publication reserved "almost exclusively" for Institute members (Wiggershaus 1994, 117). Though the publication did sometimes open its pages to outsiders, these contributions were usually review articles, written in German, and authored by friends, colleagues, or associates of the Institute. After the group settled in New York, the *Zeitschrift* did pay more attention to American scholarship, but, again, this usually came in the form of review

²⁷ At a broader level, however, Lasswell's essay did deal with themes of culture and social psychology that had characterized his earlier and more notable works. For instance, Lasswell's thesis was that the Taos' peyote rituals functioned as telling "symbols" of some kind of change in the deep social or political structure of the tribe. Specifically, Lasswell believed that the community's increased use of peyote "signified" – or reflected – an underlying anxiety over contact with outside cultures (1935a, 232; 237). It should also be noted that later in his life, Lasswell did return to anthropology and the political and social conditions of indigenous tribes. In 1971, he collaboratively authored *Peasants, Power, and Applied Social Change: Vicos as a Model*, which was an experiment in "giving increasing initiative in decision-making" to peasants in a Peruvian hacienda (Almond 1987, 266). See Farr, Hacker, and Kazee (2008) for a more critical discussion of the Vicos project.

²⁸ As stated above in n.12, I will provide dates and location information in-text for documents housed in the Max Horkheimer Archive. However, as per the guidelines of the sixteenth edition of the *Chicago Manual of Style*, my full bibliography provides only one citation to the collection as a whole. See the correspondence between Horkheimer and Lasswell at the end of May 1935, shortly before the publication of the Taos essay. In his letter, Lasswell wrote that he was "very much gratified at your [Horkheimer's] invitation to contribute to your journal and I am doubly gratified that you found the article interesting" (29 May 1935, box 1, folder 16, document 98). Horkheimer, for his part, remarked that he appreciated the article "not only because the contents are closely related to our own field of interest, but also it gives me the extreme pleasure of welcoming you as our collaborator" (21 May 1935, box I, folder 16, document 99).

essays authored by Frankfurt School members or their acquaintances (Wheatland 2009, 65). On the rare occasions when the *Zeitschrift* did publish an English-language essay authored by an outside figure, both the topic of the article and the contributor were usually clearly sympathetic to the group's *modus operandi*. Owing to his reputation as a political scientist interested in empirical methods, Lasswell would not have fit this bill as neatly as the *Zeitschrift*'s other American contributors, such as Margaret Mead (1936) and Charles Beard (1935).²⁹

By 1937, the same year that “The Latest Attack on Metaphysics” and “Traditional and Critical Theory” were published in the *Zeitschrift*, Horkheimer had developed close-enough relations with the University of Chicago that prominent members of its sociology and political science departments agreed to add their names to the list of the Institute's American sponsors, which was termed the group's “Advisory Committee.” The sociologist Louis Wirth was the first to offer his support, but Lasswell and Merriam were included soon after (Wheatland 2009, 222). Beginning in 1940, this list of names appeared on all the official stationary of the Institute (Wheatland 2009, 380 n.79).³⁰

More significant collaboration between the Frankfurt School and scholars at the University of Chicago materialized during the summer of 1940, during which time the Institute was developing ideas and proposals for two long-term research projects. The first project was to

²⁹ Incidentally, Beard's essay, a critical assessment of the rise of empiricism and professionalization in the American social sciences that would have certainly resonated with the Institute, appeared in the same issue as Lasswell's piece. Compared to Beard, however, Lasswell used (or was granted) over three times the number of *Zeitschrift* pages.

³⁰ When Horkheimer contacted Merriam to request permission to print his name on the Institute's new letterhead, along with that of the other Advisory Committee members, Merriam acquiesced, though it should be noted that he appeared to have little knowledge of the specific mission or purpose of the Institute he had earlier agreed to support and, indeed, “advise.” He wrote: “I have no objection to the use of my name as a member of the Advisory Committee of the International Institute of Social Research, but I don't mind saying that I should like to know more about the program of the Institute and what kind of advice is expected of me” (1 July 1940, box I, folder 18, document 343).

be an examination of the growth and popularization of anti-Semitism in the West, the second a study of the cultural conditions in Germany that had made the rise of Nazism possible during the early 1930s. As it happened, only the former project would survive, in the form of the multivolume *Studies in Prejudice*. The proposal on German culture was never able to secure sufficient funding, though Institute member Franz Neumann engaged many of its themes in his individual work of 1942, *Behemoth*. In 1940, however, Horkheimer and his colleagues were cultivating both research ventures in earnest, and were attempting to procure backing from institutions like the American Jewish Committee and the Rockefeller Foundation. To apply for these resources, the Institute compiled a collection of materials for review, which included budgets, detailed proposals, and letters of reference and support. It was for the purpose of securing these latter items that first Horkheimer and, later, Neumann, contacted Lasswell and Merriam.

Horkheimer likely communicated with both scholars in late 1940 regarding their potential sponsorship of the German culture project, but he apparently only exchanged correspondence with Merriam during the remainder of that year. Adorno had prepared the ground for Horkheimer's request in July, when he sent a long, carefully worded letter to Merriam – it went through at least two drafts – detailing the Institute's work and theoretical outlook.³¹ Here Adorno clearly outlined the group's critical theoretical outlook, and even directed Merriam to Horkheimer's "Metaphysics" and "Traditional and Critical Theory" essays, thus making no

³¹ This was not the only contact the Institute had with Merriam and Lasswell during 1940. Shortly after Adorno sent his July 30th letter, Horkheimer and the Institute's chief administrative director, Friedrich Pollock, sent both Chicago School scholars a copy of the first issue of the Institute's new English language journal, *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science*. Merriam (24 August 1940, box V, folder 193, document 314) and Lasswell (20 August 1940, box V, folder 193, document 312) each acknowledged receipt, and Lasswell seemed especially pleased, writing: "I have long hoped that you would make use of English as a vehicle for enlarging the impact of the distinguished work of your Institute on social science in this country."

effort to hide the Institute's attitude toward empirical methodology as "mere fact collecting" (30 July 1940, box I, folder 18, documents 340-342, 344-353). Several weeks later, Horkheimer sent Merriam a copy of the research proposal on German culture, asking for his comments and suggestions. Merriam quickly acknowledged receipt of the proposal, but was either unwilling to respond in depth or did not understand what Horkheimer was asking of him. Rather than explicitly agreeing or declining to provide the sort of recommendations for improvement that Horkheimer had requested, Merriam simply wrote that the proposal "contains very valuable material, and I am very glad to have it" (31 October 1940, box I, folder 18, document 338). Evidently Horkheimer did not immediately press the issue, but waited until March of 1941 to return to the subject. Again Merriam seemed pleasantly interested in the Institute's work, but unclear as to what was being asked of him, writing to Friedrich Pollock: "Incidentally, I note my name is on the Advisory Committee and I am wondering whether I am neglecting my duties. What is the Advisory Committee supposed to do" (29 May 1941, box I, folder 18, document 336)?

While this rather confused series of communications with Merriam was taking place, Horkheimer and the Institute were having greater success with Lasswell, who at this point had left the University of Chicago for a position at the Library of Congress. Their collaboration was demonstrated, first, by the publication of yet another Lasswell article in an Institute organ. This one, on radio as a means for "reducing personal insecurity," appeared in a 1941 issue of the English-language *SPSS* (49). As will be discussed in the next section, Horkheimer dedicated this installment to the socio-political ramifications of modern mass communication, and Lasswell's

essay was joined by articles such as Paul Lazarsfeld's "Remarks on Administrative and Critical Communications Research" and Adorno's "On Popular Music."³²

In the meantime, Lasswell was also proving both willing and able to offer his support for the nascent project on German culture. By February of 1941, Lasswell had reviewed the Institute's proposal (which Horkheimer had presumably sent or given to Lasswell around the same time he had mailed the document to Merriam), and had written Horkheimer with a series of editorial suggestions and changes. Horkheimer returned Lasswell's letter with a revised proposal that reflected virtually all of the edits Lasswell had suggested. The most notable was the inclusion of a more explicit plan to "associate young American scientists with the project," which Lasswell thought would mutually benefit both the Institute and its research partners (10 March 1941, box I, folder 16, documents 88-89). In none of his notes, however, did Lasswell suggest that the Institute's proposal was too philosophically or normatively inclined. Nor did Horkheimer express concern in this series of communications that Lasswell's input risked "scientizing" the project.

A month later, Neumann contacted Lasswell to ask whether he would chair Neumann's individual section of the German culture project, entitled "Ideological Permeation of Labor and the New Middle Classes." Lasswell agreed, and throughout the remainder of 1941 the two

³² Lazarsfeld's article opened the issue with the argument that "[b]ehind the idea of [communications research] is the notion that modern media of communication are tools handled by people or agencies for given purposes" (Lazarsfeld 1941, 2). Lazarsfeld thus claimed that cultural products such as radio, television, and film should thus be studied as "a medium for something" (Lazarsfeld 1941, 3). He went on to cite Lasswell as an important resource for this kind of work, and, indeed, Lasswell's subsequent essay reinforced this depiction. As will be discussed, Lasswell's article employed his research with the National Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) to suggest that popular radio shows could function as effective transmitters of social therapy, helping to ameliorate the insecure conditions of modern life.

remained in contact via post, telephone, and face-to-face conversation.³³ With this collaboration underway, the Institute also kept Lasswell informed of their other research projects. In May 1941, for instance, Neumann sent Lasswell a copy of Marcuse's recently published *Reason and Revolution*, just as Pollock had sent both Lasswell and Merriam the first issue of the *SPSS* a year earlier (6 May 1941, box I, folder 16, document 82).

Ultimately, the German culture project would founder for lack of funds. Neumann, however, re-focused his efforts on securing funding from the American Jewish Committee for the anti-Semitism project, and, in 1942, actually considered naming Lasswell its co-director (Wheatland, 383 n.22). Though the Columbia sociologist Robert Lynd was eventually chosen for the position, Lasswell remained associated with the preliminary research and wrote a supportive testimonial for the American Jewish Committee application. In the testimonial, Lasswell expressed explicit support for the Institute's methodological approach in treating culture as a political domain:

Thank you very much for your invitation to serve on a committee to sponsor the Institute's project on anti-Semitism. I accept with alacrity. Few topics are more urgent than this and few institutions are of equal competence to your own for the successful prosecution of research. Your Institute is distinguished for careful study of individual and cultural processes and is admirably equipped to bring out the full complexity of the interrelationships involved. (Box IX, folder 92, document 7a)

³³ See the collection of letters between Neumann and Lasswell in the Max Horkheimer Archive, box I, folder 16, documents 76-86.

These interactions during the early 1940s indicate that Lasswell and the Institute were working closely to develop and refine two long-term research projects, one of which would occupy the Institute for the remainder of their stay in America and would culminate in the multivolume *Studies in Prejudice*, published in 1949 and 1950. Certainly the Frankfurt School sought out Lasswell's help on these projects because of his status and influence in the American academy. Still, the extent and tenor of their collaboration suggests that the group also sincerely believed Lasswell could strengthen the fundamental structure and substantive direction of both research ventures.

Therefore despite their vociferous public rhetoric against scientism throughout the 1930s and 1940s, the productive relationship that the Critical Theorists of the Frankfurt School developed with Lasswell reveals a much more *complicated* and *intriguing* picture. Indeed, the communication between these scholars suggests they shared a not insignificant portion of intellectual ground, especially concerning the politics of culture. This stands in contrast to common disciplinary narratives concerning Critical Theory and empirical political science as they emerged in the early 1940s. Before pursuing this argument in earnest, then, it is worth presenting some alternative explanations of the interactions between the Institute and Chicago scholars, which would keep intact the conventional view that Critical Theorists and empirical social scientists were at intellectual odds and therefore incapable of meaningful collaboration.

The first and most obvious explanation is that the Institute showed deference to the members of the Chicago School was simply out of professional propriety. Not only had the University of Chicago almost housed the Institute upon their arrival in the US, but, even after the group's immigration, individual Chicago scholars including Lasswell and Merriam had also offered backing in the form of sponsorship and letters of support. Regardless of their larger

political and philosophical differences, then, open criticism of these figures like the kind the Institute had leveled against Dewey would have proved awkward, if not outright detrimental to the Frankfurt School's valuable professional connections in the United States. Maintaining these bonds likely seemed even more important to the Institute given its relative disinclination to cultivate many meaningful support networks with other American scholars and institutions during their time in exile (a situation further exacerbated after Fromm's messy departure from the group in 1939) (Wiggershaus 1994, 145-148).³⁴ Add to this Horkheimer's recurring fear that he or the Institute might be persecuted for leftist or simply non-standard political beliefs, and the group's continued contact with these prominent American academics becomes rather more understandable (Wheatland 2009, 72-73).

A second line of reasoning suggests that, in an effort to create an attractive image of themselves for their future American hosts, Horkheimer and the Institute over-exaggerated their commitment to empirical methodology in their applications to US universities in 1933 and 1934. Knowing full well that empiricism was increasing in popularity on the other side of the Atlantic, both Jay and Wheatland have suggested that the Institute intentionally depicted its early studies on the decline of the traditional family structure in the West – which would eventually be published in 1936 as *Studien über Autorität und Familie* – as amenable if not committed to empirical social scientific methods. Given the Institute's description of the *Studien* project, then, it might have appeared to someone like Lasswell that both he and his German counterparts were interested in using empirical methods to study the political implications of similar phenomena, including the family, educational institutions, individual psychological dispositions, and, of

³⁴ It should be noted, though, that Wheatland also argues that the Institute's self-imposed alienation, or, conversely, forced marginalization from the American academic community has been somewhat exaggerated over the years. See his Chapter Two for further discussion.

course, mass culture. Thus Lasswell could have envisioned the Institute as kindred spirits, and Horkheimer was willing to allow the misrecognition to continue after he arrived in the US (Jay 1973, 130; Wheatland 2009, 43-44, 59-60). If this explanation is correct, then American social scientists could be forgiven for failing to recognize the obvious political and philosophical dissimilarities between themselves and the Institute.

A third and final possibility, put forth by John Gunnell (1993b), is that even if Lasswell and Merriam were aware of the Institute's hostile attitude towards positivism and empirical methodology in general, they likely did not understand it (or at least not very well). This is because debates over the philosophy of science were only beginning to develop in the US prior to the mid-1930s and the immigration of European scholars to the American academy.³⁵ Indeed, Gunnell argues that “[t]he positivist image of science that many émigré theorists struck out against in American social science was, ironically, less one generated in this country than one that they brought with them” (1993b, 192). Rather than the product of their sudden immersion in an insufficiently critical intellectual and cultural environment, then, the Institute's censure of positivism was part of a much larger and peculiarly European debate that had begun during the 1920s in Weimar Germany and intensified after 1933.³⁶ Accordingly, the Frankfurt School's attack on American research methods was simply an extension of this Weimar debate, and was largely lost on its domestic audience. This would mean that Institute's American interlocutors were unaware of or uninterested in its approach to the philosophy of science, and that whatever

³⁵ Gunnell has also advanced this position in a 2006 essay, “Dislocated Rhetoric.” Here he depicts the American academy as failing to be able to distinguish the positions of European émigrés from one another for want of a conceptual framework through which to properly understand their work (776-777).

³⁶ According to Gunnell, this discussion had developed around the work of Karl Mannheim, and involved a number of prominent German intellectuals who later emigrated, including Hannah Arendt, Leo Strauss, Hans Morgenthau, Otto Neurath, and central Institute figures such as Horkheimer, Neumann, Marcuse, and Karl Wittfogel (Gunnell 1993b, 164).

communication the Institute had with figures like Lasswell or Merriam, it never really engaged their deep political and philosophical differences.

Certainly all three of these explanations help contextualize the surprisingly close relationship that developed between members of the Frankfurt and Chicago Schools during the 1930s and early 1940s. Given the actual content of the groups' dealings during this time, however, I do not believe these narratives tell the *entire* story. While the interactions these scholars were undoubtedly conditioned by mundane circumstances including professional propriety, self-interested anxiety, and simple misrecognitions and misreadings, the frequency and content of their collaboration also indicates that it was not entirely insincere or superficial.³⁷ Prominent members of each camp took an active interest in the work of the other, and there is little evidence to suggest that either group tried to hide details of their projects from the other. Indeed, beyond furnishing Lasswell and Merriam with detailed descriptions and extensive samples of their scholarship, the Institute also sought out their advice and support in developing substantive ideas and research projects. For their part, the Chicago scholars, and especially Lasswell, responded by offering professional sponsorship and, more importantly, detailed and approving appraisal of the Institute's work. Sifting through the details of their recurring liaisons,

³⁷ Many of the letters shared between Institute members and Lasswell in particular even indicate the growth of personal friendships. For instance, upon their initial encounter as far back as 1935, Horkheimer and Lasswell seemed to have got on swimmingly. The former wrote shortly after their introduction that he "hope[d] sincerely that the gay evening of our first meeting was the beginning of a fruitful scientific and personal relationship in the future" (21 May 1935, box I, folder 16, document 99). Lasswell concurred, noting that, "[i]ndeed, I look forward to many profitable conversations, some of which need not be as exuberant as those of the other evening" (29 May 1935, box I, folder 16, document 98). Neumann and Lasswell also made friends after they began working together on the German culture project. In a letter from 1941, Neumann wrote to Lasswell thanking him for hosting the former during a visit to Washington DC: "It was a great pleasure to see and talk to you and I am indebted to you for the kind interest you have shown in our work. [...] Could you spare the time to spend an evening with some of our friends, not to talk shop but about the pleasanter things of life? Shall I give you a ring on Saturday?" (11 June 1941, box I, folder 16, document 82)

then, it is difficult to maintain the position that each group committed so much time and energy to the other merely to keep up appearances. Nor does it seem likely that recurring dialogue on one side was simply misunderstood by both groups because each inhabited entirely different conceptual and discursive frameworks. Far from failing to communicate across some kind of antagonistic divide of “theory vs. science” or a “European vs. American worldview,” the historical record indicates that leading figures of both Critical Theory and empirical political science worked together quite well.

Therefore it seems that the traditional narrative of the disciplinary history of political science, which posits some kind of “break” at mid-century between two radically different approaches to politics, has been overdrawn, at least in this instance. Though the emergence of European thought in the American academy certainly challenged the *status quo* in a variety of disciplines, most notably political science, it is simply not the case that Critical Theory and American positivism were hopelessly opposed to one another *in practice*. On the contrary, the correspondence between members of the Frankfurt and Chicago Schools reveals that, in certain areas, Critical Theory and empirical social science actually found common ground. Such correspondence indicates that the relationship of these scholars deserves a reappraisal.

The question is how and where to begin such a reappraisal. Perhaps the most obvious starting place for reassessment is the thematic content of the two groups’ actual communications, i.e. the topics on which they discoursed and collaborated. One particularly notable theme of the interactions between Frankfurt and Chicago School scholars was a mutual interest in the politics of ordinary cultural behaviors and practices. Indeed, a shared fascination with everyday culture is evident in the very first interactions of the two groups, when Lasswell and Merriam took notice of the Institute’s cultural and psychological analyses in the *Studien über Autorität und*

Familie project. The theme emerged again when Frankfurt School chose to and even invited Lasswell to publish his essays on Taos peyote rituals and mass radio broadcasting in its journals. It appeared once more in Lasswell's work with Neumann on the German culture project, and in his later, glowing description of the Institute as "distinguished for careful study of individual and cultural processes." Setting aside discussion of narrowly personal or professional topics, it could be argued that a considerable portion of the communication between these two groups bore directly on the politics of culture. If these two groups shared any discursive ground, this was likely it.

THE CULTURE INDUSTRY: POPULAR CULTURE AS CAPITALIST INSTRUMENT

In some ways, the Institute's analyses of popular culture were fashioned after their criticisms of empirical social science in particular and instrumental rationality more generally. Recall that the Frankfurt School figured positivism and its ostensible outgrowth, pragmatism, as both symptom and cause of the destruction of objective reason. In the Institute's estimation, positivism's commitment to "mere fact collecting" meant that the current social, political, and economic order was treated as given, which in turn implied that this order should not and could be altered. Positivism and pragmatism reflected the triumph of instrumental reason insofar as these philosophies remained blind to "humankind's higher temporal goods above and beyond self-preservation and the calculation of utility" (Joas 1993, 82).

For the Frankfurt School, mass culture similarly reinforced the relativism and instrumentalism of modern life. Just like empirical social science, contemporary culture was no longer informed by any guiding social theory, and was therefore unable to fulfill its traditional role as critical interpreter of social life. The Institute's critiques of culture thus paralleled its

critiques of positivism: the group treated both categories as exemplary illustrations of instrumental rationality and its complete takeover of modern civilization. Just as logical empiricism was a tragic methodological development in the social sciences because it obstructed a critical evaluation of social life, so mass culture was a tragic ideological development in social life because it concealed the political and economic tensions intrinsic to late-modern capitalism.

In other ways, however, the Institute considered mass culture an even more catastrophic manifestation of instrumental rationality than positivism. For in effectively eclipsing “high” culture, including visual art, music, and literature, mass culture had silenced one of the last remaining outposts of social criticism in the modern world. Thus while the rise of empiricism in the social sciences was troubling because it obstructed critical analysis of social phenomena, the ascension of popular culture was even more disastrous because it transformed culture from something that “endow[ed] nature with an organ for making known her sufferings” into “a giant loudspeaker...blaring through commercialized recreation and popular advertising” (Horkheimer [1947] 2004, 69; 96). Lost in the eclipse of high culture by mass culture was not just a rational discourse of social critique, but something even more basic: a language with which to express the sheer pain, alienation, and misery produced by advanced capitalism.

It was only after emigration in 1934 that the Institute developed its assessment of mass culture in earnest. Before this, the Institute certainly engaged culture – they had always maintained a commitment to the study of society in its totality – but these reflections appeared less frequently than they later would. During its early years the group was also less focused on mass culture *per se*, cleaving more closely to issues of aesthetics and the critical possibilities of high art.

The Institute figure most engaged with these topics prior to 1934 was undoubtedly Adorno, who had developed knowledge and interest in art and music apart from and even before his formal academic training in philosophy.³⁸ During the 1920s, Adorno trained as a composer in Vienna under Alban Berg and Eduard Steuermann, who were leading members of the circle surrounding the atonal composer Arnold Schönberg. When it became clear that he had no future in *avant-garde* composition and performance – Schönberg was apparently unimpressed with his work – Adorno turned his attention toward music criticism. He only committed himself to academia in the late 1920s (Wiggershaus 1994, 71-81).³⁹ Between 1921 and 1932, however, Adorno published about one hundred articles on music criticism and aesthetics (Wiggershaus 1994, 70).

He produced his first substantial work on music aesthetics for the Institute in 1932. Though not yet a full-fledged member of the group, his essay, “On the Social Situation of Music,” spanned the first two issues of the *Zeitschrift* (Adorno [1932] 2002b). Much of the article dealt with the critical value of atonal music, especially as developed by Schönberg. Elaborating a position that he largely maintained throughout the rest of his life, Adorno celebrated atonality as an expression of the “refusal to compromise with the unresolved dissonances of contemporary society” (Jay 1973, 183). Schönberg’s purposefully difficult, discordant compositions endeavored to fulfill the highest purpose of art, i.e. to make known nature’s sufferings (to appropriate Horkheimer’s later formulation). Later in the essay, Adorno condemned composers

³⁸ Adorno’s cultural writings in the 1930s were not entirely unprecedented for the Institute, however. Many of the first generation Institute members had taken an interest in cultural and aesthetic theory early on, largely due to the teachings of Hans Cornelius. An older philosopher at the University of Frankfurt, Cornelius had been “an artist *manqué* and had written extensively in the philosophy of art” (Jay 1973, 175). Moreover, Horkheimer had tried his hand at fiction writing before becoming the Institute’s director, and continued to write fiction throughout his life, though not in any formal capacity.

³⁹ Adorno’s first publication in philosophy was in fact his dissertation on Kierkegaard, which was finished in 1933 (Wiggershaus 1994, 70).

and genres that had reneged on this responsibility in the face of “monopoly capitalism” – most notably Stravinsky and modern opera – but he did not engage mass culture as such (Adorno 2002d, 392). Indeed, in “Social Situation” Adorno was focused more on the commodification of high culture than on popular culture, whose products were designed as commodities to begin with.

Yet the topic of mass culture was not *entirely* absent from the group’s work prior to emigration. One particularly early comment surfaced in Horkheimer’s *Dämmerung (Dawn and Decline)*, which was published in Switzerland in 1934, but had been written in Germany as a series of notes between 1926 and 1931. The book was written as a general protest against the horrors of social inequality and oppression in the modern world, but in a pointed remark Horkheimer observed that “[p]leasure in cheap amusements, narrow-minded fondness for petty possessions, empty discussion of one’s own concerns, comical vanities and sensitivities, in short the whole wretchedness of dejected existence, do not occur wherever power gives men and women contentment in their lives and allows them to develop” (Horkheimer [1934] 1978, 47). Horkheimer did not specify these comments further, but it is noteworthy that even before taking over directorship of the Institute, he was already conceptualizing products and practices of popular culture as instruments through which the masses are kept mollified and ignorant of their social lot.

Shortly before he came to America in 1938, Adorno also began paying more attention to the aesthetic, social, and political status of popular culture, and especially popular music. His first extended analysis of the domain, “On Jazz,” was published in a 1936 issue of the

Zeitschrift.⁴⁰ Adorno, still not an official Institute member, wrote the article while studying at Oxford, though much of the essay's content was developed from conversations that he had had with a jazz expert at the Frankfurt conservatory before 1933 (Jay 1973, 185-186). When the article was published, then, Adorno had yet to visit America and "thus had not experienced jazz at first hand" (Jay 1973, 186). Nevertheless, Adorno believed – and continued to believe throughout the remainder of his career – that jazz was a paradigmatic example of the impoverished and oppressive nature of mass culture. Though the genre *seemed* rebellious and creative, especially in its deployment of formal musical elements such as atonality and syncopation, Adorno argued that this was only a thin disguise. Thus while in Schönberg's work a musical element like atonality represented a form of thoroughgoing social criticism, in jazz, the technique had been transformed into a repeated, derivative, and ultimately agreeable pattern. Thus musical elements that were disruptive in one context were, in jazz, coopted. Its listeners had been trained to blindly accept – and even masochistically "appreciate" – sounds that were actually intended to be harsh, dissonant, and disagreeable (Adorno [1936] 2002, 473).

Contrary to several accounts of the Institute's intellectual development, then, the group's rejection of popular culture did not appear suddenly after emigration, a result of "culture shock."⁴¹ Prior to their arrival in America, the Institute had in fact advanced several negative appraisals of mass culture. Still, it is true that before emigration the Frankfurt School's few

⁴⁰ Before 1936, Adorno authored two very short pieces, "Farewell to Jazz" in 1933 and "Kitsch" in 1932. Neither was published in an Institute organ. Both have been translated and republished in the collected work *Essays on Music* ([1932] 2002a; [1933] 2002).

⁴¹ Adorno (1969) himself was one of the first to provide support for this account, though subsequent Frankfurt School scholars have repeated it in both implicit and explicit terms. The most notable examples are, perhaps, Jameson's *Marxism and Form* (1972) and Jay's "Adorno in America" (1984), but see also Jennemann (2007). It should be noted that while Jennemann disagrees with Jameson and Jay's more traditional depiction of Adorno as a mandarin elitist in America, he does not dispute the fact that Adorno's negative response to mass culture was largely the product of his sudden cultural immersion in it after emigration.

comments on mass culture, though uniformly critical, were not programmatic or systematic, and were not intended to be. It was only after the group had established itself in New York in the late 1930s and 1940s that it generated its sustained interpretations of mass culture as an expression of instrumental rationality and, by extension, of social, political, and economic oppression.

The Institute's first effort at a more systematic treatment of popular culture came with Adorno's "On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening," a long essay that appeared in a 1938 issue of the *Zeitschrift*. Following his earlier comments on jazz, the article was, at its most basic, a return to Adorno's assessment of popular music as derivative, mimetic, and perniciously ideological. The difference between the 1936 and 1938 essays, however, was that in the latter Adorno expanded his critical vision beyond a specific genre, and now approached popular music as a homogenous cultural field in which certain social and psychological tendencies were routinely produced and disseminated. The first of these tendencies was, as the title of the essay indicated, the fetishization of cultural objects. At the outset of the essay, Adorno meant this in a more or less orthodox Marxian sense. Following Marx's analysis in *Capital*, then, in "Fetish Character" Adorno argued that products of popular culture were no longer recognized as human-made objects meant for reflection and aesthetic enjoyment. Having lost their "pre-capitalist residues," cultural objects were valued only insofar as they could be exchanged and consumed (Adorno [1938] 2001, 38). Accordingly, the value of contemporary music was determined not by aesthetic standards, but commodity standards, i.e. "what one pays in the market for the product" (Adorno [1938] 2001, 37-38). In celebrating a piece popular music, the modern cultural consumer did not enjoy its artistic qualities, which would have required the individual to involve him/herself with "the basic conditions of the

relation between art and society,” but the money used to consume the product itself (Adorno [1938] 2001, 39).

The fetishization of modern culture produced a series of attendant political problems. When dissociated from their real social contexts and revered only as objects of exchange, Adorno argued that cultural products could no longer live up to their original, critical purpose. That is, mass culture could not reveal to the attentive spectator or listener the larger social tensions under which it was produced. In fact, inasmuch as mass cultural products were oriented toward easy consumption, they actually helped obscure the real social, political, and economic conditions from which they arose. Commenting on popular music specifically, Adorno thus declared that “[t]he delight in the moment and the gay façade becomes an excuse for absolving the listener from the thought of the whole, whose claim is comprised in proper listening. The listener is converted, along his line of least resistance, into the acquiescent purchaser” ([1938] 2001, 32). As such, the pleasures of mass music serve a “diversionary function” (Adorno [1938] 2001, 33). The genre was “illusory and mendacious,” a “mask...of false happiness” (Adorno [1938] 2001, 33).

In the second half of “Fetish Character,” Adorno pushed his critique even further. Here he claimed that precisely because popular music was “illusory and mendacious,” contemporary listeners had “lost the capacity to make demands beyond the limits of what was supplied” by the market ([1938] 2001, 45). For Adorno, then, popular music was not just diversionary; it was also stultifying. In consuming popular music one’s actual ability to listen *regressed*: the listener became psychologically unable to make sense of any art form other than that provided within the rigid boundaries of mass culture. Thus contemporary listening had “arrested at the infantile stage. Not only do the listening subjects lose, along with the freedom of choice and

responsibility, the capacity for conscious perception of music, which was from time immemorial confined to a narrow group, but they stubbornly reject the possibility of such perception. [...] The fetish character of music produces its own camouflage through the identification of the listener with the fetish” ([1938] 2001, 46; 48). The situation of the average music listener was therefore quite dire. Not only did the fetish character of music strip consumers of their critical awareness, it also and at the same time regressed the consciousness of these same consumers to a state of docility and stupidity, which made the process of fetishization virtually impossible to counteract.

Of course, the depth of Adorno’s disdain for popular culture, and popular music in particular, is notorious. I have recounted the arguments of “Fetish Character” at length, however, because the article represents one of the Institute’s first and certainly one of its most comprehensive descriptions of how mass culture *functioned* as a politically relevant domain. Like Horkheimer’s early essays on positivism, later Institute treatments of culture expanded upon but never considerably deviated from the basic premises Adorno laid out in his 1938 essay. Before discussing these later treatments, then, it is worth specifying the ways that Adorno depicted mass culture as “working,” politically speaking.

The overarching depiction of popular culture in “Fetish Character” was as a representative byproduct of the existing socio-political order. Mass culture – and mass music in particular – was a kind of condensed carbon copy of modern society, which meant that the domain bore the traces of the larger social, political, and economic system from which it had developed. Hence for Adorno popular culture was politically significant primarily because it mirrored, and therefore helped make visible, the deep structural forces ordering modern life.

This did not mean that popular culture was merely epiphenomenal, however. The domain did indeed *do* political things; it had political effects.⁴² As a fetish object, for example, popular music made the listener “infantile” (Adorno [1938] 2001, 46). It disabled his or her “capacity to make demands beyond the limits of what was supplied” by the market (Adorno [1938] 2001, 45). It “so heavily veiled” the “unconscious reactions of the listeners” that they had become “forcibly retarded” (Adorno [1938] 2001, 45; 47). Thus because mass culture so effectively and extensively reflected the structuring forces of modern life, it also inured individuals to these forces, concealing their oppressiveness. Popular culture not only *mirrored* the existing socio-political order, then; it also *masked* its true nature.

Yet while Adorno’s description of popular culture meant that the domain *did* political things, it also implied that socio-political forces beyond culture itself were ultimately what *determined* its operation. To be sure, mass culture could condition the immediate social environment in which it appeared; it could “veil” the consciousness of its consumers, “regress” their listening capacities, and so on. But whatever political things popular culture did, or whatever political effects it had, were in the final instance directed by deeper socio-political forces. It could reflect and conceal the modern social, political, and economic order, but only because it was a tool *of* that order, and therefore served its needs. Participation in popular culture was therefore politically significant, but not in any active or dynamic sense. The domain

⁴² Martin Jay has noted, for instance, that for Horkheimer and his colleagues, culture was “never epiphenomenal, although it was never fully autonomous. Its relationship to the material substructure of society was multidimensional. All cultural phenomena must be seen as mediated through the social totality, not merely as the reflection of class interests. This meant that they also expressed the contradictions of the whole, including those forces that negated the status quo. Nothing, or at least almost nothing, was solely ideological” (1973, 54).

did not create or substantially shape political reality, but rather extended and ossified political conditions that already existed.⁴³

This functional description of popular culture was remarkably similar to Lasswell's own work on the topic. Both he and Adorno defined products of mass culture as tools that transmitted and even forced a pre-defined vision of political reality upon the masses. Lasswell and Adorno differed over the normative value of this functioning, of course. Nevertheless, both agreed that the political significance of popular culture lay in its ability to inure consumers to the existing order of things (Adorno [1938] 2001, 33).⁴⁴ Hence each defined the domain as an activity determined *by* politics, but not an activity *of* politics.

Adorno's essay would prove a model for the Institute's forthcoming work on mass culture, which picked up considerably after 1938. In 1941, for instance, the group devoted the first *SPSS* issue of that year to "problems of modern mass communication" (Horkheimer 1941b, 1). Following a brief introduction by Paul Lazarsfeld, the issue led off with Adorno's "On Popular Music," which Adorno had in fact written during his brief stint with Lazarsfeld's Office

⁴³ Some, such as Apostolidis (2000) and Jay (1973), have stressed that for Adorno mass culture was not *purely* ideological, in the sense that it bore within itself traces of the tensions, dissonances, and struggles of modern life. In this sense, it pointed to the impoverishment of existing reality, even if negatively. Of course, both Apostolidis and Jay are right to note that Adorno believed mass culture frequently reflected fissures in the socio-political system of which it was a part. Yet this did not mean that Adorno believed the domain could actually shape or alter the fissures that it sometimes conveyed. More recently, Mariotti (2013) has suggested that Adorno actually wanted to use mass culture – and radio in particular – to propagate better models of democratic citizenship. Mariotti's argument is fascinating and sheds much-needed light on Adorno's radio writings. In the final analysis, however, her essay only underscores the propagandistic nature of Adorno's treatment of mass culture. In articles like "Current of Music" and "The Psychological Technique of Martin Luther Thomas' Radio Addresses," Adorno may have described culture as something other than politically deleterious, much along the same lines as Lasswell, but he was still arguing the function of the domain was to dictate political values to its listeners. Culture, in other words, was still treated as an instrument that political elites used to convey and impose an established vision of political reality upon the masses.

⁴⁴ It followed for Adorno that mass culture would disappear if and when the existing social, political, and economic order of industrial capitalism ends (but certainly not *vice versa*). Interestingly, Adorno even claimed that in a utopian society, art as such would cease to exist, since the social tensions that it gave voice to would themselves cease to exist. See Adorno ([1970] 1984, 47).

of Radio Research.⁴⁵ In the article, Adorno largely followed the line of critique he had developed in “Fetish Character.” Here he again condemned popular music as a standardized genre designed for easy consumption and acceptance, and argued that such standardization imposed upon the listener a “pre-given and pre-accepted” definition of the cultural product in particular and social reality in general (Adorno 1941, 18). Consequently, popular music conditioned the individual such that s/he was willing to obey the dictates of the existing social, political, and economic order. Thus the functional definition of culture as mirror and mask of a deeper, oppressive socio-political reality was reiterated: “The frame of mind to which popular music originally appealed, on which it feeds, and which it perpetually reinforces, is simultaneously one of distraction and inattention. Listeners are distracted from the demands of reality by entertainment which does not demand attention either” (Adorno 1941, 37). This kind of distraction, Adorno continued, “is bound to the present mode of production, to the rationalized and mechanized process of labor to which, directly or indirectly, masses are subject” (1941, 37). Thus the repressive political effects of mass culture, Adorno argued, resulted from its functional capacity to re-present underlying social structures in such a way that attention was diverted from their oppressive character.

Lasswell’s article on radio and personal insecurity followed Adorno’s essay, offering a remarkable side-by-side comparison of these authors’ respective assessments of popular culture.

⁴⁵ The Office of Radio Research was geared primarily toward empirical research, but Lazarsfeld was familiar with the Institute’s critical theoretical approach due to their regular contact throughout the late 1930s and 1940s. Adorno’s stay with the Office of Radio Research between 1938 and 1940, however, was not a happy one. Almost immediately upon his arrival there, Adorno came into conflict with Lazarsfeld and other colleagues for his brusque, aloof demeanor and aggressive rhetoric, which prompted Lazarsfeld to write Adorno a long and harshly worded critique. While this story and, indeed, Adorno’s work for the Office is fascinating, I pass it over because only one of Adorno’s essays was ultimately published by Lazarsfeld’s group, and because many of his writings for the group largely corresponded to the arguments of his more notable contemporary essays, including “Fetish Character” and “On Popular Music.” For further discussion, see Jenemann (2007), Mariotti (2013), and Wiggershaus (1994, 236-246).

In his article, Lasswell analyzed a series of broadcasts that he had produced for NBC to argue that radio could perform the “socially significant purpose” of “*insecurity reduction*” (1941b, 55; emphasis in original). By “insecurity reduction,” Lasswell meant that mass radio broadcasts could help, for instance, clarify difficult moral conundrums or ameliorate common psychological neuroses such as reductively “apprais[ing] the value of the ego in terms of success and failure” (1941b, 50). Lasswell thus proceeded to suggest that carefully designed mass media products could function like systematic therapeutic programs, offering listeners “insight” into their own “anxiety level,” which could in turn help determine whether and what kind of treatment listeners might need (1941b, 56). Clearly, Lasswell’s view of the social and political *value* of mass culture was at complete odds with Adorno’s. Whereas Adorno had claimed in “Popular Music” that the perniciousness of mass culture lay in its ability to effectively acclimatize individuals to their surrounding environment, Lasswell was arguing that this was precisely its value.

Ironically, though, Lasswell’s essay also proved – and in fact *agreed* with – Adorno’s basic point: mass culture could successfully condition individuals to better cope with their reality. The difference was that Adorno saw such coping as ultimately manipulative and oppressive, while Lasswell simply saw it as a productive form of treatment. Despite their *normative* disagreements, then, in their two essays Lasswell and Adorno were employing nearly identical *functional* definitions of mass culture. That is, both were suggesting that the primary political purpose of mass culture was to manipulate consumers into thinking and behaving in ways conducive to the established social, political, and economic order.

For the second *SPSS* issue of 1941, Horkheimer decided to write an article of his own on the politics of mass culture.⁴⁶ Taking up themes that Adorno had introduced in “Fetish Character” and elaborated in “Popular Music,” Horkheimer opened his essay, “Art and Mass Culture,” by paying tribute to the critical power of art before the rise of mass culture. In times past, art was a kind of resistance, “erecting a ‘new world above the familiar world...a new society which by force of imagination it adds to the society in which we really live’” (Horkheimer 1941a, 291).⁴⁷ Now, however, with the “transformation of personal life into leisure and of leisure into routines supervised to the last detail, into the pleasure of the ball park and the movie, the best seller and the radio, ...man has lost his power to conceive a world different from that in which he lives” (1941a, 293-294). Indeed, because “popular entertainment is actually demands evoked, manipulated and by implication deteriorated by the cultural industries,” consumers have become hapless supporters of the existing social, political, and economic order (Horkheimer 1941a, 302-303). Horkheimer’s line of critique closely tracked the functional description of mass culture that Adorno had outlined in his own previous essays. Whereas the “true” purpose of art was to make manifest the underlying conditions of social reality, popular culture mirrors the world in which the individual already lives, thus acclimatizing him or her to its logic and effectively masking its actual degenerative state. “Art and Mass Culture” did not break new intellectual

⁴⁶ In his brief “Notes on Institute Activities,” which was published toward the end of the first *SPSS* issue of 1941, Horkheimer appeared to presage his forthcoming article (and support Adorno’s analysis in “On Popular Music”). Here, Horkheimer spoke of pursuing a critical analysis of social institutions that would pit these associations’ actions and activities against the “values they themselves set forth as their standards and ideals.” In so doing, Horkheimer argued that a “pervasive discrepancy” would appear between reality and the “avowed aims” that social institutions apparently championed: “To take an example, the media of public communication, radio, press, and film, constantly profess their adherence to the individual’s ultimate value and his inalienable freedom, but they operate in such a way that they tend to forswear such values by fettering the individual to prescribed attitudes, thoughts, and buying habits” (Horkheimer 1941b, 122). This, of course, was virtually the same line of argument Adorno had pursued in his essay on popular music, and would reappear in Horkheimer’s essay for the following *SPSS* issue.

⁴⁷ Horkheimer quotes here the French philosopher Jean-Marie Guyau (1930, 21).

ground for the Institute, then, but its contents are noteworthy as they represent one of the first sustained treatments of popular culture by an Institute member other than Adorno.

The next year, Adorno composed the “The Schema of Mass Culture,” in which he sought to generalize his earlier critiques of popular music to popular culture as a whole.⁴⁸ This enlarged scope did not alter Adorno’s basic functional or political evaluations, but in “Schema” his analysis moved away from pointed analyses of the degenerative effects of music, such as the regression of listening, and toward a general condemnation of mass culture as an ideological shroud. In this sense, the essay read like a companion piece to Horkheimer’s “Art and Mass Culture.” No longer capable of producing critical reflection *about* the world, Adorno argued that the glittering products and reverential advertisements of mass culture glorified the world as it *already is*, producing awe in “the mere fact of [its] being” ([1942] 2001, 63). Consequently, “[r]eality becomes its own ideology through the spell cast by its faithful duplication [i.e. culture]” (Adorno [1942] 2001, 63). This withering evaluation of mass culture assumed, as before, Adorno’s functional assessment of the domain as both mirror and mask of social and political reality. On the one hand, mass culture reflected the instrumental, commodified character of industrial capitalism. On the other hand, the extensiveness and repetition of these reflections concealed the fundamentally oppressive character of this system, at least to the average consumer.

Over the next two years, Horkheimer and Adorno worked to combine their individual assessments of mass culture from the previous years into a chapter for the Institute’s next major

⁴⁸As Gunzelin Schmid Noerr observes in his editorial notes for *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno’s composition was initially intended to be the second part that book’s “Culture Industry” chapter (Horkheimer and Adorno [1944] 2002, 254 n.[xix] “fragmentary”). Upon its original publication in 1944, however, this section was not finally edited. It was later published as an appendix to *Dialectic* in Adorno’s collected works.

publication, which also turned out to be its most celebrated work: *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. While definitive, however, the work did not appreciably alter its established assessment of mass culture. In fact, *Dialectic*, though first published in mimeograph form in 1944 and re-published as a monograph in 1947, had been a long-maturing project of Horkheimer and Adorno's. As such, the basic outline of the work had developed alongside both of these thinkers' other writings throughout the end of the 1930s and early 1940s. Their depiction of popular culture in *Dialectic* was therefore familiar. The "culture industry," they argued, was a "filter" through which "the whole world is passed" ([1944] 2002, 99). The domain "seeks strictly to reproduce the world of everyday perception," a goal which was now "the guideline" of all cultural production (2002, 99). Accordingly, while mass culture seemed to promise the consumer pleasure and perhaps even escape from the drudgery of everyday life, its underlying purpose was to acclimatize the consumer to the very world from which he or she was trying to find relief. Mass culture constructed a façade over existing reality, transforming the individual into a docile subject: "The more strongly the culture industry entrenches itself, the more it can do as it chooses with the needs of the consumers – producing, controlling, disciplining them.... Through its inherent tendency to adopt the tone of the factual report, the culture industry makes itself the irrefutable prophet of the existing order" (Horkheimer and Adorno [1944] 2002, 115; 118). The functional language deployed in *Dialectic* is recognizable. Mass culture was a "filter," a "reproduc[tion], a "prophet;" it "misinform[ed]," "duplicate[d]," and "block[ed] insight" ([1944] 2002, 99; 115; 118). This treatment of culture as a manipulative tool of deeper politico-economic forces underwrote Horkheimer and Adorno's critique in *Dialectic*, but followed a path already well worn by earlier Institute writings.

Only weeks *Dialectic* appeared in mimeograph form, the group also drafted what was effectively a capstone report on Institute activities for the administration of Columbia University. The relationship between the two institutions was fast coming to an end, and the document was meant to detail the progress the Institute had made on several projects initiated during their stay in New York.⁴⁹ The report was not intended for publication, but it deserves consideration here because in it the Institute provided a rare self-reflective assessment of its methodological approach to mass culture that was relatively free from the dense philosophical abstraction more characteristic of their public scholarship, and the just-published *Dialectic* in particular. In the statement, the Institute made direct reference to mass culture as a “mechanical element” and “instrument” of social control (Institute for Social Research 1944, 11). Indeed, according to the report, the political significance of culture in modern society hinged on its power to manipulate the individual’s comprehension of social reality: “Art, for instance, is today not so much an expression of ideals to be realized in human existence as an instrument to promote aims determined by completely external forces. Art is supposed to facilitate adjustment, provide recreation and propagate the values of governmental systems. Art is used to hammer such values into the people’s heads and the people in turn demand that art serve these values in ever increasing measure” (Institute for Social Research 1944, 11). The negative normative judgments of these comments are clear, but it is worth drawing attention, again, to the Institute’s explicit depiction of culture as a tool of deeper social, political, and economic forces. It was an instrument – a “hammer,” even – determined by “external forces.” In a subsequent segment summarizing the Institute’s work on literature, music, and the arts, the report went so far as to

⁴⁹ Horkheimer and Adorno had already relocated to California, and would soon be followed by Marcuse. Columbia, meanwhile, repurposed much of the group’s office space in New York City for the use by the US Navy.

depict mass culture as simply a vehicle of transmission for pre-formed political content: “We interpret it [art] as a kind of code language for processes taking place within society which must be deciphered by means of critical analysis” (Institute for Social Research 1944, 12). Elsewhere the report described art as a “vener” of social phenomena, depicted popular activities like “swimming and football” as “tonics,” and claimed that “[p]opularity consists in reconciling the public to what the amusement industries want it to like” (Institute for Social Research 1944, 12-13).⁵⁰ If they were not precisely propaganda objects, then, the products and practices of popular culture were construed as consciousness-shaping reduplications of the larger social milieu in which they are embedded.⁵¹

The last major Institute work to engage mass culture before the group’s return to Germany in 1950 was Horkheimer’s *Eclipse of Reason*. Though the book was, as discussed above, a damning appraisal of positivism and pragmatism, it also continued the cultural criticism that Horkheimer and Adorno had laid out in *Dialectic* (and that had been summarized in the Columbia report). Sounding a now familiar tune, then, in *Eclipse* Horkheimer argued that mass culture “glorifies the world as it is,” “blaring through” its “giant loud-speaker” the refrain that “[t]his is our groove, this is the rut of the great and the would-be great – this is reality as it is and should be and will be” (Horkheimer [1947] 2004, 96). Confused, scared, and powerless, *Eclipse* depicted the average individual as seeking relief in mindless amusements. It was only by

⁵⁰ This last phrase, which was almost identical to one that appeared in Horkheimer’s “Art and Mass Culture” (1941a, 303), indicate that the Director was the likely author of the report, issued though it was under the group’s collective moniker.

⁵¹ It is important to note that the “Morningside Heights” report was intended only as a summary of the Frankfurt School’s extensive production over a ten-year period. Its portrayal of the group’s work is therefore purposefully broad and in some cases overly reductive (see also Jay [1973], 176-177). Even so, the internal memo was consistent with the Institute’s functional treatment of culture in previous essays, if also more clearly worded. While it may have simplified some of the Frankfurt School’s philosophical discourse, then, it also clarified many of their basic methodological principles.

“echoing, repeating, imitating his surroundings, by adapting himself to all the powerful groups to which he eventually belongs,” Horkheimer said, that the modern individual “manages to survive” (Horkheimer [1947] 2004, 96). Up until their last days in exile, then, the Frankfurt School remained committed to a functional conceptualization of popular culture as both mirror and mask of a deeper social reality, as a tool that kept the masses ignorant of and disconnected from the political forces that *actually* shaped their world.

Yet even after leading members of the Institute returned to Germany, the group largely maintained its assessment of mass culture. Adorno’s position on the topic may have in fact hardened, even as he became more interested in aesthetic theory and his own philosophical project of negative dialectics. For instance in his 1954 essay, “How to Look at Television” ([1954] 2001), Adorno focused almost exclusively on the medium’s use of subliminal messaging. Its “hidden” messages, he argued, were designed to “escape the controls of consciousness, [and therefore] will not be ‘looked through’, will not be warded off by sales resistance, but [are] likely to sink into the spectator’s mind” ([1954] 2001, 164-165). Such an analysis appeared to present television as almost perfectly propagandistic: its purpose was to convey surreptitious psychological messages beneath its more “overt” but ultimately meaningless content (Adorno [1954] 2001, 164).

Nine years later, Adorno returned to the themes of *Dialectic* in his “Culture Industry Reconsidered” ([1963] 2001). Here, as with “Television,” the more complex roles he had attributed to this domain in earlier works, such as its ability to literally regress or retard consumers’ listening habits, were simplified into a depiction of culture as transmitting propagandistic messages. “The concoctions of the culture industry,” he argued, “are neither guides for a blissful life, nor a new art of moral responsibility, but rather exhortations to toe the

line, behind which stand the most powerful interests” ([1963] 2001, 105). In these post-exile essays, Adorno seemed, more than ever, convinced of culture’s ability to completely control and manipulate the public.

Also worth noting, finally, is that while Horkheimer and Adorno were undoubtedly the most vocal critics of mass culture within the Institute during and perhaps even after exile, Marcuse advanced an updated version of the group’s cultural critique throughout the 1960s and 1970s.⁵² To be sure, Marcuse’s analyses in works such as *One-Dimensional Man* (1964), *Essay on Liberation* (1969), and *The Aesthetic Dimension* (1978), were clearly indebted to basic analytic framework of culture that Horkheimer and Adorno had developed years earlier. Thus *One-Dimensional Man* asserted that modern society, and especially mass culture, kept the average individual “indoctrinated and manipulated” (1964, 6).⁵³ Prevented “from being autonomous,” modern citizens did not understand their true needs, and so their political opinions could not be trusted (1964, 6-7). Partly in response to the student protests of the 1960s, however, in *Essay on Liberation* Marcuse acknowledged that some popular art forms, most notably jazz and blues, appeared to signal a “new sensibility” intent on subverting the affirmative culture of the *status quo* (1969, 38).⁵⁴ Yet in *The Aesthetic Dimension*, his last work, Marcuse backed off this position. Indeed, here Marcuse offered a cultural analysis reminiscent of Adorno’s early work on Schönberg: “The work of art,” he stated, “can attain political relevance only as autonomous work;” that is, when produced *outside* the relations and institutions of the modern

⁵² Marcuse himself chose to stay in the United States, where he taught at Brandeis and the University of California-San Deigo.

⁵³ “Perhaps the most telling evidence [of the ideological character of society],” Marcuse noted, “can be obtained by simply looking at television or listening to the AM radio for one consecutive hour for a couple of days, not shutting off the commercials, and now and then switching the station” (1964, xvii).

⁵⁴ See also Jay, who argues that Marcuse was “unwilling to agree entirely” with Adorno’s rejection of jazz (1973, 186; 334 n.63).

market economy (1978, 52). The “pop art and best sellers” of mass culture were for their part repressive, forcing the “exploited classes” to “succumb to the powers that be” (1978, 32). Thus if Marcuse appeared close to repudiating the Institute’s established functional interpretation of mass culture as mirror and mask of deeper socio-political forces in *Essay on Liberation*, in his final work he seemed just as skeptical as Horkheimer and Adorno that mass culture could do anything but reduplicate the impoverished social and political system that had produced it. Marcuse may have modified the Frankfurt School’s critique of mass culture, then, but he did not fundamentally alter it.⁵⁵

CONCLUSION

In canvassing central works of the Institute on mass culture, especially those produced during its time in exile, I have attempted to show that the group maintained a consistent

⁵⁵ Around the same time that Marcuse was developing his analyses of mass culture, Jürgen Habermas, the leading member of the “second generation” Frankfurt School, was producing his first works on the origin and development of the public sphere, the social sciences, and modern rationality. Habermas, of course, had little interest in the politics of mass culture, at least compared to Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse (see, however, Stevenson [1993; 1995]). Indeed, Habermas abandoned his dissertation work with Horkheimer and Adorno in part because he believed their thought had become “paralyzed” by “disdain for modern culture and institutions” (Calhoun 2007, 352). In his early writings, however, it was clear that Habermas was not entirely unsympathetic with his mentors’ analysis of popular culture. In his *habilitation* thesis, for instance, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* ([1962] 1994), Habermas noted that “public opinion” was more and more *produced* by “the realm of mass media” (2). Whereas in the eighteenth century “the press was able to limit itself to the transmission and amplification of the rational-critical debate of private people assembled into a public, now conversely this debate gets shaped by the mass media to begin with” (Habermas 1994, 188). Today, then, the public sphere has been destroyed by a “culture of harmony” that “invites its public to an exchange of opinion about articles of consumption and subjects it to the soft compulsion of constant consumption training” (Habermas 1994, 192). Habermas repeated these claims in 1970 whilst reflecting on the direction of the student protests at the time: “The gentle social control exercised by the mass media makes use of the spectacles of an undermined private sphere in order to make political processes unrecognizable as such. The depoliticized public realm is dominated by the imposed privatism of mass culture. The personalization of what is public is thus the cement in the cracks of a relatively well-integrated society, which forces suspended conflicts into areas of social psychology” (1970, 42-43). Thus, while Habermas may not have wished to pursue the cultural analyses of Horkheimer, Adorno, or Marcuse, he agreed, at least in these early works, that mass culture effectively manipulated the minds of its consumers, taking them out of the public sphere and thus out of meaningful political participation.

functional conceptualization of the domain as a mirror and mask of deeper socio-political forces. For the Frankfurt School, mass culture was ultimately a lens through which an underlying social, political, and economic order was selectively, limitedly represented. In this sense, participation in popular culture did not and could not meaningfully condition or alter political reality; it was not a practice that could shape the direction of political life.

Much like Lasswell, then, the Frankfurt School saw mass culture as increasingly crucial to modern politics, but *not* in any active or dynamic way. In other words, the domain was political because it conveyed an established socio-political reality to its consumers, and ultimately imposed that reality upon them. For both Lasswell and the Institute, mass culture was a tool of more powerful political actors and forces. It was therefore a heteronomous domain, a practice whose political operation was wholly determined by the “powers that be.” Thus while the general political and intellectual agendas of Lasswell and the Institute diverged at several key junctures, they were not *entirely* incompatible. In fact, they were on common ground in their treatment of mass culture as an instrumental tool of politics.

According to traditional narratives in political theory, of course, correspondence of any kind between an empirical social scientist like Lasswell and the Critical Theorists of the Frankfurt School might seem implausible. My sense, however, is that such sharp disciplinary distinctions run the risk of obscuring areas of shared intellectual interest, and of overlooking and even disregarding evidence (e.g. archival material) that would contradict such established narratives. As a result, established disciplinary narratives may miss the remarkable consistency with which certain objects or domains of study – in this case mass culture – have been conceptualized within political theory, even in the eyes of ostensibly radically different thinkers.

Chapter Four: The Politics of Practice

Camps of philosophers cordon themselves off from one another by drawing lines in the still sands of a breezeless desert. [...] Eventually, it is hoped...philosophers will effortlessly walk across those tiny little lines, eventually rubbing them out with their footprints, as they stare up in wonder at the spectacular sculptures above that stand as a memorial to a not-too-distant time when all philosophers were afraid to walk paths that are now frequently trod by just about everyone. (Koopman 2011a, 4)

In the previous two chapters, I explored the intellectual histories of Harold Lasswell and leading members of the Frankfurt School in order to re-trace why and how each camp treated popular culture as an indispensable feature of modern politics. Traditional disciplinary wisdom holds that Lasswell and the Institute shared little in common, on this or any issue. With respect to their analyses of popular culture, however, this standard portrayal holds only if we ask *why* Lasswell and the Institute found the domain politically significant. For Lasswell, political messages conveyed via film, music, television, radio, and printed material could help adapt mass publics to modern democratic society, while the Institute believed they camouflaged its deeper, fundamentally oppressive characteristics. While this analysis is accurate at a surface level, I contend that it overlooks the extent to which the normative conclusions of Lasswell and the Frankfurt School were premised on remarkably similar *functional* descriptions.¹ For both camps, popular culture mediated political reality. It mirrored, and hence supplemented, deeper political actors and forces. Lasswell and the Institute thus offered compatible assessments of *how* popular culture “worked” politically, even though they disagreed about the normative consequences of this work.

¹ As noted in Chapters Two and Three, I use the term “function” to refer to the political activities, tasks, or roles that popular culture is understood to perform, or have the ability to perform. In asking how popular culture functions politically, then, I am investigating what popular culture “does” politically, i.e. the ways it operates as a political phenomenon.

Over the next two chapters, I suggest that rather than debate whether Lasswell or the Institute evaluated popular culture correctly, we might sidestep – or at least bracket, for the time being – the entire functional model that both camps used to describe the domain in the first place. The reason for doing so is that their “mediating model” does not capture all that is political about popular culture. In fact, it excludes another, more literally productive functional description of the domain, which I will call a “material model.” In this model, popular culture operates as the building blocks from which publics and their individual members confront, construct, and even experiment with what is knowable, sayable, and doable in a given social context. Popular culture is, in this sense, more than a tool of conveyance, transmission, or mediation. It is also the very *material* that publics have and use, for better or worse, to define and reconstruct many of their most pressing problems and possibilities. What separates the mediating model from the material model is the idea, held by the latter model, that the boundaries of community life are defined as popular culture is consumed, experienced, and interpreted in everyday life. It thus functions similarly to “traditional” political activities, such as elections, protests, governmental regulations, institutional behavior, and so on. Many have seen culture “as *political*” – as reflecting political concerns. My argument is that it can also be treated “as *politics*.”

Explaining and justifying this argument require that I answer several important questions. First, what does it mean to say that popular culture is political material? How could this approach be applied, and how could it help us assess our contemporary political environment in new, useful, and creative ways? Second, how could such a model be supported, from a political theoretical perspective? What resources could substantiate it? These questions guide my investigations of the next two chapters. I will address the latter set of issues first.

Before doing so, however, it is important to note that shifting away from Lasswell and the Frankfurt School's mediating model of culture does not mean I think it is *wrong*. It would be absurd to assert that products and practices of popular culture do not often convey powerful symbols and messages, and in fact both these camps should be applauded for introducing and maintaining popular culture as an important arena of inquiry for political science. What I *am* asserting is that Lasswell and the Institute's functional descriptions of this domain are inextricably linked to larger political theoretical commitments, including Freudian psychoanalysis, certain interpretations of Marxism, and, in the case of Lasswell, Chicago School positivism. Thus, one might generate an alternate but equally useful functional description of popular culture by approaching the domain from a different political theoretical perspective. This is precisely the object of the present chapter: to develop the basic theoretical resources that will, in the final chapter, help me (a) define my material model of popular culture, and (b) justify why such a model is important for political science to possess.

In the following, I argue that the theoretical resources for a material model of culture can be developed from the work of Michel Foucault and John Dewey. Suggesting that these two figures can be read together on any topic may sound highly implausible. Many interpreters, from Richard Rorty on, have suggested that Foucault's concern with power and its interlocking relationship with knowledge conflicts with the more sanguine Dewey, who maintained that "scientific inquiry" represented the best and most constructive means for managing the natural and social world.² In this account, Foucault and Dewey lean toward different normative poles, the latter favoring hope and progress, the former skepticism and even nihilism. Yet much as I

² I discuss Dewey's idiosyncratic definitions of "science" and "scientific inquiry" below (n.57), but also see my earlier discussion of Dewey and Lasswell in Chapter Two.

argued with Lasswell and the Frankfurt School, this oppositional reading obscures several important similarities between these two thinkers. Dewey and Foucault are useful for my project because *both* similarly argued that activities of everyday life, such as popular culture, play a critical role in constructing and regulating modern politics.

To develop my reading of Dewey and Foucault and their treatment of the politics of ordinary activity, I divide the remainder of this chapter into three sections. In the first, I survey several of the most prominent arguments *against* reading Dewey and Foucault together. Over the past three decades, these arguments have popularized the notion that Deweyan pragmatism and Foucaultian genealogy share little in common with one another, and may in fact be diametrically opposed. Therefore before attempting to link these two thinkers, I want to challenge those who would claim that such a project is not even worth attempting. While Dewey and Foucault pursued different philosophical projects in many respects, the oppositional readings of Rorty and others have greatly oversimplified matters.

Indeed, in the second section I canvass several recent attempts to challenge the traditional depiction of Dewey and Foucault and re-start a dialogue between these two thinkers on new grounds. Randall Auxier (2002), Vincent Colapietro (2011; 2012), Colin Koopman (2007; 2009; 2010; 2011a; 2011b; 2013b), Paul Rabinow (2003; 2011; 2012), and John Stuhr (1997) have all suggested that Deweyan pragmatism and Foucaultian genealogy can be linked at a number of crucial methodological, philosophical, political, and even historical junctures. In so doing, these new interpreters have showed that, in many ways, Dewey and Foucault pursued similar and perhaps even compatible political philosophical projects.

These revisionary interpretations serve as inspiration and important source material for my own reading of Dewey and Foucault, which I present in the final part of the chapter. Here I

argue that a basic orientation to the politics of everyday activity can be developed from three main concepts that are equally important to and equally present in the work of each thinker: *practice, problems, and experiments*. All three of these concepts have been touched on in a more or less sustained manner by those interested in rethinking Dewey and Foucault together. As such, my interpretation is not altogether unprecedented. I do, however, re-order and re-emphasize the way in which these concepts hang together, as it were, since my goal is not simply to show that Dewey and Foucault shared certain concepts, but that the concepts they did share can be used to help explain and justify the functional model of culture I outline in the fourth and final chapter.³

JUXTAPOSING DEWEY AND FOUCAULT: DIFFERENT PACES OR DIFFERENT PATHS?

In recounting the various ways in which Dewey and Foucault have been brought into dialogue, whether as antagonists or partners, it is first worth noting just how relatively rare such dialogues are. Prior to the 1980s, Dewey and Foucault were not read together at all, at least not in the American academy. This began to change with the rise in popularity of French poststructuralism in the US. Still, few have considered a rapprochement between these two thinkers possible, much less plausible.⁴ Indeed, most of the literature that *has* engaged Dewey and Foucault – and pragmatism and genealogy, more broadly – has perceived only sharp contrasts and mutual incompatibilities. In this sense, the disciplinary imagination of political

³ To be sure, other points of overlap between Dewey and Foucault could be and have been explored. Colapietro, for instance, has discussed Dewey and Foucault's use of the concept of "experience," and Koopman has devoted an essay on their methodological approaches to historical analysis (Colapietro 2011; Koopman 2011b). I have chosen to explicate the concepts of practice, problems, and experiments, however, because they will serve as important theoretical resources for my *own* material model of culture, as I discuss in Chapter Four. I identify and develop these three concepts not simply to show that the philosophical projects of Dewey and Foucault are compatible, then, but also because aspects of their projects will prove instrumentally useful for my own purposes.

⁴ See Koopman (2007) for further discussion, as well as for a wide-ranging (and still growing) survey of the comparative literature on pragmatism and genealogy. Many of my interpretations in this section were immeasurably aided by his review.

philosophy tends to cast Dewey and Foucault in roles similar to those played by Lasswell and the Frankfurt School. As with these latter camps, Dewey and Foucault are assumed to represent entirely different intellectual traditions, which can be summed up by several all-purpose (and also well-worn) binaries: “analytic vs. continental thought,” an “American vs. European worldview,” and so on.⁵

Richard Rorty remains the most well-known and influential contributor to the oppositional depiction of Dewey and Foucault, though he was not the first to have put the two thinkers into dialogue.⁶ The popularity of his interpretation, first outlined in *Consequences of Pragmatism* (1982), is undoubtedly due to its complexity and originality, but of equal importance is that he engaged both thinkers with interest and even admiration.⁷ Rather than

⁵ See Chapter Three for further discussion. Also see Koopman (2011a) for a poignant metaphorical description of the seemingly irreducible gap often seen to separate Dewey and Foucault, and pragmatism and genealogy more broadly (4).

⁶ In 1980, Victorino Tejera produced a short essay for the *Southern Journal of Philosophy*, entitled “The Human Sciences in Foucault, Dewey, and Buchler,” which juxtaposed these thinkers’ approach to cultural criticism and social inquiry. At the outset of the article, Tejera applauded Dewey for his attention to culture as the primary ground of social inquiry, but then concluded that “insofar as Dewey thought that *only* the ‘method of inquiry’ provides knowledge or validates judgment, he fell short of understanding that cultural query (as Buchler would call it) also takes place in the non-assertive modes of judgment, namely, in conduct and in the exhibitiv dimension of construction” (1980, 223-224). Foucault, by contrast, recognized that culture is generated via “nonverbalizable claims,” but contradicted himself when he turned back to discourse, or “discursive events” (1980, 224). Ditching Foucault’s “ontologically inept terminology,” then, Tejera finally opted for Buchler, who “not only anticipates but also preempts” Foucault’s own attempts to find a proper methodological approach with which to assess our cultural past and cultural present (1980, 233; 229). In privileging Buchler, Tejera was admittedly not especially concerned to establish meaningful links between Dewey and Foucault. Still, the article is noteworthy because of its remarkably early recognition that Dewey and Foucault could be joined together, however selectively. As Tejera noted, the exploration of cultural practices and institutions was essential to both thinkers’ philosophical projects, precisely because they formed the actual material of contemporary social and political life (1980, 223-224).

⁷ Of course, Rorty’s ambitions in *Consequences* and his other major works (including *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* [1979] and *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* [1989]) went far beyond intellectual history or comparative textual analysis. Nevertheless, his interpretations of American pragmatism and its relationship to European poststructuralism remain influential, as is evidenced by the frequency with which his conclusions introduce or even ground contemporary analyses of these two traditions, and

simply dismissing one thinker in favor of the other, Rorty identified and sought to advance what he believed to be a central tenet in the work of each: an antifoundationalist attitude towards truth. Here Rorty argued that, following in the footsteps of *both* Deweyan pragmatism and Foucaultian genealogy, philosophical knowledge should be less concerned with “representing reality” correctly or objectively than with finding better ways of “coping with it” (1982, 202). But troubling differences emerged between the two thinkers as soon as Rorty considered which one provided better resources for actually undertaking and successfully maintaining such a project.

The most disconcerting dissimilarity concerned their respective approaches to “hope,” or the question of what kind of world could and should be produced given its contingency and contextuality (1982, 203). For Deweyan pragmatism, the fact that the world was plastic – the product of human artifice, as opposed to natural or supernatural law – was liberating. Dewey’s philosophy “gives mankind an opportunity to grow up, to be free to make itself, rather than seeking direction from some imagined outside source.... His experimentalism asks us to see knowledge-claims as proposals about what actions to try out next” (1982, 204). Foucaultian genealogy shared none of this optimism. Precisely because there was no suprahistorical narrative that could ground truth-claims, all efforts to find and convey knowledge were, according to Rorty’s Foucault, simply “moves in a power-game” (1982, 205). Contra Dewey, Foucault seemed to hold that knowledge was only efficacious to the extent that it imposed itself through discourses of subjugation, oppression, or, increasingly, discipline. For Rorty, then, the compatibility of Dewey and Foucault on the issue of truth was matched only by their complete

especially those which focus on Dewey and Foucault. See Colapietro (2011; 2012), Garrison (1998), Marshall (1994), Hoy (1994), or Prado (2010).

divergence on the issue of hope. Given a contingent world, Dewey saw opportunities for a public. Foucault, on the other hand, saw blueprints for a prison.

Confronted with these two normative options, Rorty's choice was clear. Foucault simply provided too few resources with which to cope with the unstable reality entailed by his antifoundationalist position on truth. This was not the same as saying that Foucault's pessimistic view of the world was inaccurate, of course, since Rorty had previously admitted that "correctness" was not a useful measuring stick for philosophical knowledge. Instead, Rorty argued that viewing reality as nothing more than a power-game enervated rather than strengthened the world's collective ability to manage itself and its environment. As such, Foucault's work did not meet the requirements of a successful antifoundationalist philosophical project, and therefore paled in comparison to Dewey's reconstructive instrumentalism. In Rorty's final analysis, Foucaultian genealogy, though stimulating, was really not much more than an immature version of Deweyan pragmatism. Whence his well-known claim that Dewey was in fact "waiting at the end of the road which, for example, Foucault and Deleuze are currently traveling," and that "we should see Dewey as having already gone the route Foucault is still trying reach – the point at which we can make philosophical and historical ('genealogical') reflection useful to those, in Foucault's phrase, 'whose fight is located in the fine meshes of the webs of power'" (1982, xviii; 207).⁸

Rorty's reading of Dewey and Foucault, though relatively brief given the larger context of *Consequences*, helped rekindle interest in pragmatism's relationship to contemporary social

⁸ It is possible that, aside from its originality and apparent faithfulness to both pragmatism and genealogy, Rorty's conclusions have proved so influential in part because they trouble traditional understandings of contemporary intellectual history – but only temporarily. Pragmatism and genealogy were similar to one another, yes, but not on the issues that matter most. In this sense, Rorty's reading of Dewey and Foucault feels strangely innovative, yet also safe.

and political thought. Even so, many interlocutors remained skeptical about the plausibility of his Dewey-Foucault pairing, despite his concerns and qualifications. For instance, James D. Marshall (1994) charged Rorty (speciously, as I discuss in a moment) with seeing “little essential difference between Dewey and Foucault,” confining their opposition “merely” to the issue of “what we may hope” (307). In Marshall’s view, Dewey and Foucault produced differing normative conclusions not just on hope, but on a range of issues, including the social sciences, methodology, rationality, the individual and the community, social control, and the subject (1994, 308). Whereas Dewey believed the social sciences accumulated knowledge, Foucault believed they were contingent and power-laden (1994, 308). Whereas Dewey “identified inquiry with both logic and the scientific method,” Foucault “espoused no formal methodology” (1994, 310-311). Whereas Dewey believed human rationality was an evolving thing, Foucault thought rationality and irrationality were indistinguishable (1994, 312-313). Finally, whereas Dewey envisioned freedom in the mutual relationships between individuals and communities, Foucault saw only the potential for discipline and oppression (1994, 319).

In a slightly less militant but no less critical vein, John Patrick Diggins (1994) argued that “in relating pragmatism to the writings of Derrida and Foucault Rorty may have pushed the French connection a little too far” (456). Unlike Marshall, Diggins was willing to grant Rorty that Dewey and Foucault both believed that traditional philosophy had become overly concerned with unsolvable epistemological questions (1994, 458). But this similarity was virtually meaningless, since these thinkers were ultimately at “cross-purposes” in “trying to prove the opposite ‘truths’ about the human condition” (1994, 458). Thus, following an extended accounting of their binary oppositions on a number of issues – language, mind, and evolution, especially – Diggins concluded that “it is difficult to imagine Dewey feeling comfortable with a

philosopher who denies progress, sees power as a production of knowledge, and values madness as healthier than reason” (1994, 458-459).

Thomas McCarthy (1994) echoed Diggins’ argument, suggesting in a dialogue with David Hoy that “[o]ne of the disconcerting features of the otherwise welcome renewal of interest in American Pragmatism is the suggestion by some ‘new pragmatists’ that Peirce, James, Dewey, and Mead were actually much closer in spirit to Nietzsche, Heidegger, and the French poststructuralists than to Kant and the German Idealists – whom, unlike the former, they encountered as students and continued to draw inspiration from throughout their lives” (Hoy and McCarthy, 217). Like Diggins, McCarthy did not entirely reject Rorty’s reading, but rather questioned the degree to which he and other “neopragmatists,” who seemed to sympathize with poststructuralism’s penchant for contingency and disruption, could overlook traditional pragmatists’ proclivity for “theory on a grand scale” (1994, 217). The critical skepticism of “postmodern discourse,” McCarthy argued, clashed with Dewey’s “metanarratives of scientific and social progress” (1994, 217-18).

More recently, Carlos Prado (2010) has suggested while Rorty did call attention to some meaningful similarities between these two thinkers, especially concerning the development of the self, he ignored basic incompatibilities when it came to judging what *kinds* of subjectivity should be pursued (2010, 189). Because of his emphasis on scientific inquiry, testing, and evaluation, Dewey tried to provide a plausible and constructive account of self-formation. In Foucault’s work, no such account exists. Indeed, since his histories “effectively reduce investigation of and knowledge about ourselves and our social world to power-determined perceptions,” Foucault could not justify why a subject should pursue one kind of action over another (2010, 187).

Hence Prado concluded that though Rorty’s interpretation of Dewey and Foucault was generally

correct, it needed updating and refining. If in 1982 it appeared that Foucault was traveling down a road toward Dewey, history has proven that Foucault “never...reached that end” (2010, 190).

Two notable themes can be identified in these four critical appraisals of Rorty. The first is a similarity in their basic argumentative *purpose*. Despite several attempts to update and even refute Rorty’s reading, his respondents did not significantly alter his initial findings. On the contrary, several of the claims leveled by Marshall, Diggins, McCarthy, and Prado seek justification on grounds Rorty himself already staked out in 1982. For instance, it is simply not the case, *pace* Marshall, that Rorty “saw little essential difference between Dewey and Foucault” (Marshall 1994, 307). Quite the reverse, Rorty made abundantly clear that Dewey and Foucault’s disagreement over the issue of hope all but overshadowed their shared critical attitude toward traditional epistemological questions. Foucault, in Rorty’s eyes, had done nothing more than “update Dewey,” and in the process had left out all of Dewey’s best bits (1982, 207-208). Drawing a sharp dividing line between these two thinkers, *Consequences* then went about cataloging several of the binary divisions Marshall thought were missing from Rorty’s reading, such as Dewey and Foucault’s differing valuations of the social sciences, rationality, and the relationship between the individual and the community.⁹

Given his ultimate aversion to a Dewey-Foucault pairing, then, Rorty could also be easily read as voicing the same concern as Diggins. Dewey, the philosopher of “unjustifiable hope,”

⁹ On the issue of the social sciences, for instance, Rorty noted that, for Dewey, these fields widened and deepened community values, while, for Foucault, they were tools of manipulation (1982, 203-204). On the issue of rationality, Rorty observed that Foucault viewed the concept as simply a production of power, while he quoted Dewey’s more sanguine definition of rationality as “the attainment of a working harmony among diverse desires” (1982, 205; citing Dewey [(1922) 2002, 196]). Finally, on the issue of the relationship between individual and the community, Rorty asserted that Dewey saw liberty as inherently connected to community life, whereas Foucault, having abandoned the concept of a foundational truth, mistakenly assumes that we subsequently “*must* find ourselves all alone, without the sense of community which liberalism requires” (1982, 207).

would *not* have been comfortable with Rorty's Foucault, who indeed seemed to "den[y] progress, [see] power as a production of knowledge, and [value] madness as healthier than reason" (Rorty 1982, 208; Diggins 1994, 458-459). Similarly, Prado's update of Rorty – in which he suggested that Foucault "never...reached" the end of the road at which Dewey was waiting – is precisely that: an update (2010, 190). Rorty's critical appraisal of Foucault never implied that he had confidence Foucault would actually reach the place Dewey already occupied. Indeed, it seems likely that were Rorty to have written his interpretation twenty-six years after Foucault's death (as opposed to two years before it), he would have agreed with Prado's final assessment: Foucaultian genealogy was dangerously relativistic, and therefore ultimately incompatible with Deweyan pragmatism.

The second theme shared by these four appraisals is a similarity of argumentative *method*. All the interpretations considered above, from Rorty to Prado, ultimately split Dewey and Foucault over perceived *normative* differences. For instance, are the social sciences good (Dewey) or bad (Foucault)? Is reason constructive (Dewey) or dominative (Foucault)? And power: is it a repressive force to be eliminated (Dewey), or inescapable in its modern disciplining manifestations (Foucault)? It was supposed disagreements over these and other normative questions that led Rorty to draw a line between these two philosophers on the issue of "hope," and many subsequent readings have continued to privilege normative valuation as the primary lens of analysis through which to view and eventually divide these two thinkers. Thus all of the respondents canvassed above agreed with Rorty that Deweyan pragmatism tried to provide some aspirational sense of "human solidarity" (Rorty 1982, 208). Contrariwise, all granted that Foucaultian genealogy interpreted social cohesion as a ruse of power (Rorty 1982, 207). If there was disagreement with Rorty on this score from his skeptics, then, it was not so much that he

denied Dewey and Foucault's normative dissimilarities, but that he did not go far enough in showing just how committed Dewey was to the ideals of social progress, or, alternatively, just how deep Foucault's criticisms of modern society went.

Certainly, these two themes are not without their merits. The differences between Dewey and Foucault, especially over issues of normative valuation, are in some sense quite real. A key source of these differences, as Rorty and his respondents have noted, must certainly be traced back to these two thinkers' different relationships to the concept of *power*. Dewey's work was not *especially* designed to identify the complex, subtle network of forces that constrain thought and action in the modern world, precisely because he was so concerned to develop reconstructive responses to the problems he *did* identify (though in short order I will argue this did not mean Dewey was entirely inattentive to power). This is a characteristic of Dewey's writings that many pragmatists and other sympathetic readers have readily admitted.¹⁰ With respect to Foucault, the

¹⁰ In his attempt to reconstruct a theory of power in Dewey's work, R.W. Hildreth (2009) has noted that while Dewey was not unaware of the importance of the concept, he nevertheless failed to offer any "systematic statement on power in his major texts" (781). Elsewhere in his essay, Hildreth suggests that Dewey, like Foucault, saw power as both oppressive *and* productive, although he inserts the caveat that there are "only certain resemblances between Dewey and Foucault" (2009, 806 n.69). Thus, whereas Dewey was more likely to emphasize the creative potential of power in institutions like the social sciences, Foucault was more interested in detailing how "specific social sciences and social practices...discipline the subject" (2009, 806 n.69). Mark Mattern (1999) has also observed that Dewey's work on art "suffers from the same shortcomings as his work in political philosophy" (55). That is, he "erased conflict, negotiation, and contestation – in short, politics – from the world of art. Nor does he address the crucial role of power in the world of art, which can as easily create and sustain social barriers as break through them" (1999, 55). See Mattern's associated footnote for further consideration of criticisms of Dewey on power (1999, 55 n.2). Vincent Colapietro (2012), comparing Dewey and Foucault's conceptions of "experience," has similarly noted that Foucault was intent on casting "experience as a fiction," produced by contingent social, political, and historical circumstances (83). Dewey, by contrast, was relatively (and mistakenly) content to take experiences as simply given, unaffected by external social pressures. Finally, in his intellectual biography, Robert B. Westbrook (1991) has argued that Dewey sometimes struggled fully understand how stubborn or entrenched certain contemporary political conflicts were, and therefore often "remained wedded to moral exhortation as the sole means to ends that required democratic politics" (179). For instance, while he "advanced impeccable arguments about the ways in which industrial capitalism directed the intelligence not only of workers but also of capitalists and managers into 'non-humane, non-liberal channels,' [he] relied all too heavily on the force of such arguments to overcome the

opposite appears the case. Power was a thoroughgoing concern of his, if not throughout his career, than certainly in major works such as *Discipline and Punish* ([1975] 1995) and the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* ([1976] 1990), as well as in several of his lecture courses at the Collège de France and other volumes of collected writings.¹¹ More important still, Foucault often insisted that his diagnoses of power stop short of defining responsive programmatic action. Responding charges that his studies of the prison advocated no plan for reform, for instance, he noted: “Critique doesn’t have to be the premise of a deduction that concludes, ‘this, then, is what needs to be done. [...] It isn’t a stage in programming. It is a challenge directed to what is” ([1980] 2000b, 236).

It would thus require an immense interpretative effort to argue that Dewey was as thoroughly skeptical as Foucault, as attuned to the various ways in which power manifests itself in everyday life, or as interested in tracing out the contingent origins of central social institutions of modernity, such as the hospital or the prison. By contrast, Dewey was undoubtedly more interested than Foucault in uncovering methods with which to resolve, dissolve, or reconstruct social and political problems that appeared most readily identifiable to him. To paraphrase Koopman (2011a), then, only the most “entrenched pragmatist” would contend that Dewey was as willing and able as Foucault to diagnose power relations as they manifested themselves in

appeal of the tangible, of morally shortsighted benefits employers derived from exploitation” (1991, 179). Note, however, that Hildreth and Westbrook’s points seem to imply not that Dewey was blithely *unaware* of power relations, but that he was too optimistic about resolving such relations. For a more supportive treatment of Dewey on power, see Melvin Rogers’ *The Undiscovered Dewey* (2009), in which he argues that Dewey’s understanding of democracy can in fact be “recast as a preoccupation with power and domination” (195).

¹¹ See, for instance, Foucault (1980; 2000; 2003; 2007). The secondary literature concerning Foucault’s treatment of power is simply massive, and I trust few would dispute the notion that this was a central topic of interest for him. For introductory and/or foundational accounts of Foucault’s concept of power, see Connolly (1985), Digeser (1992), Dreyfus and Rabinow (1983), Falzon, O’Leary, and Sawicki (2013), Gutting (1994; 2005), Lukes (2005), and Taylor (1984).

contemporary social and political life (8-9). Similarly, only the most stubborn Foucaultian would argue that Foucault's work provided (or even wanted to provide) sufficient resources for resolving the myriad problems he was so skillful at detecting. Dewey and Foucault were, in important respects, different thinkers with different intellectual interests. No amount of interpretation could plausibly suggest otherwise without misrepresenting their respective projects.

Yet I am concerned that the position of Rorty and his interlocutors has promoted an equally reductive reading of Dewey and Foucault, albeit in the other direction. In their attempts to clearly demarcate one thinker from the other, these analyses tend to limn Dewey as a hopelessly naïve liberal (a trait Rorty spins as an "ungrounded" or "unjustifiable hope"), while Foucault figures as a would-be nihilist or reverse-teleological thinker (1982, 203; 208).¹² There are at least two major problems in depicting Dewey and Foucault this way.

Dewey's Critiques, Foucault's Reconstructions

First, and most substantively, we should not hone normative distinctions between Dewey and Foucault so sharply that crucial themes, obvious caveats, and detailed elaborations offered by each thinker are simply lopped off and ignored.

Dewey may not have been as committed a theorist of power as Foucault, but he was not unaware of the existence of power relations in contemporary American society, and he was especially sensitive to those produced by modern industrial capitalism. In 1913, for example, he

¹² These depictions are certainly not confined to only the comparative literature on Dewey and Foucault. On the contrary, they have dogged each thinker both during and after their lives. On Dewey as a naïve optimist, see, for instance, Bourne (1964), Farrell (1975), Horkheimer (2004), Kaplan (1956), Marcuse (1941), and Randall (1989). For interpretations of Foucault as an anti-normative and/or reverse-teleological thinker, see Fraser (1981), Habermas (1982; 1986), Lukes (2005), Taylor (1985), and Walzer (1986).

attacked dominant educational institutions for their subtle but effective role in embedding “social dualisms” into the fabric of American political life. He was particularly concerned about pedagogical reinforcement of distinctions between the “working” and “leisure” classes ([1913] 1979, 120). To counter these normalizing forces, Dewey called for a “social perspective of education,” which he defined as “that particular point of view which is founded on the criticism of traditional doctrines and methods that not only represent the vestiges of past conditions, but which also are opposed to the concept of democracy” ([1913] 1979, 115). Later, during his time in China (1919-1921), Dewey reiterated his call for a robust criticism of American democracy, declaring that “[w]e need to observe, first of all, the causes of social conflict, to find out what groups have become too dominating and have come to exercise disproportionate power, as well as to identify groups that have been oppressed, denied privilege and opportunity” (1973, 71). He continued in a decidedly agonistic vein: “Social conflict occurs not because the interests of the individual are incompatible with those of his society, but because the interests of some groups are gained at the disadvantage of, or even by the suppression of, the interests of other groups” (1973, 73). A decade later, when Dewey turned his attention to aesthetics in *Art as Experience* ([1934] 2005), he roundly attacked industrial capitalism for its role in reducing art to consumer commodities, which robbed individuals and communities of the ability to critically assess the world in which they lived (7-8). He then devoted much of *Freedom and Culture* ([1939] 1989) to detailing the ways in which participatory democracy had been systematically undermined by various social, economic, and politics trends of the early twentieth century. In light of these critical political assessments, Robert Westbrook has argued that a “notable feature” of Dewey’s “democratic socialist vision is that he focused on capitalism less as a badly managed economic system than as a system of *power* [...] Dewey’s central concern... was with power and, in

particular, with the power needed by all men to develop their individual capacities” (1991, 226).¹³

In light of his recognition that power was indeed central to politics, Dewey acknowledged that existing social conditions could not be transformed without political conflict and thoroughgoing intellectual criticism, i.e. absent competing power claims. In fact, precisely because his pragmatism was so wedded to the notion that reconstruction only occurs in the face of some problematic situation, some trouble, or some practical difficulty, Dewey insisted “the elimination of conflict to be ‘a hopeless and self-contradictory ideal’” (qtd. in Westbrook 1991, 80). More than this, it was simply antidemocratic. Social and political life was less free to the extent that conflicts were repressed, transmuted, or denied expression, whether through the “regimentation” of public opinion or through other, more violent means (Dewey [1926] 1984, 159-160; Dewey [1927] 1984b, 307).¹⁴

It was here that philosophy (and other forms of social criticism, such as art) could make their contributions.¹⁵ In the preface to the second edition of *Experience and Nature*, for instance, Dewey stated that contemporary philosophy needed to be reconstructed as “a generalized theory of criticism” whose “ultimate value for life-experience is that it continuously provides instruments for the criticism of those values – whether of beliefs, institutions, actions or products – that are found in all aspects of experience” ([1925] 1987), xx). To fulfill this critical responsibility, philosophy had to cast off its professional specialization and attend to the concrete

¹³ See also Rogers (2009).

¹⁴ See Hildreth (2009) for further discussion (796-797). According to Hildreth, Dewey’s emphasis on the importance of conflict meant that he actually anticipated, in certain ways, Foucault.

¹⁵ In *Experience and Nature* ([1925] 1987), Dewey identified art, like philosophy, as essentially critical: “For all art is a process of making the world a different place in which to live, and involves a phase of protest and compensatory response” (294). Compare this with Adorno and Horkheimer’s political conceptualization of art, detailed in Chapter Three.

problems, conflicts, and relations of power suffusing everyday life. Absent this shift, philosophy risked quietism, or, worse, co-optation by the dominant structures of power. Hence Dewey's call, as early as 1917, for a "recovery of philosophy," for its awakening to the problems and possibilities of "contemporary conditions" ([1917] 1980, 3; 5). Too long had the discipline remained in a somnambulant conservatism, sanctioning "waste," "carelessness," and a "legal formalism in behalf of things as they are – the rights of the possessor" ([1917] 1980, 48). Adopting a sharply critical tone virtually disregarded by the Rortyan narrative, Dewey concluded this same essay with the following declaration: "We thus tend to combine a loose and ineffective optimism with assent to the doctrine of take who take can: a deification of power. All peoples at all times have been narrowly realistic in practice and have then employed idealization to cover up in sentiment and theory their brutalities. But never, perhaps, has the tendency been so dangerous and so tempting as with ourselves" ([1917] 1980, 48).¹⁶ Therefore while Dewey was undoubtedly a philosopher of growth, reconstruction, and problem solving, it would be inaccurate to suggest that he ignored altogether the importance and even productive political value of conflict, criticism, and power. He was not a genealogist, to be sure. Still, much of his work exhibits a notable skepticism towards the established order of things – "things as they are" – and a conceptualization of philosophy as ameliorative but also, by necessity, critical.

The reading of Foucault advanced by Rorty and company faces similar problems. If there are traces of extreme positions in Foucault's work – denials of all social progress, claims of

¹⁶ Though I am not interested in trying to combine Dewey and Foucault on the concept of power, it is worth noting that there are certain resonances between Dewey's warning on power in 1917 and Foucault's own comments in his preface to Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*. Just as Dewey cautioned against a "deification of power" that has never been "so dangerous and so tempting," so Foucault argued in 1976 that we must be on guard against the "major enemy, ...fascism" (Dewey [1917] 1980, 48; Foucault 2000c, 108). "And not just historical fascism," Foucault continued, "but also the fascism in us all, in our heads and in our everyday behavior, the fascism that causes us to love power, to desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us" ([1976] 2000, 108).

insidious power relations behind every instance of human solidarity, rejections of meaningful forms of agentive action – only the most superficial reading could ignore the numerous and detailed clarifications that accompanied them. Foucault may have indeed seen power “everywhere,” for instance, but in the same breath he also insisted that power only appeared alongside its necessary corollaries: resistance, transformation, and modification (1990, 93). Thus, in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault stated that power is everywhere “not because it embraces everything” – i.e. not because it determines all things – “but because it comes from everywhere,” i.e. because it does not emanate from a single source, but is rather diffused throughout the entire social body (1990, 93). Foucault’s argument was not that everything is fixed by power, then, but that the political conflicts and contestations that constitute power relations are enacted at a “microsocial” level, or are inserted into the most fine-grained of daily practices all the time.¹⁷ It is in precisely this sense that Foucault called power “productive.” As it attempts to permeate our social and political fabric, relations of power incite various actions, responses, thoughts, and desires. It was from this position that Foucault argued, in an interview from 1977, that “[w]hat makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn’t only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression” ([1977] 1980, 119).

¹⁷ Hence Foucault’s well known yet frequently misunderstood definitional stipulation: “Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power” ([1976] 1990, 95). The claim here was not that resistance is always co-opted by being “inside” power. Rather, Foucault’s point was that power itself cannot function without an “odd term,” without an “adversary, target, support, or handle” ([1976] 1990, 95). Without resistance, power is simply the exercise of violence.

Rorty, of course, chose to interpret such statements as betraying a fundamental relativism. Power was not “intrinsically repressive” for Foucault because, as Rorty read him, “there is no naturally good self to repress” (Rorty 1982, 208). But this explanation contravenes the letter and spirit of Foucault’s clarifications: his argument was not at all that human action was meaningless, but rather that meaningful action was *always* available in response to power claims, even if its outcome was never assured. Foucault made this point explicit in an interview from 1978:

When I study power relations, I try to study their specific configurations; nothing is more foreign to me than the idea of a master who would impose his law on one. I don’t accept either the notion of mastery or the universality of law. [...] And if I don’t say what needs to be done, it isn’t because I believe there is nothing to be done. On the contrary, I think there are a thousand things that can be done, invented, contrived by those who, recognizing the relations of power in which they are involved, have decided to resist them or escape them. From that viewpoint, all my research rests on a postulate of absolute optimism. ([1978] 2000, 294)

Of course, there exists a significant body literature that has defended Foucault’s concept of power – and his broader philosophical project more generally – from the reading of Rorty and other like-minded critics.¹⁸ There is thus little need to offer an extensive justification of Foucault

¹⁸ For a small sampling of work that emphasizes Foucault’s work on freedom, resistance, and meaningful action or critique, see Connolly (1985), Dumm (2002), Geuss (2005), Hooke (1987), and Oksala (2005). Though pursuing the argument in detail would divert me from my main arguments, it is worth noting that my own position on Foucault’s anti-nihilism follows the general line argued by Hooke: Foucault may have been a sharp critic of liberal humanism and many of its attendant values, but the notion that his work is against or does not promote meaningful human action is simply unsustainable (39-40). Throughout his career, Foucault made clear that modern forms power and/or oppression could and in many instances *should* be resisted, or at least be rendered open to modification. He insisted, however, that such a position does not require – and in fact avoids – any absolutist or universal normative commitments. With respect

on this score here. I only wish to establish that Foucault provided considerable evidence of his anti-nihilism. Those who would read Dewey and Foucault as fundamentally opposed, however, have tended to either downplay or simply ignore such comments.

Also worth noting, finally, is the reconstructive tone Foucault adopted in his later writings on ethics, in which he explored the conditions of possibility for individual action and freedom within broader discourses of power and knowledge. Much of this work Foucault undertook in the final two volumes of *The History of Sexuality*, in which he traced techniques of self-formation as they were developed and reformed in ancient Greek and early Christian society. He expounded upon this work in several interviews and shorter essays during this period, speaking about the possibility of creating an ascetic (and also aesthetic) self. This process he defined as an “exercise of the self on the self by which one attempts to develop and transform oneself, and to attain to a certain mode of being” ([1984] 1997a, 282).¹⁹ Since the appearance of the last two volumes of *The History of Sexuality*, critics have debated the value of Foucault’s

to critics like Habermas and Taylor, it is not clear to me why such a position should be paradoxical or problematic. As Hooke has argued, Foucault’s political philosophical project supports “a vague sense of the right to be different,” while simultaneously refusing to define what “difference” should look like in practice, or by what methods “difference” should be achieved (1987, 49). This argument clearly entails a commitment to and belief in the value of meaningful human action, but clearly does *not* entail a commitment to or belief in a transcendental or universal normative framework that ought to direct such action. For Foucault, defining what meaningful human action was or ought to be was a dependent, contingent, and contextual process. Concepts such as “freedom,” “individuality,” “agency,” are always generated in and through particular struggles over what and how much “difference” an individual or a community has the right to exercise. Thus while Foucault committed himself to the idea that a social or political system was “intolerable” when those affected by it “don’t have the means of modifying it,” he nevertheless argued that transforming such a system could not be based on any foundationalist program (Foucault [1982] 1997, 148). Political and ethical action was always “lived, contextual, experimental” (Hooke 1987, 55).

¹⁹ Importantly, Foucault was careful to note that this conceptualization of a positive ethics was not divorced from his earlier analyses of power, but bore “essentially on relations of power” and was therefore coterminous with his earlier work ([1984] 1997a, 283). For a more comprehensive elaboration of this argument, see Koopman (2013a).

“turn” to ethics.²⁰ As with Foucault’s treatment of power, though, I need not explore the topic in more detail here. My point is simply that, aside from his negative defenses against charges of paralytic nihilism, Foucault also developed the beginnings of a positive project concerning the problems and possibilities of meaningful human action in everyday life. One may debate the success of this endeavor, but it is nevertheless the case that Foucault offered something beyond a dire warning that we are in danger of being “co-opted by the bad guys” (Rorty 1982, 207). On the contrary, as Raymond Geuss has recently observed, Foucault’s ethical work represents a concerted effort to “direct our attention to attempts made by thinkers in the past to deal with concrete aspects of life with the intention of improving our practice” (2005, 95). Geuss therefore notes that Foucault’s project was “more or less” in line with precisely that reconstructive sensibility “envisaged by pragmatism” (2005, 95).

The End of a Dialogue?

My second and more general caution is that, even if one stands firm on the interpretation that there exist few if any normative similarities between Dewey and Foucault, it is not clear why little else could (or should) be said with respect to their two projects. Clearly, political philosophy does not reduce *only* to normative interpretations of power and freedom, and this is especially true when dealing with thinkers as complex as Dewey and Foucault. To help re-start a conversation away from an exclusive focus on norms, then, we might return to one of Rorty’s initial observations on Dewey and Foucault. For all their ostensible normative disagreements, something seems to connect the projects of Dewey and Foucault at a more basic level. Rorty summarized this overlap by saying that both agreed that truth was not an eternal category, a

²⁰ For further critique and discussion, see Bernauer and Rasmussen (1988), Falzon, O’Leary, and Sawicki (2013), and Lukes (2005).

concept that existed beneath the constant rhythm and changes of everyday life. It was rather something produced in different times and places for the purpose of making the world manipulable, in one way or another. Philosophy should therefore not concern itself with discovering the truth behind reality, but with describing the ways reality functions in its actual, concrete practice, i.e. according to which specific needs, concerns, and desires.

Of course, Rorty and others only acknowledged the antifoundationalist similarities of Dewey and Foucault in order to show how little they actually mattered, given the ostensible gulf separating them on issues of “hope,” power, rationality, and the like. But what if we were to stay focused on such similarities? My sense is that fixating on the differing normative emphases of Dewey and Foucault precludes discussion of other similarities, including those concerning their more basic orientations toward political and philosophical analysis. We risk forgetting that whatever their normative conclusions, both sought to radically change how we understand political and philosophical problems as forming and developing in the first place. Accounting for these other, non-normative similarities between Dewey and Foucault is important, then, because their shared perspective can productively reframe the ways in which political theory has traditionally engaged problems of modern political life, especially – I will argue – as they are constituted in and through everyday practice.

RE-READING DEWEY AND FOUCAULT TOGETHER

For some time, Richard Rorty’s reading of Dewey and Foucault has stood as the most conspicuous and influential exchange between these two thinkers. Over the past ten to fifteen years, however, a steadily growing but still relatively select literature has sought to engage pragmatism and genealogy with an eye toward their mutual compatibilities. As with Rorty, most

of these readings have traced the connections between these two approaches and their chief representatives on a textual interpretative level, for obvious reasons. Unlike Lasswell and the Frankfurt School, Dewey and Foucault were not contemporaries, were not influenced by similar philosophical problems and individuals,²¹ and lived the most productive years of their lives on entirely different continents.²² There is, as such, little biographical and/or historical data that connects these two. But not zero.

Randall Auxier has presented the most compelling evidence of direct historical linkages between Dewey and Foucault. His most surprising finding is that Foucault was not just aware of Dewey, but actually read some of his work as early as 1967, during his time at the University of Tunis. Gérard Deledalle, who had in fact been responsible for inviting Foucault to Tunis in the first place, was also responsible for Foucault's introduction to Dewey (2002, 80). Though virtually unknown in the American academy, Deledalle was regarded in France as a unique expert on English and American philosophy, which Foucault, like most of his contemporaries, did not know well (Auxier 2002, 82; Defert 2013, 36; Eribon 1991, 191).²³ In 1967, Deledalle was finishing what was to be his most well-known work, *L'idée d'expérience dans la philosophie de John Dewey* (1967), and also completing a French translation of Dewey's *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* (1938).²⁴ Foucault himself had recently begun research for his own

²¹ With Hegel, and perhaps Kant, being the notable exceptions.

²² Dewey did spend several years out of the US, his longest stay being in China. Toward the end of his life, Foucault lived and worked for months at a time in Berkeley, a guest of the University of California.

²³ In fact, what little Foucault did know of American philosophy he had already learned primarily through Deledalle: Foucault had written the first published review of Deledalle's 1954 work, *Histoire de la philosophie américaine* (Auxier 2002, 82).

²⁴ In a 1971 interview, Foucault himself indicated that American philosophy was read only infrequently in French academia, not least because much of it was simply unavailable: "American literature, for instance, is very little read in France. One does not read American philosophy, history and criticism at all. American books are translated after an enormous delay" ([1971] 1989, 72). See also Auxier (2002, 86-87).

project, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* ([1969] 1972). Given the methodological themes planned for this work, Foucault spoke at length with Deledalle on problems relating to “linguistics and the philosophy of language” (Eribon 1991, 191). Deledalle directed Foucault to “Wittgenstein and the English analytic philosophers,” as well as to Dewey’s *Logic* and his own finished manuscript on Dewey’s concept of experience (Defert 2013, 36). Foucault read and commented on both, and their effects on him were, in Auxier’s eyes, profound (Auxier 2002, 82).

Foucault was ostensibly struck, first, by Dewey’s political engagements, which Deledalle had detailed in *L’idée d’expérience* (Auxier 2002, 83). Faced with emerging social unrest in both Tunis and Paris, Auxier suggests that Dewey was a goad for Foucault, if not the primary intellectual instigator of his political activism, which indeed picked up dramatically after his return to France in 1968. Second, Auxier claims that Foucault’s reading of Dewey in Tunis significantly affected the development of *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Thus he notes that while *Archaeology* is “not by *any* stretch a ‘Deweyan’ book,” there are nevertheless striking rhetorical and structural parallels between that work and Dewey’s *Logic*: “[T]he degree of similarity in the points made, the images invoked, the schools of thought referred to, and the general position held between Foucault’s fourteen-page methodological manifesto at the beginning of *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and Dewey’s fourteen-page treatment of historical judgment in the 1938 *Logic* – this similarity is too extensive to be accidental” (Auxier 2002, 87).

Yet more intriguingly, Auxier notes that it was in *Archaeology* that Foucault first referred to the concept of a “history of the present,” an idea which played a significant role in his later projects, but which he very likely had first found in Dewey, either through his reading of Deledalle’s book or *Logic* itself. As I will discuss in more detail in the final section of this chapter, Dewey had used the phrase “history of the present” at least as early as 1916. He did not

deploy the explicit term in *Logic*, though the underlying concept was clearly there: “The slightest reflection shows that the conceptual material employed in writing history is that of the period in which a history is written. There is no material available for leading principles and hypotheses save that of the historic present” (1938, 233).²⁵ Foucault himself did not use the phrase “history of the present” until *Discipline and Punish* – again, see the final section of this chapter for further discussion – but Auxier argues that in *Archaeology* he was plainly experimenting with a Deweyan approach to history. Hence Foucault’s declaration in the opening pages of *Archaeology* that “historical descriptions are necessarily ordered by the present state of knowledge, they increase with every transformation and never cease, in turn, to break with themselves” ([1969] 1972, 5).²⁶

Nevertheless, if Foucault did borrow the idea of a “history of the present” from Dewey – whether gleaned from Deladelle, Dewey’s *Logic*, or one of Dewey’s earlier writings – Foucault did not acknowledge it in the *Archaeology* (or anywhere else for that matter). In fact, Dewey does not appear in any of Foucault’s writings, save for a mention in his 1955 review of Deledalle’s book on American philosophy. Auxier himself finds this lack of direct citation inconclusive, noting that Foucault was “notorious for under-documenting his sources” and may have simply “forgotten where he had first seen the phrase ‘*histoire du present*’” (2002, 86; 88). Given Auxier’s reliance on interpretative inference and circumstantial evidence, however, my sense is

²⁵ See also Dewey’s discussions on the previous pages, especially pp. 231-232. I am following Farr (2004) here and throughout in my use of “term” and “concept” (9-10). In this case, the *term* “history of the present” was, for both Dewey and later Foucault, used as convenient shorthand for a more complex *concept* in order to facilitate discussion. Thus while the specific *term* “history of the present” is not used in the *Logic*, the *concept* was (as the above quote shows). See the third section of this chapter for further discussion.

²⁶ As Auxier notes, in the next paragraph Foucault remarks that “the great problem presented by such historical analyses is...no longer one of lasting foundations, but one of transformations that serve as new foundations, the rebuilding of foundations” (Auxier 2002, 87; Foucault [1969] 1972, 5).

that his final conclusions regarding Dewey's political and intellectual influence on Foucault strain the historical record. As personal confidants and biographers like Defert and Eribon have attested, Foucault was reading an immense amount of material while in Tunis, and was at the same time wrapped up in the dramatic student protests boiling over there. Absent further archival investigation, it is impossible to confirm that it was Dewey, amongst all these influences, who was the primary impetus for Foucault's entry into political activism, as well as the key intellectual inspiration for his development of genealogical analysis.

Still, the historical record Auxier has helped uncover and on which he bases his conclusions is unimpeachable. Foucault did indeed read Dewey in 1967, and one of his closest professional associates during this time, Gérard Deledalle, was an expert on American philosophy. It is also true that, after 1967, Foucault began developing concepts like "history of the present" that Dewey himself explicitly used. So while the historical connections between Dewey and Foucault may not support the kind of causative intellectual relationship Auxier desires, they are nevertheless suggestive. Most importantly, they provide a useful context in which to mount a careful reappraisal of the textual connections between these two thinkers. It is on this more hermeneutic level that several others have sought to re-read Dewey and Foucault together, most notably John Stuhr, Paul Rabinow, Vincent Colapietro, and Colin Koopman. It is to them I now turn.

Stuhr's analysis was one of the earliest sympathetic treatments of genealogy and pragmatism. His study is rather wide-ranging, primarily because it is less interested in detailing the intellectual histories of these philosophical approaches than with instrumentally using components of each in order to engage a series of contemporary social, political, and economic challenges. For Stuhr, then, pragmatism is attractive because it offers an invaluable lens through

which to imagine and evaluate growth. It is “an inquiry into today in the service of more enduring and extensive values tomorrow” (1997, ix). Genealogy, on the other hand, provides unique tools for loosening the strictures of inherited thoughts and actions. Its histories work “on behalf of future possibilities that are not inherent or imagined in this present; [it is] a detection of the past and its effects in a struggle against today’s supposedly more enduring and extensive values” (1997, ix). According to Stuhr, this means that pragmatism and genealogy are *compatible*, since they hold the same basic position: fixed political and philosophical ideals should be rejected in favor of perpetual assessment, testing, and modification (1997, 102).²⁷ But they are also *complementary*. Dewey challenges “postmodernism...to become cheerful in Nietzsche’s sense,” helping to “make explicit the notion of progress already embedded in postmodernism’s own suspicion and rejection of earlier notions of progress” (1997, 107). Conversely, Foucault and other “postmodern” thinkers can help Deweyan pragmatists “recognize and critically consider...the exclusions, oppositionalities, and single-mindedness embedded in pragmatism’s own notions of community, inquiry, and pluralism” (1997, 110). Thus for Stuhr, differences between Dewey and Foucault over words like “hope,” “power,” or “progress” are simply invitations to further dialogue, not irreducible contradictions. Precisely because Dewey and Foucault shared an abiding interest in “criticism without foundations” – a political philosophical orientation that espouses revision, flexibility, and contestation with an eye toward

²⁷ Consider, Stuhr suggests, Dewey’s *Freedom and Culture* side by side with Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish*. The former directs us to “thoroughgoing genetic analyses of liberal values of freedom, individualism, and reason; to radical attacks on economic determinism, our money culture, and the production of its accompanying business mind; to careful studies of major social institutions, including the school, the museum, and the church; and to striking new views of philosophy as criticism, inquiry, and vision” (Stuhr 1997, 102). The latter guides the reader toward analogous concerns, “to detailed genealogies of the cultural production of subjects, discourses, and regimes; to sophisticated accounts of the nature of power and its relation to interpretation, rationalities, and knowledges; to penetrating analyses of the nature of the self and to bold conceptions of philosophy as criticism, concept creation, and counter-memory” (Stuhr 1997, 102).

future growth – both thinkers are amenable to and perhaps even stand in need of the divergent emphases of the other (1997, 102).

Rabinow has pursued a somewhat more focused reading of Dewey and Foucault, exploring specific similarities in their antifoundationalist methodologies. Of particular note to Rabinow are Dewey and Foucault's use of the concepts "problem" and "problematization," respectively (Rabinow 2003, 18-19).²⁸ Rabinow argues that, for both thinkers, problems represented moments of unease or disjuncture in habitual modes of thought and action, which in turn called for a diagnostic response. Hence Dewey spoke of critical thought as beginning "when things break down; when the common-sense world ceases to function" (2003, 48).²⁹ This compares to Foucaultian problematizations, which were defined as "ensemble[s] of discursive and nondiscursive practices that make something enter into the play of true and false and constitute it as an object of thought (whether in the form of moral reflection, scientific knowledge, political analysis, etc.)" (Rabinow 2003, 18; citing Foucault 1994, 670). Thus both thinkers similarly used the concept of problems to refer to experiences in which a subject finds her/himself enmeshed in a contingent or uncertain reality, to which s/he responds through a process of intensification or inquiry. The result is an exploration of the circumstances and

²⁸ See the third section of this chapter for further discussion of Dewey and Foucault's approach to the issue of problems. Contra Auxier, Rabinow is careful to note that the "pronounced resonance" between Dewey and Foucault on the concept of the problem is "a purely coincidental one in terms of direct influence" (2003, 18).

²⁹ Rabinow quotes a noteworthy passage from Dewey's *Essays in Experimental Logic* (1916): "Reflection appears as the dominant trait of a situation when there is something seriously the matter, some trouble, due to active discordance, dissentiency, conflict among the factors of a prior non-intellectual experience; when, in the phraseology of the essays, a situation becomes tensional" (11).

conditions in which the problem arose, developed, and emerged, for the purpose of opening avenues for further experimentation and conditional resolution (2011, 12).³⁰

Tracking Rabinow's focused comparative approach, Colapietro has recently sought to connect Dewey and Foucault on the concept of "the subject." Both authors, he argues, understood subjectivity as "historically constituted and constituting," a condition and consequence of the socio-political reality in which it existed (2011, 23). For Foucaultians, this approach to subjectivity is rather familiar, given Foucault's remarks on the "death of man" or his work on "the care of the self." But Colapietro notes that Dewey maintained an equally contingent definition of the subject. In *Reconstruction in Philosophy* ([1920] 1982), for instance, Dewey charged empiricist philosophy with mistakenly treating "the individual...as something *given*, something already there" (Colapietro 2011, 23; citing Dewey [1920] 1982, 190-191).³¹ Colapietro does not feel the need to cite them, but more extensive analyses of individualism are littered throughout Dewey's writings. See, for instance, *Freedom and Culture*: "The idea that human nature is inherently and exclusively individual is itself a product of a cultural individualistic movement. The idea that mind and consciousness are intrinsically individual did not even occur to any one for much the greater part of human history" ([1939] 1989, 2003). Or the quasi-genetic analysis of democracy in *The Public and Its Problems*:

Freedom presented itself as an end in itself, though it signified in fact liberation from oppression and tradition. Since it was necessary, upon the intellectual side,

³⁰ Important to add here is the overlap or interactivity that both Dewey and Foucault identified between subject and object (or environment). In other words, intensification or inquiry into a problematic situation was not simply a matter of the subject transforming that situation; the process also necessitated a concomitant transformation of the subject. Rabinow notes this similarity, although Colapietro (2011; 2012) discusses the issue in more depth (2003, 18-19). See also Rabinow (2012).

³¹ Compare this with the Frankfurt School's criticisms of positivism (and, indeed, Deweyan pragmatism), as discussed in Chapter Three.

to find justification for the movements of revolt, and since established authority was upon the side of institutional life, the natural recourse was appeal to some inalienable sacred authority resident in the protesting individuals. Thus 'individualism' was born, a theory which endowed singular persons in isolation from any associations, except those which they deliberately formed for their own ends, with native or natural rights. ([1927] 1984b, 289)

Or the similarly critical historical discussion of the development of "human nature" during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, expounded upon in Dewey's recently published unfinished manuscript, *Unmodern Philosophy and Modern Philosophy* (2012):

The most direct means of justifying the new economic activities and capacities as rights was to hold that they inhered in the very structure of human nature, so that denial of them was denial of the intrinsic worth and dignity of human nature. [...]

The things which are fundamentally characteristic [of this concept of human nature] are the following. (1) The conviction that man's career and destiny are much more in his own power, are less fatalistically dependent upon a nature of which he is, metaphysically and cosmologically, an incidental product, than had been supposed in past ages. (2) The basis of translating this possibility into an actuality was an institution and use of a new method of knowing, a method so different from that which had given birth to what was traditionally called science that it demanded a radically new departure, a new start. (73-74)

Though Dewey is not usually considered as critically or historically inclined a thinker as Foucault, the comparisons between these passages and Foucault's more familiar analyses of the subject are indeed striking.³²

Koopman has been perhaps the most prolific of the new Dewey-Foucault interpreters. Providing a comprehensive survey of his work would thus require more attention than I can give here. Across two books and several articles, however, Koopman has aimed to join Deweyan pragmatism and Foucaultian genealogy in an attempt to construct a philosophical framework that can diagnose *and* reconstruct, better than pragmatism and genealogy alone, pressing problems of our contemporary social and political world.³³ In this sense, Koopman's work builds off, but also expands upon, the analyses of Stuhr, Rabinow, and Colapietro. In advocating for a Dewey-Foucault connection, Koopman openly acknowledges the persistent criticisms that have dogged the two thinkers for decades; namely, the perceived naiveté of the former and the supposed nihilism of the latter. Precisely because these interpretations have proven so tenacious, Koopman suggests (*à la* Stuhr) that pragmatism and genealogy may "stand in need of one

³² Colapietro goes on to argue that it was Dewey and Foucault's antifoundationalist understanding of the subject led each to define "freedom" as a conditional and experimental practice. Indeed, since the self was not a given entity, underpinned by any essential identity or transcendental ideals, the goal of considered thought and action ought to be the illumination of "present actuality, for the sake of transforming...our practices, institutions, and indeed our psyches themselves" (2012, 65). Freedom, then, was not a fixed goal, but a *verb*. It was a process of constant critique, provisional reconstruction, a perpetual becoming. "The end," as Dewey observed, "is no longer a terminus or limit to be reached. It is the active process of transforming the existent situation. Not perfection as a final goal, but the ever-enduring process of perfecting, maturing, refining is the aim of living" (Colapietro 2012, 89; citing Dewey [1920] 1982, 181). Or, as Foucault stated more dramatically: "I take care not to dictate how things should be. I try instead to pose problems, to make them active, to display them in such a complexity that they can silence the prophets and lawgivers, all those who speak for others or to others. In this way, it will be possible for the complexity of the problem to appear in its connection with people's lives; and, consequently, through concrete questions, difficult cases, movements of rebellion, reflections, and testimonies, the legitimacy of a common creative action can also appear" (Colapietro 2011, 37 fn.89; citing Foucault [1980] 2000a, 288).

³³ See especially the essays "History and Critique of Modernity" (2010) and "Genealogical Pragmatism" (2011b).

another,” and perhaps even “positively invite one another” (2011a, 6). Thus Foucault could help Dewey become more critically attentive, whilst Dewey could use Foucault’s genealogical critiques as source material for future reconstructions. Koopman is careful to note that this position does not imply that Deweyan pragmatism and Foucaultian genealogy stand *opposed* to one another. On the contrary, he spends much of one book, *Pragmatism as Transition*, arguing for pragmatism’s critical purchase, and a portion of another, *Genealogy as Critique*, outlining genealogy’s ability to respond to problems. Nevertheless, he does maintain that while there is a “clear presence of an *effort* at problematization” in Dewey, it would be difficult to argue that he achieves “rigor and patience in their execution,” i.e. in their description and detailed articulation (2011b, 555).³⁴ Similarly, though Foucault’s genealogies excelled at “focusing our attention on the problematic abyss of our present, his work does not follow up on these problematizations with the kind of philosophical work that would facilitate a meliorative response to our situation;” a response that Dewey is ready and able to develop (2011b, 545).³⁵ Hence Koopman argues that Deweyan pragmatism and Foucaultian genealogy can serve each other’s needs. Indeed, given that these two approaches share a basic antifoundationalist orientation – an interest in identifying, diagnosing, and experimenting with specific, contextualized problems in specific, contextualized ways – both stand to gain from mutual collaboration.

³⁴ This is not to say that Dewey was not attuned to identifying or theorizing problems, but that “Foucault developed problematization in much greater detail than Dewey ever tried to do and accordingly was able to deploy it with far more rigor” (Koopman 2011b, 554).

³⁵ Again, Koopman insists that this does not mean that Foucault was unwilling or opposed to problem-response: “Foucault’s shortcoming here is not the result of a principled opposition on the part of genealogy to melioration: that problematization by itself cannot facilitate a responsive work on the problem of the present does not mean that problematization is incompatible with other modes of inquiry which would facilitate such responsive melioration” (2011b, 546). Indeed, Koopman suggests that “Foucault himself was beginning an ethical reconstruction of his present in the final years of his life” (2011b, 546).

In opening new lines of conversation between Dewey and Foucault, Auxier, Stuhr, Rabinow, Colapietro, and Koopman have sidestepped many of the binary oppositions often presumed, since Rorty, to divide these two thinkers. Given the weight of past interpretation, these revisionist readings are much needed. Yet with respect to my aims, the most pressing question remains: *How* – through what methods – could Dewey and Foucault help think through the political relevance of popular culture specifically? That is, how can an account of Dewey and Foucault’s similarities yield a conceptualization of popular culture that is productively different from the “mediating model” of Lasswell and the Frankfurt School?

To begin answering these questions, I now re-focus and expand upon three concepts shared by Dewey and Foucault: practice, problems, and experiments. Auxier, Stuhr, Rabinow, Colapeitro, and Koopman have all touched on these terms in more or less depth, but I return to them for a slightly different purpose. Unlike the work of these interpreters, the primary aim of this dissertation is not to develop a general philosophical approach that would unite pragmatism and genealogy, nor is it even to detail any particular conceptual overlaps between Dewey and Foucault for their own sake. Rather, I endeavor to recover *certain* resources shared by these thinkers *in order to* generate an alternative functional model of popular culture. In this sense, I am concerned less with uncovering similarities between Dewey and Foucault *per se*, than with applying these similarities to a particular form of social and political practice.³⁶ I thus appropriate and expand upon these three concepts – practice, problems, and experiments – in an

³⁶ It is important to note that the differences I am drawing between my project and those of Stuhr, Rabinow, Colapietro, and Koopman do not denote disagreement in any fundamental sense. On the contrary, I believe that my emphasis on application with regards to Dewey and Foucault is in fact very much amenable to the approach of all four authors. Consider, for instance, Koopman’s remarks on the purpose of his own work: “My aim is thus to bring these two traditions [pragmatism and genealogy] together not for the sake of unearthing previously undisclosed compatibilities, but rather for the sake of fashioning a new philosophical position which might afford novel approaches to crucial cultural issues” (2011b, 536).

effort to develop the theoretical resources to support the functional model of popular culture I advance in the final chapter.

PRACTICE, PROBLEMS, AND EXPERIMENTS

Practice

Of the three terms I am interested in, the concept of “practice” has received the least attention in the literature discussed above.³⁷ It is particularly important to me, however, because of *how* it oriented Dewey and Foucault’s political thought. Both thinkers held that political reality was as much the product of *practices* – i.e. of “actual events, concrete situations, real experiences” – as it was of deep structural forces such as capitalism, modern rationality, Enlightenment humanism, and so on (Stuhr 1997, 66). Given that popular culture is an eminently practical domain, this conceptualization will prove vital to my material model of culture. But what in fact *is* a practice? How can the term be defined? More importantly, what led Dewey and Foucault to accord it such political importance?

Broadly defined, a practice is the “habitual doing or carrying on of something; usual, customary, or constant action or performance; conduct” (“practice, n.”). The *Oxford English Dictionary* also describes the term as a “habitual action or pattern of behavior; an established procedure or system” (“practice, n.”). Practices, then, are ordinary activities. They denote

³⁷ Though it has been entirely ignored: Colapietro speaks of freedom as a “practice” in Dewey and Foucault, for instance, and Koopman notes the importance of “critical practice” for both authors (Colapietro 2012, 65; Koopman 2011b, 537; 560). Stuhr has offered the most extensive discussion of practice, though he focused primarily on its application within pragmatism (not genealogy as well), and especially as deployed in the work of William James (rather than Dewey). Still, his comments are instructive, and I think we are in agreement on the general importance of practice for modern political thought. Indeed, as will become evident, both he and I emphasize that “[i]n order to ensure that philosophy does not end up aloof from reality, it must begin in reality and in real problems – and real problems are particular problems, somebody’s or some group’s problems, *your* problems” (Stuhr 1997, 66-67). For an early account of Foucault’s interest in practice, which I have not discussed here, see Veyne (1997).

events, behaviors, or actions that are regular or typical within some given social environment.

Both Deweyan pragmatism and Foucaultian genealogy hold an abiding interest in precisely this sense of the term.

In Dewey's work, references to practice appear frequently. It received sustained consideration as early as 1917, in the "The Need for a Recovery of Philosophy" (an essay noted above). Here Dewey declared that modern philosophy faced significant challenges because of its "increasing isolation from science and practical life" ([1917] 1980, 39). Philosophy had become alienated from the real social world in which it operated due to its endless search for eternal categories such as "Truth," "Being," "Reality," and so forth. In Dewey's estimation, such notions were neither possible nor needed: "Lies, dreams, insanities, deceptions, myths, theories are all of them just the events which they specifically are. Pragmatism is content to take its stand...with daily life, which finds that such things really have to be reckoned with as they occur interwoven in the texture of events" ([1917] 1980, 39). "Speaking summarily," he continued, "I find that retention by philosophy of the notion of a Reality feudally superior to the events of everyday occurrence is the chief sources of the increasing isolation of philosophy from common sense and science" ([1917] 1980, 39). Only three years later, Dewey returned in *Reconstruction in Philosophy* to charge philosophy with the task of "cooperat[ing] with the course of events" in order to "ma[ke] clear and coherent the meaning of the daily detail" ([1920] 1982, 201). Then in his next major work, *Human Nature and Conduct*, Dewey asserted that the formation and direction of human behavior itself needed to be understood as "something practical and moving" ([1922] 2002, 44). The meaning of human conduct could not be traced back to any transcendental category (like a Kantian will, for example), but rather defined itself in actual practice, as a "body of habits" or a set of "active dispositions" ([1922] 2002, 44).

Dewey offered perhaps his most thoroughgoing treatment of practice in *Quest for Certainty* ([1929] 1988). Taking up and expanding upon arguments he had made in “Need for a Recovery of Philosophy,” in *Quest* Dewey lamented the sense of “disrepute which has attended the thought of material things,” and which had in turn “been transferred to everything associated with practice” ([1929] 1988, 4). The origins of this trend could be traced back to “man’s...desire to get beyond and above himself; in pure knowledge he has thought he could attain this self-transcendence” (Dewey [1929] 1988, 6). But in its fruitless search for a knowledge “unqualified by risk and the shadow of fear which action casts,” Western philosophy had become “more and more derived from the problems and conclusions of its own past history,” and less and less connected to “the problems of the culture in which philosophers live” (Dewey [1929] 1988, 7; 57). What was needed, then, was a return to practice. For Dewey, it was in and through ordinary activity that human communities were literally constructed, shaped, and directed. The concept thus needed to play a central role in modern philosophy: “We should regard practice,” he said, “as the only means (other than accident) by which whatever is judged to be honorable, admirable, approvable can be kept in concrete experientiable existence” ([1929] 1988, 26).³⁸

Foucault tended to express his commitment to practice less systematically than Dewey, but evidence of this orientation is still littered throughout his work. In his candidacy presentation to the Collège de France in 1969, for instance, he called attention to the general method that had “asserted itself” in his three previous books, *History of Madness* ([1961] 2006), *The Birth of the*

³⁸ Dewey maintained this commitment to practice throughout his life. Thus in his final unfinished manuscript, *Unmodern and Modern Philosophy*, Dewey remarked that “we may be reasonably sure [that] the question of what knowledge does and does not do in society is in any case a question of how it interacts with the other main interests that actuate a given social order: namely, the arts, fine and technological, law and government, industry and the economical phase of social life, the...daily intercourse and intercommunications [and] the current religious beliefs” (2012, 112).

Clinic ([1963] 1994), and *The Order of Things* ([1966] 1970): “[I]nstead of running through the library of scientific literature, as one was apt to do, and stopping at that, I would need to examine a collection of archives comprising official orders, statutes, hospital or prison records, court proceedings, and so on. It was at the Arsenal and the Archives Nationales that I undertook the analysis of a knowledge whose visible body is not theoretical or scientific discourse, nor literature either, but a regulated, everyday practice” ([1969] 1997, 5-6). This approach carried over into his next and only methodological book, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*,³⁹ and remained central as he moved from his archaeological to genealogical period, as both *Discipline and Punish* and the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* demonstrate.⁴⁰ He again articulated this commitment in his later work on ethics, opening *The Care of the Self* ([1984] 1986a) with an analysis of Artemidorus’ *The Interpretation of Dreams* because it was “a ‘practical’ work dealing with everyday life, not a work of moral reflection or prescription” (3). And in a conversation with Paul Rabinow and Hubert Dreyfus in 1983, Foucault argued that his ethical

³⁹ See the second chapter of Part II, in which Foucault described the development and regulation of objects of discourse (using psychopathology as an example): “If, in a particular period in the history of our society, the delinquent was psychologized and pathologized, if criminal behavior could give rise to a whole series of objects of knowledge, this was because a group of particular relations was adopted for use in psychiatric discourse. [...] The relation between the filter formed by judicial interrogation, police information, and the filter formed by the medical questionnaire, clinical examinations, the search for antecedents, and biographical accounts. The relation between the family, sexual and penal norms of the behavior of individuals, and the table of pathological symptoms and diseases of which they are the signs. [...] These are the relations that, operating in psychiatric discourse, have made possible the formation of a whole group of various objects” ([1969] 1972, 43-44). Foucault went on to state that he wanted “to show that discourse is not a slender surface of contact, or confrontation, between a reality and a language, the intrication of a lexicon and an experience; I would like to show with precise examples that in analyzing discourses themselves, one sees the loosening of the embrace, apparently so tight, of word and things, and the emergence of a group of rules proper to discursive practice. [...] A task that consists of not – of not longer – treating discourses as groups of signs (signifying elements referring to contents or representations) but as practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak” ([1969] 1972, 48-49).

⁴⁰ Both of these genealogical texts are chock full of examinations of daily practice and discourse, even though Foucault offered little explicit discussion of his general method in either work. In an interview in 1978, however, he did remark that the problems he tried to pose – “those tangled things that crime, madness, and sex are” – were fundamental to the practice of “everyday life” (2000a, 288).

analyses had demonstrated that the modern subject was constituted “not just in the play of symbols,” but “in real practices – historically analyzable practices” ([1983] 1997, 277).

Throughout their careers, then, both Dewey and Foucault maintained an abiding interest in the concept of practice. But this interest is notable not necessarily because of the way Dewey and Foucault defined the word itself. Indeed, both spoke of practice in ways that accorded to its standard dictionary definition (i.e. as referring to ordinary customs, habits, performances, and activities). What was notable was the *political significance* they attached to practice. The concept was important to Dewey and Foucault because it allowed them to respond to a disjuncture they perceived between philosophy and the larger social and political world in which philosophy existed. Each turned to practice because they believed the concept could engage social and political reality in a way that other, more traditional forms of philosophy could not. To explain why, it may be helpful to return briefly to a term with which we are already familiar: history of the present.

The phrase is well known to Foucaultians, having first appeared at the outset of *Discipline and Punish*.⁴¹ Here Foucault explained that he intended to “write a history of [the] prison, with all the political investments of the body that it gathers together in its closed architecture” ([1975] 1995, 30-31). “Why?” he continued. “Simply because I am interested in the past? No, if one means by that writing a history of the past in terms of the present. Yes, if one means writing the history of the present” ([1975] 1995, 31). If somewhat cryptic in this formulation, the remainder of *Discipline and Punish* (along with the soon-to-appear first volume

⁴¹ Koopman notes, however, that Foucault was formulating the concept as early as 1969, upon his return to France from Tunisia. In a radio interview from that year, Foucault remarked that “[t]o diagnose the present is to say what the present is, and how our present is absolutely different from all that is not it, that is to say, from our past. Perhaps this is the task for philosophy now” (Koopman 2013b, 26; citing Foucault [1996], 53).

of *The History of Sexuality*) demonstrated that, for Foucault, a history of the present constituted a form of genealogy; it was a detailed investigation of the specific historical origins of some seemingly immutable habit, custom, discourse, or institution of contemporary social and political life (Auxier 2002, 91-93). Such an investigation was essentially critical in orientation, but also pointed towards reconstruction. Foucault would later insist that his description of the modern penitentiary system (along with his other genealogical studies) was useful not only because it allowed us to unravel an institutional practice that first appeared as a hopelessly tangled knot, but also because in untying that knot we discovered new ways of combining its constituent threads.⁴²

Dewey's deployment of the history of the present concept is rather less familiar, even though it appears regularly in his work (as Auxier has noted). For instance, the underlying concept is referenced at several points in the 1938 *Logic*; notable since this was the book of Dewey's that Foucault read prior to his own use of the term.⁴³ Dewey had used the specific phrase as early as 1916, however, in *Democracy and Education* ([1916] 1985). Thus he stipulated that "[t]he segregation which kills the vitality of history is divorce from present modes and concerns of social life. The past just as past is no longer our affair. If it were wholly gone and done with, there would be only one reasonable attitude toward it. Let the dead bury their

⁴² As he commented in a 1983 interview: "In bringing out the system of rationality underlying punitive practices, I wanted to indicate what the postulates of thought were that needed to be reexamined if one intended to transform the penal system" ([1983] 2000b, 383). My use of the knot and thread metaphor here is indebted to Koopman (2013b, 48-51; 140-148).

⁴³ In this work, Dewey argued that "[a]ll historical construction is necessarily selective" (1938, 235). "Furthermore, if the fact of selection is acknowledged to be primary and basic, we are committed to the conclusion that all history is necessarily written from the standpoint of the present, and is, in an inescapable sense, the history not only of the present but of that which is contemporaneously judged to be important in the present" (1938, 235). Later, Dewey remarked that "[i]t is absurd to suppose that history includes events that happened up to yesterday but does not take in those occurring today. As there are no temporal gaps in a historically determined sequence, so there are none in social phenomena that are determined by inquiry for the latter constitute a developing course of events" (1938, 501). See also Auxier (2002, 88-91).

dead. But knowledge of the past is the key to understanding the present. History deals with the past, but this past is the history of the present. [...] The true starting point of history is always some present situation with its problems” ([1916] 1985, 221-222). Even this usage can be traced further back, to at least 1913.⁴⁴ But what is clear, in any case, is that Dewey deployed the term purposefully, anticipating Foucault’s own, more well-known use of the expression. Clear, also, is that the identical phrasing of both philosophers goes deeper than terminology alone; conceptually, the two were quite close to one another.⁴⁵ Both agreed that what we understand to be “the past” is largely a fabricated thing, developed over time by social construction. Both also agreed that such a past is only worth studying insofar as it bears upon some specific problem in the present (e.g. pedagogy, discipline, war, sexuality, and so on). Hence both concluded that if problems of the present could be traced back to their socially constructed origins, one might discover resources for their future transformation. *Both* Dewey and Foucault conceived a history of the present to be a response to some specific, material, concrete activity, based on an investigation of that activity’s contextual origins and development.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ In an essay from that year, “Education from a Social Perspective” (originally published in French), Dewey employed language that was to be copied almost verbatim in *Democracy and Education*: “History thus seems to me to be a concrete sociology, awakening the pupil to a practical study of the structure and functioning of the social mechanism. In teaching us about relatively simple social situations, it leads us to understand better the more complex present. If the past were nothing more than the past, education could only say to history: ‘Let the dead bury their dead.’ [...] But so many facts in the past belong not only to the past!” ([1913] 1979, 125).

⁴⁵ See Farr (2004), as well as n.28 above, for discussion of “term” and “concept.”

⁴⁶ This is not to say that Dewey and Foucault used the concept identically. Their most obvious divergence on this issue is that Dewey, unlike Foucault, was not a genealogist. *Discipline and Punish* thus reads and feels different than a book like *Democracy and Education*. Whereas the former presents itself as a “backward-facing” text, rich in archival detail and historical description, the latter is generally oriented towards the future, towards an anticipated melioration (Koopman 2011a, 6). Of course, Dewey did not simply ignore history. See, for instance, his remarkably genealogical comment on the development of emotion and habit in *Human Nature and Conduct*. Speaking on the prevalence of such forces in contemporary, “civilized” life, Dewey notes that “[w]hen we face this fact in its general significance, we confront one of the ominous aspects of the history of man. We realize how little the progress of man has

Perhaps the most striking (and oft-noted) feature of the concept of history of the present is its critical bite. For Dewey and Foucault, histories of the present destabilize accepted definitions of social and political reality, and in so doing offer avenues through which to modify and transform that reality. What underlies and enables this critical bite, however, is the basic claim that social and political reality is the product of a multitude of specific, concrete, and relatively prosaic practices.⁴⁷ Indeed, a history of the present works by demonstrating that our world is the product not of inviolate, omnipotent, superhuman, or supernatural forces, but of ordinary customs, habits, and behaviors like elementary school pedagogy, workplace timetables, academic canon worship, or religious confession. Because these things are socially constructed performances, they can be challenged, critiqued, and modified. At its most basic, then, a history of the present concentrates on some *practice* in contemporary life, and attempts to render that practice “workable” by revealing it to be *concrete* and *contingent*, as opposed to intangible and fixed.

been the product of intelligent guidance, how largely it has been a by-product of accidental upheavals, even though by an apologetic interest in behalf of some privileged institution we later transmute chance into providence” (2002, 101). Still, such comments are more exception than rule. Unlike Foucault, Dewey’s work is more eager to test than diagnose. But similar to my arguments in the first section of this chapter, I think such differences are more of emphasis than of substance, and are therefore not particularly troubling, at least not for my purposes here.

⁴⁷ I am not suggesting that Dewey and Foucault make strong constitutive claims here, e.g. that they believe that what we take to be our social “superstructure” is in fact a “sub-structure,” and *vice versa*. My argument is simply that Dewey and Foucault believed everyday practice to be crucial grounds of social and political reality. Lenore Langsdorf (2002) has articulated this notion quite skillfully, although her discussion focuses specifically on Dewey’s conception of communication. Thus, as Langsdorf argues, Dewey developed a “conception of communication as constitution – which is to say, as shaping, forming, or crafting the subject-matter that emerges within any communicative event. What communicative experience does, in other words, is bring to presence (for those who participate in that experience) a coherent subject-matter. This is not to deny that communicative experience occurs within an already present cultural, economic, physical, social, and political environment. But it is to say that what communicative experience does is craft that environment in dynamic and even unanticipated ways, rather than transmit it as linguistically represented objects” (2002, 143). My only comment here would be to suggest that linguistic communication represents for Dewey (and Foucault) only one kind of everyday practice, though no doubt a crucially important one.

Of course, in viewing practices as literally composing and delimiting political reality, Dewey and Foucault were not implying that other, larger, or more abstract forces did not exist or were not politically significant. Certainly, both believed in the very real effects of capitalism, modern rationality, Enlightenment humanism, and so on. They were attracted to the concept of practice, however, because (among other things) it allowed them to speak of politics as something immediate and palpable, as a field experienced concretely and daily. Thus while both understood that structural forces like capitalism or humanism played important roles in contemporary political reality, they were also adamant that such forces needed to be explained as concatenations of mundane activities. Politics, they argued, could be most fruitfully engaged when one understood how it was shaped in and through everyday practice. To show how this engagement might proceed, Dewey and Foucault turned to the concepts of “problems” and “experiments.”

Problems

This concept and the next are perhaps best described as corollaries of Dewey and Foucault’s concept of practice. For both thinkers, problems and experiments guide political analysis *given* the assumption that political reality is composed and delimited in and through everyday habits, customs, and behaviors. The two concepts are thus interlocking: problems specify practices that are available for or in need of political critique, while experiments refer to the ways in which such practices can be modified and reconstructed. To put it another way, problems denote disruptions in some concrete behavior, habit, discourse, or institution (i.e. in some field of practice). Experiments, on the other hand, designate attempts to investigate, intensify, and/or modify a particular problem as it presents itself in its practical context. Unlike

their treatment of the term practice, these definitions of problems and experiments are somewhat non-standard, and are therefore unique to Deweyan pragmatism and Foucaultian genealogy. Yet they play an equally important role in both approaches.

The importance of problems in Dewey's work has been widely noted. Farr (1999b), for instance, has defined Deweyan inquiry as "the effort to specify *as* problems the doubt-provoking elements of an indeterminate situation, followed by the active and controlled attempt to offer solutions to these problems" (522). Westbrook, appropriating Dewey's own words, has described pragmatic social theory as a search for "particular kinds of solutions by particular methods for particular problems which arise on particular occasions" (1991, 245; citing Dewey 1973, 53). Dewey himself argued that thinking only begins "in what may fairly enough be called a *forked-road* situation, a situation which is ambiguous, which presents a dilemma, which proposes alternatives. [...] *Demand for the solution of a perplexity is the steadying and guiding factor in the entire process of reflection*" ([1910] 1978, 189; emphasis in original). Thus for Dewey, critical thought is called forth as a response to some trouble arising from an interaction with some actual, experienced environment. Indeed, "[w]e do not philosophize – that is to say, we do not construct theories – about our customs and habits and institutions until some sort of difficulty or obstruction raises questions in our minds about the ways in which we have been carrying out our group activities" (1973, 45). Much of Dewey's own work was performative of this approach. It was precisely because he identified them as problems of political and philosophical practice that he explored the construction of modern publics, the relationship between democracy and pedagogy, or philosophy's quest for certainty.

Foucault's approach to the concept of problems is slightly more complex. This is because he only explicitly defined his interest in the concept during the later part of his career via

the term “problematization,” and also because this neologism was specially designed for his own genealogical method.⁴⁸ Substantively, however, problems performed a remarkably similar role in Foucault’s work as they did in Dewey’s, as both Koopman (2010; 2011b) and Rabinow (2003; 2011; 2012) have argued. Like Dewey, Foucault viewed difficulties or puzzles in concrete practice as the prime instigator of critical thought and action, as he demonstrated in his investigations of madness, the hospital, the prison, and sexuality. Thus in his lectures at Berkeley in 1983 on *parrhesia*, Foucault stated that he was attempting “to analyze the way institutions, practices, habits, and behavior become a problem for people who behave in specific sorts of ways, who have certain types of habits, who engage in certain kinds of practices, and who put to work specific kinds of institutions” (2001, 74). He went on to argue that “[t]he history of thought is the analysis of the way an unproblematic field of experience, or a set of practices, which were accepted without question, which were familiar and ‘silent,’ out of discussion, becomes a problem, raises discussion and debate, incites new reactions, and induces a crisis in the previously silent behavior, habits, practices, and institutions” (2001, 74). This language could be described as a genealogically inflected approach to Dewey’s own notion of problems. In other words, for both thinkers problems arose when practice deviated from its usual course, thus offering challenges to but also new possibilities for action.

Of course, the different inflections Dewey and Foucault gave this concept *are* noteworthy, in some respects. Consider Foucault’s definition of a problematization. At the end of his

⁴⁸ See Koopman (2013b, 46-47; 130-140). I, like Koopman, think that it would be an oversimplification to say that simply because Foucault produced explicit treatments of problems and problematization only in the late 1970s and early 1980s the concepts played a minimal role in his earlier work. On the contrary, as Koopman has convincingly demonstrated, these ideas – and even the specific terms themselves – appeared in his very earliest writings, the product of his readings of and interactions with Canguilhem, Althusser, Dumézil, and Braudel (and, later, Deleuze).

Berkeley lecture series on *parrhesia*, Foucault noted that the term referred to “how and why certain things (behavior, phenomena, processes) became a *problem*. Why, for example, certain forms of behavior were characterized and classified as ‘madness’ while other similar forms were completely neglected at a given historical moment; the same thing for crime and delinquency, the same question of problematization for sexuality” (2001, 171).⁴⁹ This definition is specific, clearly intended to complement the distinctive historical investigations Foucault had undertaken up to that point in his career, from *History of Madness* to *The History of Sexuality*. More importantly, it deliberately “stops short...of proposing means of rectification” (Rabinow 2003, 18). In contrast to Dewey, who usually looked for “particular kinds of solutions...for particular problems,” Foucault tended to linger on problems, exploring their contours and their conditions of possibility so that they might be more clearly analyzed and described (Dewey 1973, 53). It was this kind of lingering and testing that Foucault defined as the process of “intensification.”⁵⁰ As Rabinow notes, Foucault’s investigations of problematizations aimed to recast a situation “not only as ‘a given’ but as ‘a question’” (Rabinow 2003, 18). Contrariwise, Dewey focused more intently on reconstruction, on the “rectif[ication] of present troubles, the harmonizing of present incompatibilities” ([1922] 2002, 210).

But even if Foucault were more eager than Dewey to intensify problems, letting them linger as questions, and Dewey more eager than Foucault to seek conditional resolutions, the fact

⁴⁹ See also Foucault’s introduction to *The Use of Pleasure* ([1984] 1986b): “It seemed to me, therefore, that the question that ought to guide my inquiry was the following: how, why, and in what forms was sexuality constituted as a moral domain? [...] Why this ‘problematization’? But, after all, this was the proper task of a history of thought, as against a history of behaviors or representations: to define the conditions in which human beings ‘problematize’ what they are, what they do, and the world in which they live. [...] It was a matter of analyzing, not behaviors or ideas, nor societies and their ‘ideologies,’ but the *problematizations* through which being offers itself to be, necessarily, thought – and the *practices* on the basis of which these problematizations are formed” (10-11).

⁵⁰ See the first chapter of Koopman (2013b) as well as Rabinow (2011) for further discussion.

remains that both began from the same conceptual premise. In other words, whether one wanted to intensify or reconstruct them, both thinkers nevertheless understood problems to specify what kinds of practice were available for (if not in need of) critical inquiry. With Koopman, then, I suggest that the difference between Dewey and Foucault on the concept of the problem – a difference of *problematizing* versus *problem-solving* – is not an irreducible one, but rather represents different attitudes to the same basic concept. Dewey, like Foucault, was “clearly committed to the work of thought known as historical diagnosis” even if, unlike Foucault, he was “not as successful at this form of inquiry as he was at other modalities of philosophy” (2011a, 8). Instead, his primary *modus operandi* was the assessment, reconstruction, or dissolution of problems that appeared most apparent and pressing to him. By contrast, Foucault’s skill as a genealogist was precisely his ability to bring a problem *into* view, to recast a previously unproblematic field of experience as, in fact, problematic, or to “[induce] a crisis in the previously silent behavior, habits, practices, and institutions” (Foucault 2001, 74). But this in no way meant that Foucault rejected the idea that problematic experiences could or should be modified, transformed, and even reformed.⁵¹ As he said in an interview in 1984, the ubiquity of struggles and power relations did not imply that “we are...trapped” ([1984] 1997c, 167). Rather, “we always have possibilities, there are always possibilities of changing the situation. We cannot jump *outside* the situation, and there is no point where you are free from all power relations. But you can always change it” ([1984] 1997c, 167). Thus whatever the reasons for their different abilities and/or responsibilities as *provocateurs*, the fact remains that both thinkers

⁵¹ Also see the comments he made to Rabinow and Dreyfus a year earlier: “I would like to do the genealogy of problems, of *problématiques*. My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous, which is not exactly the same as bad. If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do. So my position leads not to apathy but to a hyper- and pessimistic activism” ([1983] 1997, 256).

clearly and explicitly defined their critical inquiries as beginning with the identification of a problem as it presented itself in some concrete activity. Political philosophy helps transform the world of which it is a part when it identifies and engages with a specific problem as it appears – or is made to appear – in practice.⁵²

Experiments

For Dewey and Foucault, experiments were linked directly to problems: experiments referred to the particular processes by which a problem was tested, intensified, and/or transformed (if not also provisionally resolved). As with problems, linkages between Dewey and Foucault on the issue of experimentation have already been drawn. Colapietro, for instance, has called Dewey and Foucault “radical experimentalists,” in that they “took the actual situations in which they were thrown with the utmost seriousness, not longing for a transcendental perspective from which to view their historical entanglement, but joyfully accepting the available light provided by a critical understanding of just those historical circumstances” (2011, 25). Koopman has similarly argued that Foucault’s work, and especially his later analysis of ethics, is fundamentally compatible with and also importantly complemented by Dewey’s reconstructive

⁵² It is possible that the different valences Dewey and Foucault gave to the concept of problems could be explained in terms of historical context. In his mature life, Dewey faced a series of problems that needed little vocalization to be recognized as crises, including the widespread labor unrest of the 1890s, World War I, the Red Scares, and World War II (all of which Dewey engaged in his writing at some length). Foucault, on the other hand, confronted a social, political, and economic world in which conflict was more easily (though certainly not exclusively) hidden behind veneers of institutional stability, bureaucratic objectivity, and the apparent ineluctability of political ideologies. In any case, substantiating this claim would require a fuller treatment than I am offering here.

experimentalism.⁵³ Stuhr has also afforded an important place for experiments in his conceptualization of genealogical pragmatism.⁵⁴

The integral relationship between problems and experimentation is expressed especially clearly in Dewey's writings, a consequence of his particular emphasis on reconstruction, or problem-*solving*. Consider again, then, his metaphor of the forked road situation: faced with a problem, one enters a situation which is "ambiguous, which presents a dilemma, which proposes alternatives" ([1910] 1978, 189). Precisely because the situation is problematic – i.e. precisely because a solution is not immediately forthcoming – observation, reflection, and testing is required: "In the suspense of uncertainty, we metaphorically climb a tree; we try to find some standpoint from which we may survey additional facts and, getting a more commanding view of the situation, may decide how the facts stand related to one another" ([1910] 1978, 189). For Dewey, then, experimentation was the responsive counterpart to the appearance of a problem. It denoted a complex process in which one assesses a situation, develops a plan of inquiry or action based on previous experience in combination with new observation, carries out that plan as best as possible, evaluates the results, and then returns again to assess the revised environment, testing again as needs be.⁵⁵ Perhaps the most obvious manifestation of this approach in Dewey's own work was the pedagogy he helped developed for his primary school at the University of

⁵³ See especially Chapter Seven of *Genealogy as Critique*, as well as his description of Foucault's experimentalist ethics in Koopman (2013a).

⁵⁴ See Chapter Four in Stuhr (1997).

⁵⁵ This experimental process is precisely what Dewey called the scientific process or attitude. Quite contrary to common definitions of science, which tend to emphasize objectivity and value neutrality, Dewey wanted to recover a more general meaning for science, as simply the method of guided critical inquiry. Thus in *Freedom and Culture* he bemoaned the fact "[w]e have ignored science in its quality of an attitude embodied in habitual will to employ certain methods of observation, reflection, and test rather than others" ([1939] 1989, 111).

Chicago, but it also carried over into his philosophical investigations.⁵⁶ Works like *Quest for Certainty* or *Art as Experience* are performative examples of precisely this experimental process: they take stock of some particular problem of practice, assess its development and current status, and then attempt to deconstruct and reconstruct its constituent parts in the hopes of transforming its given terms.

Important to underscore is Dewey's understanding of the experimental process as both (a) conditional and (b) provisional. Thus, for Dewey, experiments were conceived as *conditional* in the sense that they are dependent upon context and purpose. To use one of Dewey's homespun examples, "[a] traveler whose end is the most beautiful path will look for other considerations and will test suggestions occurring to him on other principles than if he wishes to discover the way to a given city" ([1910] 1978, 190). In this sense, the experimental process is always contingent upon one's desired ends. Experimentation is also *provisional*, however, in the sense that solutions are never final. Indeed, unless one is "going to sleep or dying," one is always engaged in the process of navigating difficulties, puzzles, and obstructions; life does not follow a teleological path, but is rather a process of continuous "interruptions and recoveries" ([1922] 2002, 282; 179).⁵⁷ In Dewey's estimation, then, our experiences as individuals and as members of broader publics are defined by a constant tacking back-and-forth between problems and experiments. Hence we find ourselves in a perpetual state of becoming: each "positive attainment," as it "opens new vistas and sets new tasks," also "creates new aims and stimulates new efforts," which in turn expose us to "[n]ew struggles and failures" ([1922] 2002, 288).

⁵⁶ See Chapter Four of Westbrook (1991) for a detailed description of the experimental pedagogy installed at the Dewey School.

⁵⁷ Dewey often described the contingent and provisional construction of ends by the term "ends-in-view." See, for instance, Dewey (2002, 223ff.).

Relative to Dewey, Foucault's interest in experimentation is less widely recognized, precisely because his considerable skill as a problematizer has tended to overshadow his efforts at or attentiveness to political and philosophical reconstruction. As with Dewey, however, experiments were an important accompaniment to Foucault's own treatment of problems. In Foucault's language, experiments constituted the processes by which a problematization was intensified, or recast as an object of interrogation. Experimentation, in other words, was the "lingering on" of a problem: it was defined as the strategy one pursued in order to better expose some practice as contingent and unstable, rather than given and ineluctable. Foucault articulated this approach most clearly in an interview from 1978, already quoted from above. Speaking about his own work, Foucault noted: "I am an experimenter and not a theorist. I call a theorist someone who constructs a general system, either deductive or analytical, and applies it to different fields in a uniform way. That isn't my case. I'm an experimenter in the sense that I write in order to change myself and in order not to think the same thing as before" ([1980] 2000, 240). Later in the same interview, Foucault made clear that he approached the subjects of his scholarship in the same way:

The problems I try to pose – those tangled things that crime, madness, and sex are, and that concern everyday life – cannot easily be resolved. Years, decades, of work and political imagination will be necessary, work at the grass roots, with the people directly affected, restoring their right to speak. [...] In this way, it will be possible for the complexity of the problem to appear in its connection with people's lives; and, consequently, through concrete questions, difficult cases, movements of rebellion, reflections, and testimonies, the legitimacy of a common creative action can also appear. It's a matter of working through things little by

little, of introducing modifications that are able if not to find solutions, at least to change the given terms of the problem. ([1980] 2000, 288)

This was not the only occasion Foucault interpreted his work through the lens of piecemeal experimentation. A year earlier, in 1977, he suggested his work be approached as a theoretical “toolkit,” which could help assess “the specificity of power relations and the struggles around them” in “step by step” fashion, “on the basis of reflection...on given situations” ([1977] 1980, 145). And in 1983, he again argued that “[w]e must transform the field of social institutions into a field of experimentation, in order to determine which levers to turn and which bolts to loosen in order to bring about the desired effects” ([1983] 2000a, 370). In each of these cases, Foucault adopted conceptual terminology remarkably similar to that of Dewey. Faced with a problematic situation in practice, one responded in conditional and provisional fashion in the hopes of changing its “given terms,” of transforming it from something inflexible into something workable. As with Dewey, Foucault’s texts are performative examples of this attitude. *History of Madness, Discipline and Punish, History of Sexuality*: these are all projects that begin from some problem in concrete practice, and then work (by way of a history of the present) to re-describe the development of that problem such that it becomes an object of inquiry and future contestation. Thus for Foucault, as for Dewey, experimentation was the assessment, testing, and pressing of a problem, from a variety of different angles and approaches, in order to render it subject to modification.

To be sure, as with their respective treatment of problems, Foucault’s version of experimentation differed from Dewey’s, and on precisely the same points. Foucault, leaning toward *problematization*, spoke of experimentation and “movements of rebellion” in almost the same breath. Dewey, leaning toward *problem-solving*, linked the forked road situation with the

“[d]emand for the solution of a perplexity” ([1910] 1978, 189). The differences of emphasis here are familiar: the former favors intensification, the latter conditional resolution. But, as before, contrasting a Dionysian Foucault with an Apollonian Dewey risks oversimplifying matters, for at least two reasons.

The first is that Foucault’s comments on experimentation explicitly referenced growth, reconstruction, and even community. Thus, alongside his invocation for movements of rebellion in 1978, he also spoke of the “legitimacy of a common creative action,” of “restoring” the right of public speech, and of “introducing modifications” that transform problems, if not also “find solutions” to them. In one of his last essays, “What Is Enlightenment?”, Foucault even called for “experimental...work [to be] done at the limits of ourselves,” that would, one the one hand, “open up the realm of historical inquiry and, on the other, put itself to the test of reality, of contemporary reality, both to grasp the points where change is possible and desirable, and to determine the precise form this change should take” ([1984] 1997d, 316). If Foucault’s experiments were radically critical, then, they were not without hope.

The second reason is that Dewey’s approach to experimentation explicitly referenced struggle, contingency, and failure. Problematic situations always demanded solutions, to be sure. Yet Dewey was also clear that such solutions (a) may not be forthcoming, (b) would vary depending on circumstance and desired results, and (c) would never be final. As he stated in *Human Nature and Conduct*, without these conditions, reconstruction would not even be thinkable: “Reflection occurs only in situations qualified by uncertainty, alternatives, questioning, search hypotheses, tentative trials or experiments which test the worth of thinking” ([1922] 2002, 59). If Dewey’s experiments aimed for resolutions, then, they recognized the ineluctability of struggle. Therefore while Dewey and Foucault gave the concept of experiment different

rhetorical valences, both nevertheless agreed that it served as the responsive counterpart to the experience of a problematic situation in practice.

CONCLUSION

Against traditional wisdom, I have allied myself in this chapter with a small but growing group of new interpreters in arguing that there exist important historical and intellectual connections between John Dewey and Michel Foucault. But I have also sought to establish more than this. My aim has not only been to contravene accepted disciplinary narratives (though this has its own appeal), but to argue that Dewey and Foucault are useful for the particular purpose of this dissertation: to re-appraise the political significance of popular culture in response to Lasswell and the Frankfurt School's analyses of the domain. This re-appraisal is not yet complete, since I have yet to describe (a) how precisely a material model of culture could develop from the three conceptual resources outlined above, (b) how this model would differ from the mediating model of Lasswell and the Frankfurt School, and (c) why it might be useful to re-describe culture in this way. But in bringing together three basic concepts equally present in and significant to the work of Dewey and Foucault, I am now better equipped to confront these critical issues.

In the next and last chapter, then, I finally turn from critical interpretation to my own reconstructive project. In some sense, this turn will necessarily be an amplification of aspects of Dewey and Foucault's own philosophy. Indeed, as I will discuss, both thinkers explicitly acknowledged the capacity of popular culture to literally construct and regulate public life, even though neither ever considered the domain in abundant detail. On the other hand, precisely because Dewey and Foucault were *not* philosophers of popular culture – i.e. precisely because

neither developed a systematic portrait of popular culture as a political domain – the final chapter is also a creative appropriation of their work, an instrumental use of their thought. Here I intend to use Dewey and Foucault’s philosophical resources in just the way Foucault himself called for: as a toolkit. Thus, employing the three concepts outlined above – practice, problems, and experiments – I shift now to consider the ways in which popular culture not only transmits political reality, but in fact helps construct that reality from the ground up, shaping what we can see in it, how we can talk about it, and how we can respond to it.

Chapter Five: Materializing Popular Culture

There is always a little thought even in the most stupid institutions; there is always thought even in silent habits. [...] Practicing criticism is a matter of making facile gestures difficult. (Foucault [1981] 1988, 155)

Few works of political theory begin as shockingly as Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* ([1975] 1995). The first three pages of the book recount, in stomach-turning detail, the public execution of the regicide Robert-François Damiens in 1757. Quoting almost verbatim from the original reportage, Foucault describes how Damiens' hand was first burnt with molten sulfur, how several pieces of flesh were then torn from his body with steel pincers, and finally how he was drawn and quartered by six horses, slowly and with much difficulty. Foucault then breaks off abruptly. When the text resumes, it is with something much more palatable: a brief excerpt of prison house rules from 1838, which articulate a strict but humane regimen of prayer, education, and physical labor. Juxtaposed with the torture of Damiens, this later punitive model appears downright gentle. As Foucault goes on to demonstrate throughout the rest of his book, however, things are not so simple. Though generally non-violent, modern penal institutions like the prison still exercise a profound power over their subjects, particularly via techniques of surveillance and discipline.

With this eventual conclusion in mind, the opening pages of *Discipline and Punish* read as a microcosm of the entire book. In the space of five pages, Foucault connects two otherwise insignificant events that, when placed together, neatly illustrate the transformations punitive practice underwent upon its encounter with the ineluctable forces of modernity, from capitalism to humanism, psychology to natural science. On this reading, Foucault's introduction – perhaps even all of *Discipline and Punish* – functions as a masterful metaphor. Thus, while punitive

technique is its immediate material, the book appears above all (or beneath all) a critique of the larger social and political forces that *conditioned* modern punishment.

But is this interpretation acceptable? Initially, Foucault himself appears to think so. As he writes in the introduction, it seems obvious that the disappearance of punishment as torture and public spectacle was but one small byproduct of Enlightenment era thought.¹ Devoting an entire book solely to a history of punishment technique thus seems rather narrow-minded. Why study the prison, Foucault asks, when its emergence was really only “a special case, an incidental effect of deeper changes” ([1975] 1995, 8)? Rather than focusing solely on the evolution of modern punitive practice, should one not explore the larger social, political, and economic conditions that made this practice possible?

Ultimately, Foucault thinks not. It would be a mistake, he insists, to presume that the rise in punishment “of a less immediately physical kind” was the product of “general social forms” beyond or above punishment itself ([1975] 1995, 8; 23). Such an interpretation is overly simplistic, since “one would run the risk of allowing a change in the collective sensibility, an increase in humanization or the development of the human sciences to emerge as a massive, external, inert and primary fact” (Foucault [1975] 1995, 23). In other words, the grand socio-cultural changes of the Enlightenment cannot be treated as “exogenous shocks” that appeared autonomous from everyday practice, and then slowly trickled down into relatively mundane, “real-world” activities like punishment. In fact, the situation was often quite the reverse.

Ordinary activity, Foucault suggests, typically served as the material from which the new social,

¹ Thus he says that “[t]oday we are rather inclined to ignore [the “disappearance of torture as a public spectacle”]; perhaps, in its time, it gave rise to too much inflated rhetoric; perhaps it has been attributed too readily and too emphatically to a process of ‘humanization,’ thus dispensing with the need for further analysis” (Foucault [1975] 1995, 7).

political, and economic realities of the Enlightenment were stitched together. Thus, ideas and events usually conceived as the structuring conditions of modern life – the rise of humanism, the emergence of modern science, the invention of capitalism, the rapid development of technology – were only able to emerge and define themselves in the course of everyday practice.

With this argument in hand, Foucault goes on to reconsider Damians' execution and the prison timetable. These two events were not symbols or metaphors *for* anything, Foucault argues, but were rather the immediate, material building blocks out of which two very different socio-political realities were literally constructed. More than mere “consequences of legislation or...indicators of social structures,” public executions and prison timetables were “positive” techniques that “possess[ed] their own specificity in the more general field of...exercising power” (Foucault [1975] 1995, 23). In this sense, punitive practice should be understood as a “political tactic,” a dynamic activity *of* politics ([1975] 1995, 23). Foucault might have also used the phrase “political material” here, but – “tactic” or “material” – the underlying concept is the same: punishment helped define the thoughts, habits, actions, and identities that were possible or not possible within a given social environment. In this interpretation, the torture of Damians and the prison rulebook were not incidental effects of some kind of deeper or background political reality. These events *were* political reality, insofar as they produced certain kinds of public order and certain types of subjects to inhabit that order.

In this chapter, I take Foucault's analysis of punishment as inspiration for my own treatment of popular culture. Though ephemeral, mundane, and therefore seemingly inconsequential, popular culture can nevertheless be conceptualized as a political “material” (or “tactic”) that helps create the substance and parameters of our thoughts, habits, actions, and identities, both individually and collectively. More specifically, I argue that popular culture can

be conceived as a *practice* that contributes to the delimitation of pressing political *problems*, and, in so doing, may even *experiment* (or allow us to experiment) with the way such problems are articulated in everyday life. Taken together, these three concepts – which I have drawn from the political philosophies of Foucault and John Dewey – form what I call a “material model” of popular culture. My ultimate purpose in constructing this model is to provide a new, inter-theoretical perspective to help the discipline of political science better understand the exceptionally ubiquitous but relatively under-theorized feature of contemporary socio-political reality that is popular culture.

Though Dewey and Foucault provide the conceptual building blocks for my material model of popular culture, it must be acknowledged at the outset that Dewey and Foucault were not directly or in the first instance theorists of popular culture. As such, the material model I outline in this chapter is not derived directly from their work, but is largely a creative *appropriation* of certain general theoretical concepts that both thinkers shared. Nevertheless, developing a material model of popular culture from Deweyan and Foucaultian resources does not stretch the thematic boundaries of these thinkers’ projects as far as one might assume. Largely because of their theoretical commitment to and interest in ordinary practice,² neither Dewey nor Foucault proved oblivious to the political significance of popular culture: comments on the subject of various length and depth are scattered throughout their work. This chapter is not *just* a creative appropriation of general concepts shared by Deweyan pragmatism and Foucaultian genealogy, then. It also explores and expands upon of a line of inquiry that both thinkers broached explicitly in their political thought.

² See Chapter Four for further discussion.

Thus it is with a survey of Dewey and Foucault's scattered analyses of popular culture that I begin the substantive work of this chapter. The purpose of this review is not only to demonstrate that Dewey and Foucault were cognizant of the political significance of popular culture, but also to show that both were already thinking of this domain – however inchoately – as political material, and thus quite differently than either Lasswell or the Frankfurt School.³ Taking Dewey and Foucault's analyses of popular culture as inspiration and direction, in the second section I attempt to define and systematize my own understanding of popular culture as political material. To accomplish this, I put the domain into dialogue with the three concepts outlined in the previous chapter: practice, problems, and experiments. Here I first explain what treating popular culture as a Deweyan-Foucaultian practice means, politically speaking, and why this concept constitutes the basic theoretical assumption driving my material model. I then move on to show how the practice of popular culture can be described not only as (a) defining pressing political problems, but also as (b) allowing for modification of or experimentation with these problems in the very process *of* defining them.

To help demonstrate how my material model might apply to actual products or performances of popular culture, in all three of these subsections I deploy the concepts of practice, problems, and experiments to re-describe cultural activities previously examined by Lasswell, Horkheimer, and Adorno. Returning to the analyses of these “mediating” theorists of popular culture proves useful, for two reasons. First and most importantly, they provide convenient raw material with which to illustrate the Deweyan and Foucaultian concepts of

³ Recall that in Chapters Two and Three, I argued that both Lasswell and the Frankfurt School conceptualized popular culture as the means by which political symbols and messages were conveyed from political elites to mass consumers. In this sense, Lasswell and the Frankfurt School understood culture as a *mediator* – rather than *material* – of politics.

practice, problems, and experiments. These illustrations will be preliminary, to be sure. Nevertheless, since Lasswell and the Institute have already introduced us to the politics of popular culture, my sense is that revisiting and ultimately rearranging their readings of specific cultural activities will expediently demonstrate how popular culture can be described as both producing and modifying our modern political environment. Second and more broadly, re-engaging Lasswell and the Institute's analyses will allow me to demonstrate the extent to which our political assessments of popular culture depend on our basic theoretical assumptions concerning the domain, rather than "true" knowledge of how popular culture "really" works. This is not to say that political descriptions of popular culture cannot or need not conform to our experiences of the world "out there." It is to say, however, that our experiences of popular culture are in large part constituted by our conceptual framework of what the world "out there" is, and how popular culture fits into that world.⁴

"THE SIGHTS THAT HOLD THE CROWD": DEWEY, FOUCAULT, AND POPULAR CULTURE⁵

Though it was never an abiding concern of Dewey or Foucault's in the way that it was for Lasswell and the Frankfurt School, the topic of popular culture nevertheless made numerous appearances in the work of both. At first glance, however, neither thinker's comments on the

⁴ Such an approach is in full accordance with both Deweyan pragmatism and Foucaultian genealogy, as Auxier (2002), Colapietro (2011; 2012), Koopman (2011b), Rabinow (2003), and Stuhr (1997) have all variously argued. On this point, I am also in full agreement with Rorty's version of pragmatism. My sense is that political philosophy proves helpful – in a real, material, concrete sense – when it abandons efforts to provide a truthful representation of reality and instead pursues fruitful ways to "cope" with it (Rorty 1982, 202). For a fascinating interpretation of nominalism as a constitutive problem for political science, see Gunnell (1998).

⁵ The quoted phrase is Dewey's, from *Art as Experience* ([1934] 2005): "In order to *understand* the esthetic in its ultimate and approved forms, one must begin with it in the raw; in the events and scenes that hold the attentive eye and ear of man, arousing his interest and affording him enjoyment as he looks and listens: the sights that hold the crowd – the fire-engine rushing by; the machines excavating enormous holes in the earth; the human-fly climbing the steeple-side; the men perched high in air on girders, throwing and catching red-hot bolts" (3).

subject appear markedly different from the analyses of Lasswell or leading members of the Institute. Like these earlier theorists, both Dewey and Foucault expressed, at one time or another, some degree of skepticism, concern, and even cynicism regarding the political effects of popular culture.

Dewey voiced his fears loudest in one of his last major works, *Freedom and Culture* ([1939] 1989). Reflecting on current events in Europe at the close of the 1930s, here Dewey expressed concern that totalitarian states like Germany and the Soviet Union had exploited the relatively new domain of popular culture for the purposes of mass indoctrination. It was a problem, he said, that the “theater, the movie and music hall, even the picture gallery, eloquence, popular parades, common sports and recreative agencies, have all been brought under regulation as part of the propaganda agencies by which dictatorship is kept in power without being regarded by the masses as oppressive” ([1939] 1989, 16). Some twenty pages later, he returned to the same point: “The warning is obvious,” he declared, “as to the role of propaganda, which now operates with us in channels less direct and official. The suggestion is that the printing press and the radio have made the problem of the intelligent and honest use of means of communication in behalf of openly declared public ends a matter of fundamental concern” ([1939] 1989, 36). Such sentiments bear close resemblance to assessments advanced by both Lasswell and the Frankfurt School. Indeed, given Dewey’s comment in *Freedom and Culture* it might seem that the only difference between Lasswell, the Frankfurt School, and Dewey – at least on the topic of popular culture – was that the first two had offered detailed interpretations of the domain at least a decade before the publication of Dewey’s own book.

Several of Foucault’s better known remarks on popular culture could be interpreted similarly. Consider his observation, offered in an interview in 1975, that modern cultural

commodities “from sun-tan products to pornographic film” had become increasingly effective in directing sexual behavior ([1975] 1980, 57). This regulation was a direct result of the social and political upheaval of the 1960s. No longer able to exercise “control by repression,” power had instead devised methods for “control by stimulation” ([1975] 1980, 57). Thus, while products of popular culture were superficially pleasurable and even ostensibly liberatory, their underlying goal was to discipline: ““Get undressed,”” they called, ““but be slim, good looking, tanned!”” (Foucault [1975] 1980, 57) Consider, too, his comments on popular music in an interview from 1983, snippets of which could have been pulled directly from one of Adorno’s early essays on jazz.⁶ Speaking with his friend and composer Pierre Boulez, Foucault complained that, thanks to “laws of the marketplace...what the public finds itself actually listening to, because it’s offered up, reinforces a certain taste, underlines the limits of a well-defined listening capacity, defines more and more exclusively a schema for listening” ([1983] 1988, 317).⁷

Adding these comments from Dewey and Foucault together, it appears evident that both construed popular culture in much the same terms as Lasswell and leading members of the Institute. All seemed to agree that the domain was politically deleterious – or at least politically dangerous – because it transmitted psychologically suggestive messages to the masses. Yet to end this comparative analysis here would leave it decidedly incomplete, for at least two reasons. The first is that while the passages quoted above do not at all exhaust the bank of observations Dewey and Foucault made about popular culture, they do practically exhaust the number of

⁶ Though he never spoke directly on the Frankfurt School’s work on culture, it is worth noting that Foucault admitted he knew little of their work until relatively late in his career. After discovering their writings, however, he suggested that its members “had tried, earlier than I, to say things I had also been trying to say for years” ([1978] 2000, 273). These similarities notwithstanding, Foucault went on in the same interview to catalogue a series of fundamental differences separating their work from his, which express, more or less generally, the differences outlined in this and the previous chapter.

⁷ Compare Foucault’s language here with Adorno’s 1942 essay, “The Schema of Mass Culture” ([1942] 2001).

times either thinker offered anything resembling a conclusive normative assessment of the domain, especially a negative one. The point is small, but telling. As I discuss below, Dewey and Foucault were much less interested in generating decisive normative judgments about popular culture – or about any other form of ordinary practice, for that matter – than with unearthing the specific ways in which the activity contributed to the functioning of the social and political reality of which it was a part. Methodologically speaking, their critical inquiries were guided more by “how” questions than “why” questions.⁸ This is not to say that either thinker pursued valueless inquiry in general, but only to note that their respective comments on popular culture were more about political operation than political judgment. Thus, while Dewey and Foucault expressed some anxieties about the domain, it is important to understand that these sentiments appeared rarely and always in reference to some particular event or application. Even their condemnations of totalitarian propaganda and commercial advertising were quickly contextualized within a much more expansive description of popular culture, as I will soon show.

The second reason is that uniting Lasswell, Dewey, Foucault, and the Institute on popular culture solely on the basis of normative agreement would require us to de-emphasize other

⁸ Foucault offered an especially clear articulation of this point in his 1975-1976 lecture series at the Collège de France. In his efforts to conceptualize power, Foucault noted that his goal was not to analyze the term “at the level of intentions or decisions” (2003, 28). It was, rather, “to study power at the point where...intentions – if, that is, any intention is involved – are completely invested in real and effective practices” (Foucault 2003, 28). Thus, he continued, the question is not: “Why do some people want to be dominant? What do they want? What is their overall strategy? The question is this: What happens at the moment of, at the level of the procedure of subjugation, or in the continuous and uninterrupted processes that subjugate bodies, direct gestures, and regulate forms of behavior? In other words, rather than asking ourselves what the sovereign looks like from on high, we should be trying to discover how multiple bodies, forces, energies, matters, desires, thoughts, and so on are gradually, progressively, actually and materially constituted as subjects, or as the subject” (2003, 28).

meaningful points of theoretical convergence and divergence amongst this group of thinkers.⁹ Indeed, it is only tenable to claim that Dewey and Foucault thought (or would have thought) of popular culture in the same way as Lasswell and the Institute if one disregards the *distinctive* way in which Dewey and Foucault conceptualized everyday practice more generally. As discussed in Chapter Three, both thinkers' antifoundationalist philosophical projects led them to view mundane performances, habits, and customs as integral to the production and regulation of political life. For Dewey and Foucault, ordinary activity – from penal techniques, elementary school pedagogy, to religious confession – defined the operation, regulation, and direction of community life.¹⁰ For Lasswell and the Institute, however, these types of practices were more often understood as conditioned by or representative of deeper social, political, and economic forces.¹¹ These thinkers understood political reality in structural and sometimes even metaphysical terms: mundane experience was subordinated to unconscious drives, vast economic organizations, or the irrational spirit of modernity. Accordingly, it is unlikely that Dewey and Foucault would have conceptualized *any* kind of everyday practice – popular culture included – in quite the same way as Lasswell and the Institute, even if all were more or less wary of the political uses such a practice could be put. Dewey and Foucault may indeed have found certain aspects of popular culture troubling, but not, we would expect, because they believed it was a derivative of political forces that were themselves troubling. Popular culture was of political concern to these two thinkers because it could *create* – not just *transmit* – political reality.

⁹ Note that this argument is similar to the one I pursued in Chapters Two and Three, in which I read Lasswell and the Institute's treatments of culture together owing to their similar functional – rather than normative – interpretations of the domain.

¹⁰ As Dewey remarked in *Experience and Nature* ([1925] 1987): "Reference to the primacy and ultimacy of the *material of ordinary experience* protects us, in the first place, from creating artificial problems which deflect the energy and attention of philosophers from the real problems that arise out of actual subject-matter" (19; emphasis added). See Chapter Four for a fuller discussion of this claim.

¹¹ This argument is canvassed in detail in Chapters Two and Three.

Dewey and Popular Culture

This unique approach to popular culture is evident in Dewey's work if we place his comments from *Freedom and Culture* in context with the other numerous observations he offered on the domain, which date at least as far back as 1922. In *Human Nature and Conduct* ([1922] 2002), for instance, he lambasted academic philosophy for having "neglected" to investigate "the humanizing capabilities of sport in its varied forms, [as well as] drama, fiction, music, poetry, [and] newspapers" (160). These common forms of play and art were, he argued, crucial to the development of individual and collective life. When at their best, they added "fresh and deeper meanings to the usual activities of life," "softening rigidities, relaxing strains, allaying bitterness, dispelling moroseness, and breaking down the narrowness consequent upon specialized tasks" ([1922] 2002, 162). Of course, popular culture was not always at its best: it could and often did contribute to the routinization of life, rather than its playful reconstruction ([1922] 2002, 162-163). Yet for Dewey this only reinforced why the domain required sustained investigation. Whatever its particular consequences, popular culture was socially and politically important precisely because it actively modified the environment in which it appeared. It could do this in a multitude of different ways, some good and some bad. But before philosophy could offer any kind of educated assessment of which was which, the discipline first had to acknowledge that popular culture was an activity that literally "*shape[d]* material" (Dewey [1922] 2002, 164).

He returned with an even stronger formulation of this argument three years later, in *Experience and Nature*.¹² Here he declared that the "level and style of the arts of literature,

¹² The point does not bear directly on his treatment of popular culture, but it is worth noting that whilst re-editing *Experience and Nature* in 1951, Dewey expressed regret for not using the term "culture" in place

poetry, ceremony, amusement, and recreation which obtain in a community, furnishing the staple objects of enjoyment in that community, do more than all else to determine the current direction of ideas and endeavors in the community. They supply the meanings in terms of which life is judged, esteemed, and criticized” ([1925] 1987, 168-169). This was an unequivocal but also somewhat complex statement on the political significance of popular culture. On the one hand, Dewey acknowledged that cultural products were “instrumental” forms of communication, since they could and obviously did convey meaning ([1925] 1987, 169). But in the same breath he insisted that cultural products were not *merely* instrumental. Such forms of communication were also and at the same time “uniquely final,” in the sense that social values were “enhanced, deepened and solidified” through their very distribution and consumption (Dewey [1925] 1987, 169). If popular culture could transmit meaning, then, it could also produce it. Any investigation of the domain had to acknowledge both functions.¹³

Dewey would return to this point in *Individualism, Old and New* ([1930] 2008). In the midst of a pointed critique of America’s obsession with business and “corporateness” –

of “experience.” “Were I to write (or rewrite) *Experience and Nature* today,” Dewey stated, “I would entitle the book *Culture and Nature* and the treatment of specific subject-matters would be correspondingly modified. I would abandon the term ‘experience’ because of my growing realization that the historical obstacles which prevented understanding of my use ‘experience’ are, for all practical purposes, insurmountable. I would substitute the term ‘culture’ because with its meanings as now firmly established it can fully and freely carry my philosophy of experience” ([1951] 2008, 361). The difficulties associated with Dewey’s use of the term experience are complex and need not be taken up here, and, what is more, the meaning Dewey gave “culture” in this particular context was relatively broad ([1951] 2008, 362). Still, the terminological shift does underscore the degree to which Dewey wanted his work tied to concrete human activity. Indeed, Dewey lamented that his concept of experience had been too often associated with the “intrinsically psychical, mental, [and] private,” and hoped the term culture might better articulate the “whole body of beliefs, attitudes, dispositions which are scientific and ‘moral’ and which as a matter of cultural fact decide the specific uses to which the ‘material’ constituents of culture are put” ([1951] 2008, 362).

¹³ As in *Human Nature and Conduct*, Dewey asserted in *Experience and Nature* that such a position carried no implicit normative judgment. Popular culture produced the meanings by which community life was judged and esteemed, but the “[s]ubsequent consequences” of this functionality “may be good *or* bad” (Dewey [1925] 1987, 168; emphasis added). The point was simply that whatever the “ideas and endeavors” of a community were, they were materially constructed in large part by culture itself.

comments that presaged concerns he would soon raise in *Freedom and Culture* – Dewey remarked that nowhere was this obsession more evident

than in leisure life, in amusements and sports. Our colleges only follow the movement of the day when they make athletics an organized business, aroused and conducted under paid directors in the spirit of pure collectivism. The formation of theater chains is at once the cause and the effect of the destruction of the older independent life of leisure carried on in separate homes. The radio, the movies, the motor car, all make for a common and aggregate mental and emotional life. ([1930] 2008, 62)

As with *Freedom and Culture*, Dewey's concern over the politics of popular culture is evident. At the same time, however, this concern was also situated within the unique conceptual framework that Dewey had developed in *Experience and Nature*. Dewey was insisting here that popular culture was not merely an instrument of American "corporateness," but also an integral component of its production. Theater chains, for instance, were both "the *cause* and the *effect*" of the destruction of traditional uses of leisure. Likewise, "the radio, the movies, and the motor car" were understood as literally creating – "mak[ing] for" – an "aggregate mental and emotional life." Thus, if Dewey's basic critique of popular culture was not particularly unique, the way he approached that critique was. What he was demonstrating was that one could critically evaluate popular culture, especially in terms of its association with industrial capitalism, while not simultaneously writing the domain off as an ideological byproduct or instrumental tool of capitalism.

Surprisingly, Dewey did not take up popular culture in much detail in his most politically oriented text, *The Public and Its Problems* ([1927] 1984b), but rather waited until *Art as*

Experience and Freedom and Culture to return to the topic.¹⁴ In this first work, Dewey's aim was to re-define aesthetic experience from a pragmatic perspective. Given this rather ambitious scope, *Art as Experience* was only periodically punctuated with discussions of concrete cultural objects, and these were drawn primarily from the domain of "high" art (Cézanne, Keats, and Wordsworth were particular favorites). As such, Dewey's arguments in *Art as Experience* can appear somewhat rarified, or at least little concerned with popular culture as such. Yet as his definition of aesthetic experience unfolded in the book, it became clear that Dewey understood art as anything but rarified. The "primary task" of a pragmatic aesthetics, he wrote, was to "restore continuity between the refined and intensified forms of experience that are works of art and the everyday events, doings, and sufferings that are universally recognized to constitute experience" ([1934] 2005, 2). For Dewey, this meant that conventional definitions of art, which tended to classify art *qua* art insofar as it was autonomous – i.e. disconnected from or independent of the mundane – needed to yield to a conception that saw art as giving voice to experiences of and engagements with ordinary activity.¹⁵ In this approach, the very idea of autonomous art would be seen as a contradiction in terms. As Dewey analogized the issue: "Mountain peaks do not float unsupported; they do not even just rest upon the earth. They *are* the earth in one of its manifest operations" ([1934] 2005, 2). The same was true of aesthetic

¹⁴ Although in *The Public and Its Problems*, Dewey dreamed of a "genuine social science [that] would manifest its reality in the daily press" ([1927] 1984b, 348). The "tools of social inquiry will be clumsy," he continued, "as long as they are forged in places and under conditions remote from contemporary events" ([1927] 1984b, 348).

¹⁵ "In common conception," Dewey observed, "the work of art is often identified with the building, book, painting, or statue in its existence apart from human experience" ([1934] 2005, 1). Such a position was antithetical to Dewey's pragmatic aesthetics: "Since the actual work of art is what the product does with and in experience, the result [of the common conception of art] is not favorable to understanding. [...] When an art product once attains classic status, it somehow becomes isolated from the human conditions under which it was brought into being and from the human consequences it engenders in actual-life experience" ([1934] 2005, 1).

experience. It was not separate from everyday activity, but was rather a mode or quality of everyday activity.

Thus in spite of its dense theoretical discussions and illustrations drawn from “high” culture, *Art as Experience* actually aimed for a conventionalization or even popularization of art. Dewey wanted art conceived as integrally connected to “ordinary forces and conditions of experience that we do not usually regard as esthetic,” precisely because it was these forces and conditions that art was constantly drawing from, interpreting, and ultimately transforming ([1934] 2005, 2). In this sense, Dewey was tracking his earlier treatment of culture in *Experience and Nature*. Both works understood cultural activity – whether “high” art or “low” entertainment – in a two-fold way, as both constituting and constituted by “common qualities of the public world” ([1934] 2005, 282). This is not to say that Dewey saw high art and mass culture as the same thing, exactly. But *Art as Experience* did seem to imply that in an ideal world these two terms would refer to the same basic practice. Were a pragmatic aesthetics adopted, cultural production of all stripes would focus on “remaking...the experience of the community in the direction of greater order and unity” (Dewey [1934] 2005, 84).

Of course, the obvious obstacle to this aspiration was that the world was not at all ideal, and nor was its art. Perhaps in an attempt to confront this fact, Dewey’s next work, *Freedom and Culture*, offered a markedly less optimistic description of culture, and popular culture in particular. It was in this context that he presented his concerns on the propagandistic characteristics of mass media in totalitarian Europe and the Soviet Union, cited above. In the modern world, Dewey acknowledged, culture was often employed to advance political ends quite antithetical to the spirit of a “unified collective life.” Given the more pessimistic tone of *Freedom and Culture*, it is tempting to read the book as (at least) a partial disavowal of the more

optimistic cultural analyses Dewey offered in *Human Nature and Conduct*, *Experience and Nature*, and *Art as Experience*. But even if this were so, this did not mean that Dewey had suddenly adopted a mediating model of popular culture. Unlike Lasswell and leading members of the Institute, who spoke of popular culture as a symbolic veneer of or code language for deeper socio-political conditions, in *Freedom and Culture* Dewey was arguing that popular culture *produced* totalitarianism as much as it was an *effect* of it.

Dewey derived this argument from his unique description of culture as a repository of norms and values that individuals drew on to speak and think of their social environment, a description he had already outlined in *Experience and Nature* and *Individualism, Old and New*. Thus as he defined it in *Freedom and Culture*, culture was “the system of general ideas used by men to justify and to criticize the fundamental conditions under which they live, their social philosophy” ([1939] 1989, 25). The domain was not just an “adornment” of politics, then, but rather “deeply affect[ed] the attitudes and habits expressed in government and rules of law” (Dewey [1939] 1989 15; 13). In light of this description of culture – which expressly included both “high” and “low” culture¹⁶ – Dewey maintained that the domain was not wholly derivative of any larger social or political conditions, precisely because it also contributed to the formation of those conditions. This was not to mean that culture was autonomous from its surrounding political environment, but that the relationship between culture and politics was reciprocal: culture could mirror an extant political environment, but it could also transform it. Therefore if totalitarian politics produced totalitarian culture, it was also the case that totalitarian culture

¹⁶ Dewey’s broadest definition of culture was the “complex of conditions which taxes the terms upon which human beings associate and live together” ([1939] 1989, 13). In using the term, Dewey was speaking of things like “the state of science and knowledge; of the arts, fine and technological; of friendships and family life; of business and finance; of the attitudes and dispositions created in the give and take of ordinary day by day associations” ([1939] 1989, 13).

produced totalitarian politics. The same was true of democratic politics – from the opposite direction – hence Dewey’s assertion that the “problem of freedom and democratic institutions is tied up with the question of what kind of culture exists; with the necessity of free culture for free political institutions” (Dewey [1939] 1989, 18).¹⁷ Whatever its critique of popular culture, then, *Freedom and Culture* was not a simple condemnation of the propagandistic nature of the domain, but rather a plea that cultural producers and consumers become more cognizant of its dynamic political power and potential. Indeed, what Dewey was claiming here, and what he had claimed consistently since at least *Human Nature and Conduct*, was that culture – even popular culture – helped to materially construct, condition, and modify community life. The pressing question was what *kind* of community life modern publics wanted culture to help materialize.¹⁸

¹⁷ Compare Dewey’s language here with his famous description of democracy as “a way of life” ([1937] 2008, 217). This reading of *Freedom and Culture* is further supported by the fact that, after his visit to the Soviet Union in 1928, Dewey had actually celebrated what he perceived to be the “formation of a popular culture impregnated with esthetic quality” in that country ([1928] 2008, 219). In this early evaluation, Soviet popular culture appeared to Dewey as a “constructive activity” devoted to the “creation of living art and to universal participation in the processes and the products of art” ([1928] 2008, 219-220). Dewey’s critique of popular culture in *Freedom and Culture* can therefore be fruitfully contextualized by these comments of a decade prior. Whereas in 1928 Dewey saw Soviet culture as helping to build democracy, in 1939 the situation had been turned on its head – the domain was now actively aiding in the construction of totalitarianism.

¹⁸ Though I have framed my arguments in this section primarily around Dewey’s major texts, it is worth noting that Dewey had been rehearsing the arguments of *Freedom and Culture* in several essays throughout the early 1930s. In 1932, for instance, Dewey published an article entitled “Politics and Culture” (2008), in which he stated: “If we cannot produce a democratic culture, one growing natively out of our institutions, our democracy will be a failure. There is no question, not even that of bread and clothing, more important than this question of the possibility of executing our democratic ideals in the cultural life of the country” (48). This was a challenging task, given to the degree to which commercialism currently governed “the radio, the movie and the popular theatre” ([1932] 2008, 45). Cultural experimentation was therefore required, and this experimentation in turn needed to link up with efforts to move beyond “the present economic order” ([1932] 2008, 47). Consider also Dewey’s co-authored essay from 1933, “The Underlying Philosophy of Education” (2008), in which he criticized the “customary” view that the “relatively low level of esthetic use of leisure time in this country” is due “to an inherently low grade of taste” (86). Such an explanation, Dewey argued, “leaves out of account the commercialization which uses these things to make money instead of to serve the values involved. As long as the conditioning means remain unchanged, there is little benefit likely to accrue from eulogizing fine art no matter how ecstatic the admiration. When conditions confine the development of taste to a

Foucault and Popular Culture

Foucault's own scattered comments on popular culture pursued a remarkably similar line of analysis as Dewey's. Of course, Foucault's aforementioned critique of cultural products like suntan products and pornographic films would seem to suggest otherwise. For wasn't he suggesting that these objects conveyed coded messages – i.e. “Get undressed – but be slim, good-looking, tanned” – seemed to echo claims Lasswell and the Institute had claimed forty years earlier ([1975] 1980, 57)? This was, in some sense, correct. Like Dewey, Foucault never denied that cultural products did not or could not convey meaning. But, again like Dewey, Foucault almost always insisted that the political significance of popular culture did not end with its ability to transmit coded messages. The domain could and did mediate, but this was but one aspect of its political functionality. Thus as Foucault expanded on his comments in the 1975 interview, it became clear that his point was not that politics simply *used* popular culture to achieve its own ends. This explanation would imply an overly simplistic distinction between an autonomous domain of politics, on the one hand, and a dependent domain of cultural practice, on the other. He had refuted this type of analysis elsewhere.¹⁹ For Foucault, the political significance of suntan products and pornographic films was that they *materialized* political changes in the very process of being produced and consumed. More specifically, they literally modified the relationship an individual had with his or her own body, as well as modified the relationship between that individual and the community at large.

privileged few, its status in the community will be that of a contrast effect with the things of ordinary life. Popular art will then be a rebound to stimulation and excitement from those activities of working hours which lack freedom and meaning” ([1933] 2008, 86).

¹⁹ For further discussion see fn.8, above, as well as Chapter Four.

These modifications happened in two ways, Foucault suggested. First, in consuming images of sexualized bodies in advertisements, films, and so on, modern subjects developed a sense of “[m]astery and awareness” of their own bodies ([1975] 1980, 56). They recognized new pleasures, capacities, and desires. At the same time, however, these kinds of images also stated – implicitly or explicitly – that certain kinds of bodies were the most pleasurable, capable, or desirable, if not the *only* kinds of bodies that were pleasurable, capable, or desirable. Through this double process, popular culture helped to re-define the way we valued our bodies, as well as how (or whether) others valued our bodies. Of course, the notion that culture influences body image may sound rather familiar to contemporary ears.²⁰ Nevertheless, the *functional conceptualization* underlying Foucault’s critique is still quite radical: cultural products do not just convey pre-established messages that reflect our existing socio-political environment; they also shape our socio-political environment. They are not passive tools, but rather creative experiences.

Foucault applied this same conceptual framework in his conversation with Pierre Boulez in 1983. To be sure, an Adornoian note played through the interview. For instance, Foucault acknowledged that capitalism had helped standardize popular music to serve its own ends, which tended to undermine its artistic value and therefore rigidify the listening habits of its consumers. Hence his “impression” that “many of the elements that are supposed to provide access to music actually impoverish our relationship with it” ([1983] 1988, 317). But this assessment did not imply that popular music was therefore wholly dependent upon capitalism or any other general social or political structure. If music was affected by capitalism, it was not determined by it.

²⁰ Though it should be noted that this critique did not comprise the full extent of Foucault’s argument in this interview, and is in no way representative of his critique of subjectivity more generally. See Digeser (1992) for further discussion.

Thus Foucault maintained that popular music was a powerful socio-political force in its own right, a “circuit” that produced and regulated a number of community ties: “Not only is rock music (much more than jazz used to be) an integral part of the life of many people, but it is a cultural initiator: to like rock, to like a certain kind of rock rather than another, is also a way of life, a manner of reacting; it is a whole set of tastes and attitudes” (Foucault [1983] 1988, 316). He then suggested that popular music played an increasingly important role in the formation of individual identities, in contrast to other, “higher” musical forms: “Rock offers the possibility of a relation which is intense, strong, alive, ‘dramatic’ (in that rock presents itself as a spectacle, that listening to it is an event and that it produces itself on stage), with a music that is itself impoverished, but through which the listener affirms himself; and with the other music [i.e. *avant-garde* contemporary music], one has a frail, faraway, hothouse, problematical relation with an erudite music from which the cultivated public feels excluded” ([1983] 1988, 316).

Brief those these comments are, the description of popular music they put forward is complex. On the one hand, Foucault acknowledged that the genre was imbricated with forces outside itself, especially economic ones. On the other hand, he also argued that popular music materialized a vast social network – a “circuit” – that was constantly writing and re-writing available social identities, rules, knowledges, pleasures, and so forth. Popular music could not be called autonomous, then, but neither could it be described as the mere plaything or byproduct of “larger” social, political, or economic conditions. On the contrary, it had its own role to play in defining possibilities and limitations on subjects and the communities in which they lived.

In this sense, Foucault’s assessment of popular music was Adornoian only up to a point. While he criticized the degree to which popular music had become standardized in order to fit the needs of the market, he also argued that the functionality of the genre was such that changes

in its operation could modify the relation listeners had with the market itself: “It goes without saying,” he said, “that I am not in favor of a rarefaction of the relation to music, but it must be understood that the everydayness of this relation, with all the economic stakes that are riding on it, can have this paradoxical effect of rigidifying tradition. It is not a matter of making access more rare, but of making its frequent appearances less devoted to habits and familiarities” ([1983] 1988, 318). Foucault never offered any specific suggestions as to how such a process of de-familiarization might be undertaken, but the fact that he thought it possible was clear enough. Popular music could find ways to decouple itself from habit and tradition, and thereby create new avenues of individual and collective activity for those within its “circuit.” Such comments bear more than a passing resemblance to Dewey’s observation that “[t]he problem of freedom and democratic institutions is tied up with the question of what kind of culture exists; with the necessity of free culture for free political institutions” ([1939] 1989, 18)

Before concluding this survey of Foucault’s treatment of popular culture, it is also worth documenting the various remarks he made with respect to subculture and subcultural practices, especially drug use and gay sexuality and lifestyle. It would be misleading to categorize these domains of activity as popular culture *per se*, but there are several reasons to include his comments on such topics here. Like most subcultures, these activities are related to popular culture insofar as they (a) integrate activities and products also employed in popular culture (e.g. music, print media, visual media, fashion, sport, and so on); (b) tend to define themselves in direct relation or opposition to popular culture (rather than high culture); (c) are often appropriated by (but also often appropriate) themes, trends, and values of popular culture; and

(d) manifest themselves in the everyday activities of their members.²¹ The other, more straightforward reason to engage Foucault's comments on drug use and sexuality is that he conceived of their political significance in the same way as he did popular culture. In Foucault's work, these activities often represented an extension of and response to problems he elsewhere identified in "mainstream" culture.

Foucault broached the politics of subcultural practice as early as 1970 in the essay "Theatrum Philosophicum," his extended review of Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition* and *Logic of Sense*. Here he dealt with drugs as a means of self-transformation, due to the fact that they confuse our otherwise usually stable experiences of truth and falsity. LSD, for instance, "inverts the relationships of ill humor, stupidity, and thought: it no sooner eliminates the supremacy of categories than it tears away the ground of its indifference and disintegrates the gloomy dumbshow of stupidity..." ([1970] 2000, 363). Opium produced different effects, but, like LSD, it allowed the user to experience "all differences" as "so many minute, distanced, smiling, and eternal events" ([1970] 2000, 363). The language used in these early descriptions of drug use was deliberately hallucinatory. The underlying point, however, was that drugs offered alternative and ultimately productive experiences of reality insofar as they released users from well-worn habits and familiarities – an aim Foucault reiterated years later in his interview with Pierre Boulez on music.²²

²¹ This list is in no way intended as an exhaustive definition of a subculture (if such a definition even exists). It is merely meant to justify the basic logic in including Foucault's comments on drugs, S&M, and gay lifestyle in this broader discussion of popular culture. The extant literature on subculture – much of it produced within the discipline of sociology – is enormous. See, however, Hall and Jefferson (1976), Hebdige (1979), McRobbie (1994), Thornton (1996), and Warner (2002).

²² While Foucault's later writings and interviews are often thought to represent a sudden "turn" in his thought toward problems of ethics and care of the self, this relatively early essay, written in Foucault's "archaeological period," would suggest otherwise.

Foucault's fascination with drug use never waned.²³ He returned to the topic in 1984, suggesting in an interview with *The Advocate* that drugs fostered experiences of pleasure entirely different from traditional "pleasures of the flesh," and could therefore break open new avenues for self-understanding and self-transformation ([1984] 1997c, 165). Ideally, he said, this would be a collective enterprise: "The possibility of using our bodies as a possible source of very numerous pleasures is something that is very important. [...] I think that drugs must become a part of our culture. [...] As a pleasure. We have to study drugs. We have to experience drugs. We have to do *good* drugs that can produce very intense pleasure" ([1984] 1997c, 165).

Foucault elaborated by drawing a comparison with a more mainstream cultural practice: "I think this puritanism about drugs, which implies that you can either be for drugs or against drugs, is mistaken. Drugs have now become a part of our culture. Just as there is bad music and good music, there are bad drugs and good drugs. So we can't say we are 'against' drugs any more than we can say we're 'against' music" ([1984] 1997c, 165-166). Here Foucault seemed to be recalling the comments he had made only a year earlier in his conversation with Boulez. Drug use, like music, confronted certain political problems – the dominance of market capitalism, for instance, or our limited understanding of pleasure – but in and through this confrontation also provided material with which to experiment and even possibly transform those problems. Thus, drug use was potentially politically and ethically efficacious because it could redefine our experience of both self and community.

Foucault approached the topic of gay sexuality in much the same way, especially in his later career. Of course, most of his published writings on sexuality during the 1980s concentrated on antiquity, and therefore had little bearing on issues of modern culture, popular or

²³ For discussion of Foucault's personal interest in and use of drugs, see Miller (1993).

otherwise. The interviews he gave during this period were another matter, however. Here he commented liberally on problems and possibilities related to contemporary sexuality, which often led him directly to cultural practice. Speaking with the French gay magazine *Le Gai Pied* in 1981, for instance, he declared the publication's existence a "positive and important thing" ([1981] 1997, 135). The magazine, he said, could help generate resources for gay men to experiment with alternative forms of individual and collective life, and thereby resist the marginalized position into which they were so often forced:

I would like to say...that something well considered and voluntary like a magazine ought to make possible a homosexual culture, that is to say, the instruments for polymorphic, varied, and individually modulated relationships. [...] The program must be wide open. We have to dig deeply to show how things have been historically contingent, for such and such reason intelligible but not necessary. [...] We must think that what exists is far from filling all possible spaces. ([1981] 1997, 139-140)

The statement echoed the arguments he had elsewhere offered on drugs and music. Here Foucault was again linking the possibility of political and ethical transformation to a relatively ordinary cultural product or activity – in this case, a magazine. It was a position he re-affirmed at least once more before his death. In his 1984 interview with *The Advocate*, Foucault declared unequivocally that re-defining the problems and possibilities of modern sexuality was ultimately "a process of our having to create a new cultural life underneath the ground of our sexual choices. [...] I think that one of the factors...will be the creation of new forms of life, relationships,

friendships in society, art, culture, and so on through our sexual, ethical, and political choices. [...] We have to *create* culture. We have to realize cultural creations” ([1984] 1997c, 164).²⁴

POPULAR CULTURE AS POLITICAL MATERIAL

Surveying their various remarks on popular culture, it is clear that while neither Dewey nor Foucault was a dedicated theorist of the domain, both were well aware of its significance as a political activity. In virtually every comment either thinker made on the topic – even those that appeared most sympathetic to the mediating model of Lasswell or the Frankfurt School – the ability of everyday culture to both construct and modify political reality was repeatedly emphasized. In some sense, of course, the fact both thinkers treated culture in this way should come as no surprise. As argued in Chapter Three, Dewey and Foucault’s respective versions of pragmatism and genealogy were designed to explain ordinary practice as integral to the formation and transformation of community life. This approach was as evident in their explorations of popular culture as it was in their more thoroughgoing analyses of everyday activities such as pedagogy, punishment, aesthetics, and sexuality.

²⁴ Though rather more oblique to popular cultural practice as commonly understood, Foucault’s commitment to the political and ethical value of cultural activity also underwrote his interest in and personal experimentation with S&M. Again evoking his remarks on drugs and music, Foucault suggested in his interview with *The Advocate* that S&M could invent “new possibilities of pleasure with strange parts of [the] body – through the eroticization of the body” ([1984] 1997c, 165). It was a practice that could ultimately redefine the narrow and ultimately problematic channels to which sexuality was usually confined, especially for gay men. Notably, Foucault also insisted that the political value of S&M had nothing to do with the expression of repressed desires. S&M was not a reflection of underlying socio-psychological tensions, but rather an experimental practice efficacious in its own right. Arguments to the contrary were simply “stupid” ([1984] 1997c, 165). Most notable of all, perhaps, was that Foucault also saw S&M as in fact *analogous* to sexual conduct in popular culture. Indeed, the use of a “strategic relationship as a source of pleasure” was a rather widely practiced phenomenon: “You even find this between boys and girls when they are dancing on Saturday night. They are acting out strategic relations. What is interesting is that, in this heterosexual life, those strategic relations come before sex. [...] And in S&M those strategic relations are inside sex, as a convention of pleasure within a particular situation” (Foucault [1984] 1997c, 170). For further discussion of Foucault’s experimentation with S&M, see Eribon (1991) and especially Miller (1993).

Even so, it cannot be said that Dewey and Foucault's scattered investigations of popular culture comprise a ready-made theory or model of the domain, at least not when taken on their own. Their statements on popular culture never achieved – nor indeed were aiming for – the kind of rigor and complexity each displayed when working in their primary areas of inquiry. Dewey's comments on popular culture are not as comprehensive as his writings on education, for instance, nor do Foucault's observations on the topic compare to the genealogical detail of a work like *Discipline and Punish*. Accordingly, Dewey and Foucault cannot be considered – nor can they be made to serve – as theorists of popular culture.

In this section, however, I want to argue that Dewey's and Foucault's respective political philosophies – which include their occasional remarks on popular culture – can be leveraged to *manufacture* a more systematic theoretical model of popular culture. To undertake this task, I pursue a two-pronged approach. On the one hand, I expand upon Dewey and Foucault's own treatments of popular culture by situating the domain in terms of the three basic theoretical resources outlined in Chapter Three – namely, practice, problems, and experiments. From this discussion a positive definition of popular culture as political material will begin to emerge. At the same time, I put this emerging material model of culture in dialogue with the mediating model of Lasswell and the Frankfurt School. This comparison will show, in negative terms, how a material model of culture might generate markedly different conclusions than those offered by a mediating model.

Popular Culture and Practice

Treating popular culture as set of everyday practices – using this term in a Deweyan and Foucaultian sense – is the first and most basic move in defining the domain as political material.

Before elaborating, however, it may be helpful to first briefly recall the unique way in which Dewey and Foucault understood the concept of practice.²⁵ Dewey and Foucault developed their respective philosophical projects around the argument that social and political reality was less the product of deep, unseen, underlying forces, than of ordinary thoughts and habits. Or, more precisely: deep, unseen, and underlying social and political forces may have indeed existed, but they were themselves constellations of multitudinous mundane and perhaps even accidental activities. Dewey and Foucault thus rejected the idea that overarching “structural” conditions existed that defined the “external, inert and primary fact[s]” of politics, as Foucault put it ([1975] 1995, 23).²⁶ Rather, they held that the substance and limits of collective life were materialized and delimited in everyday *practice*, i.e. in “practical activities, actual events, concrete situations, and real experiences” (Stuhr 1997, 66). The upshot of this position was twofold. First, social and political reality was understood to be contingent and contextual, a delicate arrangement of daily habits and activities. This meant, second, that political reality was eminently modifiable. Precisely because the world was the product of mundane practices like elementary education or workplace timetables, it was always potentially transformable by mundane practice itself.

In attributing to the term practice this unique political significance, Dewey and Foucault were stretching if not simply revising more common usages of the word. Consider the cultural analyses of Lasswell and the Frankfurt School, for example. In their work, popular culture was also treated as a practice, but only insofar as the domain could be described – following a traditional dictionary definition of the term “practice” – as a habitual, customary activity of

²⁵ For a more detailed discussion of the concept of Deweyan-Foucaultian practice, see Chapter Three.

²⁶ See, for instance, Fraser (1981, 274), Rabinow (2003, 44-49), and Stuhr (1997, 87-114) for similar readings of both Deweyan pragmatism and Foucaultian genealogy. See also Veyne (1997) for an early commentary on Foucault’s attention to practice.

ordinary life.²⁷ Of course, this characterization is clear and undoubtedly correct: popular culture is indeed a “habitual action or pattern of behavior” (“practice, n”). Yet missing from this definition are the far-reaching political implications that Dewey and Foucault ascribed to the word.

Horkheimer’s 1941 essay, “Art and Mass Culture,” neatly illustrates the different definitions of practice at play in the work of Lasswell and the Institute, as compared to that of Dewey and Foucault.²⁸ The overarching claim of the article, it will be remembered, was that mass culture had become completely appropriated and impoverished by industrial capitalism (Horkheimer 1941a, 292-293). As a consequence, all the “so-called entertainments, which have taken over the heritage of art, are today nothing but popular tonics, like swimming or football. [...] Popularity consists of the unrestricted accommodation of the people to what the amusement industry thinks they like. [...] Competition of artists in the free market, a competition in which success was determined by the educated, has become a race for the favor of the powers-that-be” (Horkheimer 1941a, 303-304). The description of popular culture offered here certainly fits within a traditional definition of practice. Normative condemnations notwithstanding, Horkheimer was describing swimming, football, as well as Hollywood films, and pulp fiction as habitual, common activities of the masses. Indeed, part of what marked an activity as included within the domain of mass culture was the fact that the multitude treated that activity as a “usual,

²⁷ The *Oxford English Dictionary* (2013) defines the noun “practice” as the “habitual doing or carrying on of something; usual, customary, or constant action or performance; conduct” (“practice, n”). It is also a “habitual action or pattern of behavior; an established procedure or system” (“practice, n”).

²⁸ Other illustrations could have been chosen, of course. See, for instance, Adorno’s “On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening” ([1938] 2001), in which he spoke similarly of “jazz practice,” and the “practice of contemporary popular music” (50; 57). See also Lasswell’s “The Theory of Political Propaganda” (1927b), *Politics: Who Gets What, When, How* (1936), or “The Propagandist Bids for Power” (1939), for extensive descriptions of popular culture as comprising the habitual “life patterns” of a community (1927b, 631).

customary, or constant action or performance” (“practice, n”). Yet it was also the habitual commonness of mass culture that Horkheimer found so troubling about the domain. Or, rather: it was because Horkheimer believed mass culture to be wholly determined by oppressive socio-political forces operating above or behind mass culture itself that he lamented its prevalence in everyday life. The commonness of popular culture was problematic because it meant that fascistic propaganda was being transmitted to the population at large.

Thus if Horkheimer treated popular culture as a practice, this meant something quite different to him than it did to Dewey or Foucault. For Horkheimer, practice – or at least the particular practice of popular culture – was ultimately the byproduct of much deeper political forces, “the powers-that-be.”²⁹ For Dewey and Foucault, by contrast, practice was affected by, but also actively shaped and modified, its surrounding social and political environment. It was precisely this fundamental disagreement about what popular culture *could do*, politically speaking, that underwrote Horkheimer’s denunciation of *Art as Experience* in “Art and Mass Culture” (1941a, 295; 304). Indeed, Horkheimer lambasted Dewey’s claim that “art is ‘the most universal and freest form of communication’” as ridiculous, not because this claim was necessarily wrong in theory, but because it was wrong in fact (1941a, 295). What Dewey failed to understand, in other words, was that “the gulf between art and communication is perforce wide in a world in which accepted language only intensifies the confusion, in which the dictators speak the more gigantic lies the more deeply they appeal to the heart of the masses” (Horkheimer 1941a, 295). Thus popular culture was not, as Dewey thought, a form of productive political

²⁹ Though note that popular culture was not the only practice that the Institute treated as a reflection or byproduct of deep social, political, and economic structures. Consider, for instance, their studies of the modern family, the psychology of personal authority, and the politics of labor (Jay 1973; Wiggershaus 1994).

expression, but a tool of political coercion. It was simply the means by which “[p]opular judgment, whether true or false, is directed from above” (1941a, 295).³⁰ In this sense, Dewey displayed stunning naiveté in presuming that popular culture could be anything more than a loudspeaker for industrial capitalism.

Comparing Horkheimer’s assessment of the “habitual” activities of the masses alongside Dewey and Foucault’s definition of practice, then, it is clear that two very different theoretical approaches to popular culture are on offer. In the Horkheimerian approach (which I have used as an illustration of the mediating model of culture), popular culture may indeed be defined as a practice, but it is in any case seen as dependent upon “the powers-that-be.” That is, popular culture can do political things – it can transmit, manipulate, and propagandize – but ultimately other, deeper forces direct its activities. The other, material approach to culture, which I am suggesting can be developed from Dewey and Foucault’s unique understanding of practice, tackles the domain from a different direction. The key assumption in this model is that social and political reality is not the result of “external, inert and primary fact[s],” but is rather shaped by myriad concrete and mundane activities, from elementary education to workplace timetables – or, indeed, popular culture.³¹

³⁰ Driving the point home, Horkheimer concluded “Art and Mass Culture” with the bleak statement that “[w]hat today is called popular entertainment is actually demands evoked, manipulated and by implication deteriorated by the cultural industries. It has little to do with art, least of all where it pretends to be such” (Horkheimer 1941a, 302-303). Popular culture was, in this sense, the derivative of larger, repressive socio-political conditions.

³¹ It is again worth noting, as I have already done in Chapter Four, that defining the material and mediating models of culture as different from one another does not mean they are mutually exclusive. It is not impossible to talk about the ways in which popular culture evokes or manipulates while still cleaving to idea that the domain helps form what we take to be political reality in the first place. As I discuss in the conclusion to this dissertation, the point in pursuing a material model of culture is not to simply reject the mediating model, but to offer a new and potentially useful picture of how our current political environment is shaped, as well as insight on how it might be altered.

Recall that, in his introduction to *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault described punitive technique not as “a special case, an incidental effect of deeper changes,” but as a practice that produces “positive effects...possessing their own specificity in the more general field of other ways of exercising power” (Foucault [1975] 1995, 8; 23). For Foucault, punishment was a political “tactic,” an active component in the production and modification of collective norms, values, and identities (Foucault [1975] 1995, 23). This is precisely the same lens through which I suggest we view popular culture. Like Foucault’s genealogical account of punitive technique, popular culture can be understood as a practice that actively contributes to the articulation and definition of contemporary political reality. As such, popular culture need not be described merely as the *byproduct* of general socio-political forces or structures, whether capitalism, modern liberalism, or whatever else. The domain is not simply “directed from above,” as Horkheimer put it. Instead, treating popular culture as a Deweyan-Foucaultian practice “from below,” as it were, means that the domain actually helps materialize such socio-political forces and structures.

It is important to make clear that arguing for popular culture as a Deweyan-Foucaultian practice does not imply that the domain somehow exists or has ever existed *independently* of capitalism, liberalism, or any other system or structure characteristic of our contemporary political landscape. It would be naïve to ignore the ways in which popular culture has been and is deeply imbricated with these kinds of conditions. Conceptualizing popular culture in this way does not mean that the domain is autonomous, then, but that it helps to materialize, define, or shape the ways in which we think of, speak of, and see politics, including particular concepts such as capitalism, liberalism, and so on. In the material model of culture, popular culture is treated as a practice *of* politics, not just as a practice determined *by* politics. Consequently,

popular culture sculpts our understanding of and engagement with politics, even as the domain is itself wrapped up with the particular political environment in which it exists.

Popular Culture and Problems

Having situated popular culture in terms of Dewey and Foucault's concept of practice, I have in the foregoing also outlined what I take to be the basic theoretical assumption driving my material model of culture. Popular culture functions in much the same way as Dewey and Foucault conceptualized practices like education, punishment, or sexual conduct. Like these, popular culture can be understood as materially important to the development and modification of collective life.

Even if this assumption is granted, however, several questions immediately follow. How specifically could we describe popular culture as materializing political reality, as shaping how we think of political concepts, as helping to define communal norms, values, and identities? How could a material model of popular culture be applied to our social and political environment? What, in other words, could a material model of popular culture mean "in practice?" To some extent, answering these questions in full lies beyond the scope of this project. My primary aim is to develop a general theoretical model with which to approach popular culture, with the hopes of then applying that model in *future* research projects.³² Still, it would be difficult if not counterintuitive to outline a material model of popular culture without offering *some* suggestion as to how this model might be put to work. In this section and the next, I attempt to do just this. Here I argue that once we have defined popular culture as a practice (as I have done above), we can then begin tracing the ways in which the domain has articulated and

³² See the concluding chapter for further discussion.

defined certain pressing political *problems*, and in certain cases even offered resources with which to *experiment on* these problems.

To help clarify what I mean by this claim, I want to re-engage two analyses of popular cultural products with which we are already familiar: Lasswell on Hollywood film and Adorno on jazz. As will be recalled, Lasswell's assessment of Hollywood film appeared in *Politics*, in the context of a discussion on symbols and their use by elites to defend and assert their interests. His basic argument in the discussion was that all modern societies employed propaganda in order to maintain their established political orders (1936, 29). This was as true in liberal democracies as it was in communist dictatorships: in the United States, for instance, the values of bourgeois individualism were "inculcated from the nursery to the grave" (Lasswell 1936, 30). In good scientific fashion, Lasswell declined to offer an explicit normative evaluation of such "symbol manipulation," as he called it, but his analysis was troubling nonetheless. The underlying assertion was that time-honored American ideals such as personal responsibility, personal achievement, and individual perseverance were nothing but the byproduct of an elite-run propaganda campaign.³³ For Lasswell, then, the issue was not *whether* the American masses were indoctrinated; they clearly were. It was, rather, *how* elites accomplished the task of indoctrination without the masses realizing (or at least protesting against) the ruse. To answer this question, Lasswell turned to popular culture.

³³ The extent to which Lasswell believed the American propaganda campaign reached was remarkable, and unnerving. The ideology had overtaken virtually every aspect of social life, including – as Lasswell noted in the following catalog – everyday speech: "‘The almighty dollar’: money is scarce and ‘it is not wise to buy the bicycle now’; ‘we must be economical and keep the old car another season’; ... ‘he was a brilliant man but he took to drink and went to the dogs’; ‘he was a good provider until he went running around spending his money on loose women’; ‘I hear Harry is making a good thing of it in real estate’; ‘how much did that cost you?’; ‘how much is the tuition at that college’" (1936, 30-31)?

The domain, Lasswell said, had proven remarkably effective in disseminating liberal-capitalist values whilst at the same time appearing to the average consumer as trivial, meaningless entertainment. One only had to look to the American film industry for evidence of this fact. Hollywood had invented an entire genre dedicated to what Lasswell called the “sudden success” motif. Consider the following plots: “In ‘I’m No Angel’ the ex-carnival girl marries a society man. In ‘Morning Glory’ a stage-struck country girl is shoved into the star part on the opening night of a play and makes a hit. In ‘My Weakness’ a servant girl made into a lady wins a society man. In ‘Emperor Jones’ a negro porter rises to kingly heights before he fails. In ‘Footlight Parade’ a young producer makes good with one night of strenuous work” (Lasswell 1936, 32).³⁴ Watching these films, Lasswell argued, audiences would have had two basic but deliberately concocted messages hammered into their brains. The first was that personal success was within the reach of every member of society, provided one worked hard for it.³⁵ The second was that failure to achieve personal success was always due to individual failings, never general societal inequities. In this way, popular films taught American audiences the value and payoff of individual effort, while also instructing them to blame all socio-political problems on a single culprit, rather than the system as a whole. It was a perfect propaganda campaign: without their consciously realizing it, Hollywood films yoked the masses to a social, political, and economic *status quo* that did not even serve their own interests.

³⁴ All five films were released in 1933, but they still should have been well known to Lasswell’s readers in 1936. Katherine Hepburn had received an Oscar for her performance in *Morning Glory*, *I’m No Angel* had come in as the second-highest grossing film of 1933, and *Footlight Parade* was one of the more spectacular – and expensive – productions of that year.

³⁵ Not for *every* member, perhaps. Note that it is only the “negro porter” in *Emperor Jones* – played by a young Paul Robeson – whose wealth and happiness is ultimately rescinded.

Adorno's assessment of jazz, though more explicitly condemnatory than Lasswell's analysis of film, developed a strikingly similar description of its political purpose. In "On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening" ([1938] 2001), for instance, Adorno claimed that jazz was the loudspeaker of capitalism, and that its consumption compelled listeners to accept existing social, political, and economic conditions.³⁶ He thus termed the genre "regressive," since it led the individual to delight only in the simple pleasures produced and authorized by "the market" ([1938] 2001, 46-48). Force-fed artistically depraved claptrap, jazz "converted" the listener "into the acquiescent purchaser" (Adorno [1938] 2001, 32). Whatever its apparent claims in support of individuality, then, jazz was in reality only a propagandistic ploy. Popular music enthusiasts like "jitterbugs" were a prime example of this exploitation. Though the designation was meant to define a group of sophisticated and therefore elite listeners, Adorno argued that it really only described persons that had "rise[n] up from the masses of the retarded" to pursue a "pseudo-activity" (Adorno [1938] 2001, 52). These listeners' "only excuse" for choosing to engage in such behavior was that "the term jitterbugs, like all those in the unreal edifice of films and jazz, is hammered into them by the entrepreneurs to make them think that they are on the inside" (Adorno [1938] 2001, 53). In this sense, then, jazz enthusiasts' "retardation" was not really their own fault. These poor souls had simply fallen victim to a bourgeois disinformation campaign waged by the "powers-that-be" through the medium of popular culture.

In their analyses of film and jazz, Lasswell and Adorno clearly attributed a similar political significance to popular culture. As propaganda, these two cultural activities were said

³⁶ See also Adorno's earlier essays on jazz: "Kitsch" (published in 1932), "Farewell to Jazz" (published in 1933), and "On Jazz" (published in 1936). The articles are collected in *Essays on Music* ([1932] 2002; [1933] 2002; [1936] 2002), and all pursue a similar line of argumentation as "Fetish."

to mask, manipulate, and stultify. This obviously meant that popular culture was politically significant, but it did not mean that popular culture *actively shaped* politics; at least not in the way that I am arguing here. For Lasswell and Adorno, whatever political things film and jazz did, they were doing at the behest or because of other forces. These products were not producing and modifying politics in any dynamic way, but were rather extending, concretizing, and ossifying political conditions that already existed. In their analyses, popular culture was a practice determined *by* politics, not a practice *of* politics. The domain was deployed as an instrument for mediating manipulative symbols or messages and, in this sense, had no political material substance of its own.

Yet we needn't take their own assessments as definitive. In fact, it is possible to re-read Lasswell and Adorno's observations on film and jazz and generate markedly different conclusions. To do so, let us take for granted for the moment the political concerns these two authors identified in film and jazz, which mainly related to matters of individuality and agency. The question I want to ask then, then, is not *what* political issues are at stake in film and jazz: it makes sense that Lasswell and Adorno turned to these cultural products to tease out an analysis of the modern subject and his or her agentive capacities.³⁷ The question is, rather, *how* these political issues are tied up with film and jazz. In other words, what is the relationship between modern individuality and these two cultural practices?

For Lasswell and Adorno, of course, the answer was that film and jazz transmitted the ideology of bourgeois individualism to its consumers.³⁸ For a study working within a material

³⁷ Although this is not to say that their analyses exhaust the political content of jazz or film.

³⁸ Though note that for Adorno the ideology of bourgeois individualism did not so much produce a particular kind of individual as much as it liquidated the conditions of possibility of individuality itself ([1938] 2001, 40).

model of popular culture, however, this answer is unsatisfactory, since it overlooks the dynamic and formative power of everyday practice. That is, it overlooks the possibility that popular culture may have itself shaped the meaning and operation of bourgeois individualism.

Accordingly, the goal of a material study of popular culture would not be to show that film and jazz conveyed the ideology of bourgeois individualism as an ineluctable fact, but to explain the ways in which these practices constructed the concept as a pressing *problem*, as something that had to be engaged and grappled with in the everyday life processes of a community.

Note I employ the term “problem” in a Deweyan-Foucaultian sense. Recall that, for Dewey and Foucault, problems represented modalities of practice that attracted critical inquiry concerning the nature and direction of practice itself.³⁹ For both thinkers, the proper object of political analysis was some difficulty, obstruction, or debate – some problem – as it appeared in everyday practice. The crucial point in this approach is that political problems only articulate themselves *in* practice; they are not transmitted *via* practice. Hence why an investigation of film and jazz working within a material model would seek to describe a concept like bourgeois individualism (to stay with the example) as produced and modified, at least in part, by these cultural activities themselves. Viewed from this perspective, popular culture helps *explain* the rise and development of bourgeois individualism, rather than being explained as an *effect of* bourgeois individualism.

³⁹ Thus Dewey (1973) argued that “[w]e do not philosophize – that is to say, we do not construct theories – about our customs and habits and institutions until some sort of difficulty or obstruction raises questions in our mind about the ways in which we have been carrying out our group activities” (15). Similarly, Foucault (2001) described his work as an “analysis of the way an unproblematic field of experience, or a set of practices, which were accepted without question, which were familiar and ‘silent,’ out of discussion, becomes a problem, raises discussion and debate, incites new reactions, and induces a crisis in the previously silent behavior, habits, practices, and institutions” (74). See Chapter Four for a more detailed discussion.

To re-interpret Lasswell and Adorno's analyses of film and jazz within a material model of culture, then, is to demonstrate that the basic propagandistic thesis underlying their description of these practices is untenable, or least insufficient on its own. For Lasswell and Adorno, film and jazz existed simply to extoll the virtues of personal responsibility or the pleasures of consumerism and were, as such, evidence of a "well-established ideology" (Lasswell 1936, 29). Thus, Hollywood's invention and propagation of the "sudden success" genre revealed America's "universal acquiescence" to bourgeois individualism (Lasswell 1936, 30). Similarly, the popularity of jazz proved that modern consumers were no more than "temple slaves" worshipping before the "theological caprices of commodities" (Adorno [1938] 2001, 39). Yet the difficulty of these arguments – at least for a material description⁴⁰ of popular culture – is that if liberal-capitalist ideology were as "well-established" as Lasswell and Adorno claimed, then it remains to be explained why an endless supply of popular cultural products would be needed to tout its virtues. Indeed, it seems overly simplistic to treat film or jazz as cogs in a "well-established ideology," since this claim implies that the political problems broached in these cultural products were not a matter of contest, or that consumers would not have recognized these problems as, precisely, problems. If this were the case, however, then one wonders how much propagandistic power film and jazz actually exercised, or were needed to exercise. Furthermore, this argument makes it difficult to understand what audiences would have found attractive about these cultural products in the first place, much less what political messages they could have meaningfully gleaned from them. For if bourgeois individualism were as "hammered into" consumers' brains as Lasswell and Adorno suggested – if it was "second nature" – then

⁴⁰ In the interest of convenience and simplicity, I will refer to a "material description," "material study," or "material investigation" of popular culture, rather than a description/study/investigation "informed by a material model of culture."

what would be the appeal in seeing or hearing it continually probed, questioned, and played with, even if all Hollywood films and jazz songs spat out incessant streams of individualist dogma?

The best explanation, which Lasswell came close to making and which Adorno (and Horkheimer) actually made, was that film and jazz simply induced a trained stimulus response in the consumer. But here the argument strains credulity: it is one thing to say that modern subjects are hoodwinked or even stupid, quite another to claim that their conscious lives are merely a collection of Pavlovian reactions.

A material description of film and jazz would thus seek a different explanation for the repeated appearance of individualist themes in these cultural practices. Simply put, this explanation would be that the prevalence of individualism is indicative of the fact that there exists a pressing, collective concern about what it means to be an individual agent in the modern world. The task of a material description of film and jazz would thus be to trace the development of that concern and the degree to which these cultural practices conditioned and responded to it. Of course, this approach would in no way exclude the possibility that film and jazz were imbricated or affected by the values of bourgeois individualism. It may well have been the case that some audience members walked out of a film like *My Weakness*, for example, feeling that wealth and social success were available provided one married the right man. A material description of this movie would only posit that questions concerning individuality and agency were felt as abiding *problems* for audiences in the 1930s. In other words, what it meant to *be* a modern individual would have been (and doubtless still is) experienced as a difficulty, an obstruction, or an open question. Precisely because this was (and is) a pressing problem, then, the substance and boundaries of individuality were (and are) a matter of continued discussion and debate within the domain of popular culture itself. As such, film and jazz can be understood

as specific modes of popular cultural practice in which consumers found resources to think of, understand, and ultimately engage their concerns surrounding individuality and agency.

Again, this interpretation would not imply that the resources consumers gleaned from film and jazz were necessarily “beneficial” or “good,” whatever we might take these terms to mean. The point is only that consumers’ thinking, understanding, and engagement of the problems of individuality and agency were in large part constructed *within* the practice of popular culture itself, rather than being transmitted to and imposed upon them *by* popular culture. Were we to pursue this argument in more detail, we could draw on any number of examples from Lasswell and Adorno’s own discussions. Thus, if for Lasswell a film like *My Weakness* represented an attempt to impress upon the masses the idea that individual success was achievable even for a lowly servant girl, it is also possible to demonstrate that the plot probed and therefore helped constitute the boundaries of agentive action for lower-class women in early-twentieth century bourgeois society.⁴¹ Alternatively, we could follow Adorno in interpreting jazz as converting listeners into acquiescent purchasers, but we might just as fruitfully explore the ways in which the genre shaped listeners’ understandings of what it meant to be a purchaser of popular music in the first place. We could, for instance, investigate the ways in which jazz affected intra- and inter-generational social relations, how it confused and legitimized existing classifications of race and class, or how it connected pleasure to a specific mode of commodity consumption.⁴² In all these re-descriptions, the pressing question is not what definition of individuality is transmitted via film and jazz, but rather what kind of definition of individuality

⁴¹ For some wide-ranging discussions of Hollywood film and its troubled engagements with American individualism and identity, see Dinerstein (2008), Mulvey (2009), Seery (2013), or Simpson (2000).

⁴² For these and similar arguments concerning jazz, see, for instance, Cullen (2002), Hersch (1995), Peretti (1992) or Stebbins (1966). For related treatments of popular music more generally, see Corbett (1990), Hesmondhalgh (2013), Marcus (1989), or Shusterman (1993).

film and jazz did or did not produce. Here film and jazz need not be understood as challenges to bourgeois individualism, but simply as activities that materialized the practical substance and limits of that concept.

Popular Culture and Experiments

With this connection between popular culture and problems in hand, the relationship between popular culture and experiments now also comes into view. As with my use of the term “problems,” I am deliberately deploying the word “experiments” in a Deweyan-Foucaultian sense. For both thinkers, these two concepts were inextricably linked. While a problem referred to a difficulty, obstruction, crisis, or debate concerning the nature or direction of some specific practice, experiments referred to the processes by which problems are grappled with, modified, or recast as objects available to interrogation. In this sense, Deweyan-Foucaultian experiments have a broader connotation than in the natural sciences, and could perhaps be more fruitfully associated with a term like “critical inquiry.”⁴³ Like their natural scientific counterparts, however, Deweyan-Foucaultian experiments are concerned with observable consequences, at least generally speaking. That is, experiments are attempts to “work on” practical problems, to change their given terms and thus modify if not also provisionally resolve their status as problems.⁴⁴

⁴³ As noted in Chapter Three, experimentation for Dewey and Foucault denotes the process by which a problem is perceived, probed through inquiry or action based on previous experience in combination with new observation, and then re-assessed given its new environment. For further discussion of experiments in both Dewey and Foucault, see Colapietro (2011) or Stuhr (1997).

⁴⁴ In *The Quest for Certainty* ([1929] 1988), for instance, Dewey argued that “[e]xperimental knowledge is a mode of doing, and like all doing takes place at a time, in a place, and under specifiable conditions in connection with a definite problem” (82). Foucault ([1983] 2000a) espoused a similar view over fifty years later: “We must transform the field of social institutions into a field of experimentation, in order to determine which levers to turn and which bolts to loosen in order to bring about the desired effects” (370). See Chapter Four for further discussion of Dewey and Foucault’s conceptualizations of experiments.

This conceptualization of experimentation is absent in Lasswell and Adorno's assessments of film and jazz, since these authors saw these cultural practices as purveyors of propaganda of capitalist ideology.⁴⁵ Film and jazz were designed to cover over problems or manipulate consumers into a false sense of contentment, not constitute social or political concerns as matters of sustained discussion and debate. As such, the possibility that popular culture could modify political reality was excluded from the very theoretical framework Lasswell and Adorno used to describe the political significance of popular culture. Conceived as a mirror and mask of deeper forces, popular culture was constitutively incapable of bringing to light problems related to the operation of those forces.

A material description of popular culture would challenge this position, at least as a sufficient or comprehensive account of the domain. Insofar as its re-interprets popular culture as a practice through which political problems are materialized in community life, a material description would view the domain as continually engaged in molding and modifying the way problems appear in practice, i.e. in experimentation. As with my earlier discussion of popular culture and problems, this position carries few normative implications: one could abhor or laud the way that popular culture grapples with, modifies, or interrogates practical difficulties, obstructions, or crises. Thus, a committed capitalist might applaud the fact that Hollywood films are obsessed with the discourse of bourgeois individualism, if only because this obsession precludes other, potentially contradictory forms of individualism from articulation. A staunch socialist would likely take a dimmer view of the matter. In any event, the argument that popular culture "works on" problems – that it engages and modifies their appearance in everyday life – is

⁴⁵ Though it might be argued that Lasswell aimed for this kind of experimentation in his work on the Vicos project, with mixed results. See Dobyns, Doughty, and Lasswell (1971) and Farr, Hacker, and Kazee (2006) for further discussion.

really only a re-description of how popular culture functions as a political activity. Instead of viewing popular culture as conveying some fixed or pre-established ideology, I am suggesting that the domain continually shapes the way pressing political concerns manifest in practice. In other words, popular culture is a material through which our political reality is continually fabricated.

To better demonstrate what I mean by this, let us return yet again to Lasswell and Adorno's discussions of film and jazz. As argued above, both Lasswell and Adorno construed these two cultural practices as evidence of a deep-rooted capitalist ideology. Hollywood movies reinforced the virtues of bourgeois individualism; jazz music turned listeners into acquiescent purchasers. In response, I argued that these practices could be, alternatively, described as practical engagements with the substance and limits of the concept of modern individuality. Film and jazz probed the thoughts, habits, and actions one could or could not perform within a certain social and political environment. But this argument can be taken yet further. In engaging pressing social and political problems, it could also be argued that popular cultural practices like film and jazz continually formed and re-formed the way these social and political problems were articulated, or made to appear in practice. In other words, in probing the substance and limits of concept like bourgeois individuality, it is possible that film and jazz experimented with the very meaning and form this concept could take in everyday life.

Re-interpreting Adorno's analysis of jazz will conveniently illustrate this argument. A central theme of "Fetish Character" was that jazz was so impoverished as a musical genre that listeners cared little for composition and execution, breezily accepting that the music was "fine for dancing but dreadful for listening" ([1938] 2001, 49). Listeners thus cared little for and even deliberately disdained all manner of aesthetic skill and ability:

Today, [musical] material as such, devoid of any function, is celebrated. One need not even ask about capacity for musical performance. Even mechanical control of the instrument is no longer really expected. To legitimate the fame of its owner, a voice need only be especially voluminous or especially high. If one dares even in conversation to question the decisive importance of the voice and to assert that it is just as possible to make beautiful music with a moderately good voice as it is on a moderately good piano, one will immediately find oneself faced with a situation of hostility and aversion whose emotional roots go far deeper than the occasion. (Adorno [1938] 2001, 37)

From this observation Adorno inferred that consumers of popular music willingly accepted any product the culture industry suggested they like, irrespective or even in outright denial of artistic quality. Jazz was essentially a fetish cult, calling forth “blind and irrational emotions” in order to keep listeners worshipping “[b]efore the theological caprices of commodities” (Adorno [1938] 2001, 37; 39).

It is important to separate premise from conclusion here. Up to a point, Adorno’s assessment of jazz may have been tenable. For instance, he may have been right that jazz purposefully rejected traditional aesthetic norms of “serious” music. But even if this were so, it does not necessarily follow that jazz listeners were stupid, or that they delighted in their own self-abnegation. Indeed, there are a number of other, equally plausible ways to interpret this phenomenon. It is possible that the “unsophisticated” presentation and execution of jazz represented deliberate, performative attempts to democratize cultural production. In other words, the genre may have offered a mode of cultural expression to individuals unable to access other,

more traditional cultural outlets.⁴⁶ Similarly, it is possible that the genre was a direct response to the unique pressures and pleasure of modern urban life, which conventional artistic forms could not or did not want to address. In this view, jazz's untraditional polyrhythms, syncopation, and volume were imitative of but also commented on city experience, and thus might help explain why the genre proved an especially fruitful vehicle of artistic expression for marginalized populations often forced to occupy such environments.⁴⁷ Finally, it is possible that jazz proved attractive to listeners because its musical and lyrical content – along with the social contexts in which it was usually consumed – contested a wide range established and potentially restrictive social mores, especially those concerning race, sexuality, drug use, and class.⁴⁸ None of these interpretations are particularly novel, of course, having circulated in cultural and musicological discourse since at least the 1950s. Still, if any are at all convincing then it would suggest that Adorno's critique of jazz was overly reductive precisely insofar as it ignored the ways in which the genre engaged and, indeed, *altered* socio-political practice. Whatever its relationship to the culture industry, jazz was not precluded from engaging and ultimately "working on" a host of practical problems. Indeed, in taking as its material the problems of contemporary social and political life, jazz necessarily changed the way these problems were understood and articulated by its listeners. Thus, whether its consequences were laudable or deleterious, the genre performed *some* manner of socio-political experimentation.

In making such a claim, it is worth acknowledging that I am taking some artistic license with Dewey's and Foucault's treatments of experimentation. For Dewey and Foucault, remember, experiments were construed as a form of critical inquiry. They were described as the

⁴⁶ See Baugh (1990), Cullen (2002), or Hersch (1995) for similar arguments.

⁴⁷ See Peretti (1992) for further discussion.

⁴⁸ See, for instance, Ayot (2013), Peretti (1992), or Stebbins (1966).

“specific doubting, inquiring, suspense, creating and cultivating of tentative hypotheses,” or as the “transformation of a group of obstacles and difficulties into problems to which diverse solutions will attempt to produce a response” (Dewey [1925] 1987, 222; Foucault [1984] 1997b, 118). The implication of these comments was that experimentation entailed some sense of conscious direction. The idea, no doubt, was that modifying practical problems is an activity best carried out intentionally, at least (or especially) if the goal is to reach some sort of conditional understanding or amelioration of those problems.⁴⁹

My own treatment of experimentation has largely de-emphasized this notion of intentionality, at least as I have applied it to my discussion of jazz and, to a lesser extent, film. In other words, I have assumed that it was not the *express* purpose of film or jazz to challenge the substance and boundaries of a political concept like bourgeois individuality. Instead, I have simply argued that to the extent popular culture engages socio-political problems, the domain also tends to modify – i.e. experiment with – the way these problems are materialized or articulated in everyday practice. Seen from this perspective, popular cultural experimentation need not be directed, but could in fact emerge as a dynamic, fluctuating, and perhaps even aleatory activity. The consequences of this experimentation may be deemed good or bad, but the point in any case is that popular culture plays an active role in the modification of social and political reality regardless of conscious intent. In no way do I want to preclude the possibility or value of intentional experimentation, however. Thus, while I have argued that socio-political modification can take place in popular culture without any explicit sense of guidance or intention, it may be that a more fully Deweyan or Foucaultian approach to popular culture would need (or want) to ask how the domain could be purposefully mobilized to intensify and/or conditionally

⁴⁹ See also Dewey ([1932] 2008), discussed above in fn.18.

resolve some particular problem. Here the goal would be to show that popular culture does not just modify political problems, but can actually help ameliorate them. Such an approach would represent an extension or more detailed specification of the material model of culture I have outlined here, since the aim would not be to show that popular culture is an active component of contemporary politics, but – this status assumed – to ask how the domain could be more fruitfully used as a political activity. This is the task of another project, however. My hope is only that *this* project may serve as groundwork for future explorations along these lines.⁵⁰

CONCLUSION

As I suggested in Chapter Three, my intention in this chapter was to use the political philosophy of Dewey and Foucault as a toolkit in order to help me re-describe popular culture not as a *mediator* of politics – as did Lasswell and the Frankfurt School – but as a *material* of politics. If this deployment of Dewey and Foucault was unusual, it was not unsupportable. Not only did Deweyan pragmatism and Foucaultian genealogy provide me with three crucial theoretical resources – practice, problems, and experiments – that proved convenient for developing a material analysis of popular culture; both thinkers provided direct and ample evidence of their own interest in popular culture to boot. My task in this chapter, then, was to

⁵⁰ Though it does not draw on Dewey or Foucault in depth or engage popular culture specifically, it is worth drawing attention here to overarching project of the recent edited volume, *Political Creativity: Reconfiguring Institutional Order and Change* (2013). Responding to recent trends in institutionalist research, the editors describe the book as an effort to work through reductive structure-agency binaries by “direct[ing] research toward the mutual constitution of action and context in everyday practice” (Berk, Galvan, and Hattam 2013, 2). To guide and frame this effort, the editors coin the concept “political creativity.” The term is intended to refer to the way in which “[i]nstitutional rules and roles, cultural heritage and historical memory situate actors in contexts, which inform action not as guide, constraint, or script, but as the raw material for improvisation and transformation” (Berk, Galvan, and Hattam 2013, 3). Despite their variances, then, both *Political Creativity* and this dissertation share an underlying aim: to reconceptualize ordinary activity as an integral, dynamic, creative component of our contemporary political environment. I thank Colin Koopman for pointing out the similarities between these two projects.

weave together several diverse but nevertheless compatible threads: Dewey, Foucault, popular culture, and the concepts of practice, problems, and experiments. My intention was to fabricate a theoretical model of popular culture that would not *replace* the familiar theoretical model developed by Lasswell and the Frankfurt School, but *expand* the resources available for investigating the political significance of popular culture.

In so doing, I have asked and answered a number of critical questions: What theoretical resources are available to justify an alternative model of popular culture? How would this model develop from or be defined in relation to these theoretical resources? How specifically would this model develop different political theoretical conclusions from the mediating model of Lasswell and the Frankfurt School? One last question remains, however. It has been lurking in the background of this entire project, and is perhaps the most thoroughly pragmatic of all the questions I have raised so far: Why might it be useful for political science to engage popular culture as a material? That is, how could this model help us “cope” – to use Rorty’s language – with the social and political world in which we live? I have scattered bits and pieces of an answer to this question over the last two chapters. In a brief conclusion, I want to collect these fragments together in an effort to more coherently explain why a material model of popular culture might help us come to better grips with pressing problems and possibilities we face as actors intermeshed in modern political communities.

Conclusion: What Can Political Theory Do with Popular Culture?

It is often said that pragmatism, unless it is content to be a contribution to mere methodology, must develop a theory of Reality. But the chief characteristic trait of the pragmatic notion of reality is precisely that no theory of Reality in general, *überhaupt*, is possible or needed. [...] It finds that “reality” is a *denotative* term, a word used to designate indifferently everything that happens. Lies, dreams, insanities, deceptions, myths, theories are all of them just the events which they specifically are. Pragmatism is content to take its stand...with daily life, which finds that such things really have to be reckoned with as they occur interwoven in the texture of events.

– John Dewey ([1917] 1980, 39)

In the introduction to this dissertation, I expressed concern that political theory, as I encountered it in the American academy, had done little to engage and assess the political significance of popular culture. I found this troubling because I believe that a central aim of political theory is to understand what it is that communities *do*. And popular culture is, for better or worse – perhaps for better *and* worse – an increasingly important activity of contemporary communities, particularly in the United States. Inasmuch as it turns its back on popular culture, then, political theory also turns its back on a collection of everyday life patterns characteristic of the society that the discipline is supposed to take, at least in some meaningful part, as its object of study.¹

Of course, as I demonstrated in Chapters Two and Three, political theory has not *entirely* ignored popular culture. The topic was of immense interest to Harold Lasswell and early Frankfurt School Critical Theory, in particular, and, largely because they offered some of the first sustained evaluations of popular culture within the American social sciences, the work of these thinkers remains influential. However, I also argued that the conceptual model that

¹ I do not intend to say that contemporary socio-political conditions constitute the *only* object of study for political theory, nor that they *should*. I mean only mean that one primary mission of political theory – at least as I understand it – is the study and assessment of such conditions.

Lasswell and the Frankfurt School used to evaluate popular culture – which I termed a “mediating” model – might have ironically helped to reinforce disciplinary indifference toward the domain. For in depicting popular culture as manipulating consumers in order to reinforce existing regimes of power with a minimum of dissent, the mediating model suggests that, while popular culture is indeed something that modern communities “do,” this “doing” is not determinative *of* politics. Popular culture is political, yes, but only insofar as the domain is determined *by* politics. To employ Horkheimer’s language, popular culture is always “directed from above” by forces and conditions outside itself (Horkheimer 1941a, 295). When seen through the mediating model, then, popular culture appears as something that reflects, transmits, and ultimately imposes existing political conditions and forces upon its consumers. The domain does not meaningfully *shape* those conditions and forces.

Chapters Four and Five turned to John Dewey and Michel Foucault to challenge the conceptual model of culture on offer in the work of Lasswell and the Frankfurt School. Adapting and expanding upon three concepts equally present in and important to these thinkers’ work – namely, practice, problems, and experiments – here I tried to show that popular culture could be understood as helping to literally construct our political reality. More than simply mediating politics, I argued that popular culture also “materializes” politics. That is to say, the domain forms the very building blocks out of which community norms, values, and identities are created and modified. When seen through this material model, popular culture appears not as a conveyance mechanism, but as a dynamic, formative political activity.

As I unfolded these arguments in the foregoing chapters, I largely avoided “meta”-explanations of my project; that is, explanations of why political theory ought to be wary of relying too heavily on a mediating model of popular culture, and why the discipline might

benefit from developing a material model of the domain. I did so in order to focus on my more fine-grained analyses of Lasswell, the Frankfurt School, Dewey, and Foucault. Now that I have completed these analyses, however, I want to step back – or perhaps step forward – to discuss the larger motivations of this project, and also consider some avenues of future research that might be explored with this material model.

WHY MATERIALIZE POPULAR CULTURE?

There are, I think, two main reasons for pursuing a material model of popular culture, and for juxtaposing this model to a mediating model. The first has to do with the explanatory value of the mediating model itself. Simply put, I find the depiction of culture on offer in the mediating model to be reductive. This does not mean – as I have previously stated – that popular culture does *not* transmit powerful and suggestive messages. Popular culture can and does mediate politics. But to claim that this is the *only* or even the principal political function of popular culture is to cling to an explanatory ideal that must ignore or dismiss certain aspects of the domain's functioning. This is precisely what I tried to demonstrate in my discussion of Lasswell's interpretation of Hollywood films and Adorno's interpretation of jazz, as outlined in Chapter Five. Though it is evident that these forms of popular culture were (and are) deeply imbricated with powerful political conditions and forces, such as liberal individualism or industrial capitalism, describing this imbrication *solely* in terms of mediation raises several perplexing questions. For instance: If Hollywood films of the 1930s so easily cemented liberal individualist ideology into the American psyche, why then were so many needed to constantly tout its virtues? How much political power could such films have actually exercised, if that power was never in fact needed? Alternatively, if jazz was as homogenous and vapid as Adorno

claimed, how might we explain the very real demographic differences in its consumption? Why was it especially popular amongst young, black, and urban audiences? Why did other (usually older and whiter) audiences so frequently reject it as dangerous, obscene, or unlistenable? How, in other words, did jazz produce such different effects for different listeners if the messages it was supposed to convey were ones of political homogeneity?

Such questions suggest that popular culture is either (a) not as efficacious an ideological tool as Lasswell and Adorno suggested (hence the need to constantly implant more and more ideological messages in its products), or that it (b) has other socio-political functions other than mediation alone (which might help explain the continued production and consumption of films about the status of liberal individualism, for instance, or the wildly different perceptions of jazz for different audiences). I pursued the latter explanation, for reasons I will discuss momentarily. My point here, however, is that political theory needs to develop new ways of speaking about popular culture *in part* because the language the discipline so frequently turns to when doing so is limited in its application. Describing popular culture as mediating political reality is not “wrong” – it *does* describe some important aspects of popular culture – but it is insufficient.

The second reason for constructing a material model of popular culture concerns my commitment, following Dewey and Foucault, to the political significance of everyday life. To help explain what I mean, it is worth noting that not all challenges to Lasswell’s and the Frankfurt School’s interpretations of popular culture need necessarily challenge the larger conceptual model upon which their interpretations were based. For instance, if I had been concerned only with disputing their depictions of popular culture as an efficacious transmitter of ideology, I could have tried to simply *reverse* these depictions and instead limn popular culture as *anti-ideological*, as somehow freeing or enlightening. Had I pursued this approach, I could

have still viewed popular culture as transmitting messages – its primary function would still be that of mediation – but I would have argued that the messages it transmitted were not power-laden, but in fact liberating. This approach is not without precedent.²

Because of my allegiances to Deweyan pragmatism and Foucaultian genealogy, however, I decided to sidestep *any* conceptualization of culture as a mirror, echo, or mediator of deeper forces and conditions. What I tried to do, in other words, was avoid treating of culture as a mirror of “Reality in general, *überhaupt*” (Dewey [1917] 1980, 39). Instead, I wanted to treat it as “reality” *itself*, as an everyday activity in which, in spite of its everydayness, things of material political importance – both good and bad – actually happen. Therefore in treating popular culture as a practice in and through which societal meanings, values, norms, and identities are created, I was trying to apply Dewey’s stipulation that the things of everyday life “really have to be reckoned with as they occur interwoven in the texture of events” (Dewey [1917] 1980, 39). I was also at the same time trying to realize Foucault’s similar call to treat “discourses [not] as groups of signs (signifying elements *referring* to contents or representations) but as practices that systematically *form* the objects of which they speak” ([1969] 1972, 49; emphasis added).³ I thus wanted to view the mundane, everyday behavior of popular culture as integral to the *creation* – and not just *re-presentation* – of social and political reality.

² Consider, for instance, the popular discourse surrounding protest music, particularly as it appeared in the 1960s. A familiar narrative is that such music was a byproduct of the deep socio-political unrest of the times, and offered young people a loudspeaker for their progressive socio-political views. Though here the protest music of the 1960s is seen as liberating, the implication is that it was still an echo of the larger social environment in which it was situated. For some examples of this narrative, see Cullen (2002), Street (1997), or Weissman (2010).

³ This is not to say that popular culture – or any other mundane discourse – is not “composed of signs” (Foucault [1969] 1972, 49). What I attempted to demonstrate, however, was that oftentimes popular culture “*do[es]* more than use these signs to designate things” (Foucault, [1969] 1972, 49; emphasis added).

Of course, it is possible that some adherents of the mediating model of culture will disagree with my material description of culture precisely *because* it is based upon Dewey and Foucault’s description of “reality” as a construction of everyday practice. Some may find the basic theoretical framework around which I base my model of culture to be wanting, in other words. This potential disagreement is noted. Given the scope of this project as it now stands, however, my best response to these imagined critics is simply to refer them back to Dewey and Foucault themselves. Texts such as *The Quest for Certainty* ([1929] 1988) or *The Archaeology of Knowledge* ([1969] 1972) confront questions of “reality” and its construction via everyday practice in far more depth and detail than I can muster here (though I did deal with these issues at some length in Chapter Four).

Alongside this response, however, I would also add the following comment. Because our lives are in some way “interwoven into the texture” of everyday events – i.e. because we spend so much of our time thinking, speaking, and acting in and through mundane activities like popular culture – it seems to me necessary to engage with them seriously, and as a matter of course. For better or worse, these activities make up and take up a vast proportion of our lives. Political theory needs a material model of popular culture not *necessarily* because it produces an exhaustive or even perfectly correct account of the domain, but because it offers political theorists new ways through which to approach activities of those communities it is supposed to take, in some part, as its object of study. In other words, the model offers new avenues for interpreting what it is that modern societies “do.” If those avenues help us think, see, and speak of the world differently, then they have value.

Before moving on from these “meta”-explanations of my project, two final clarifications are in order. First, in allying myself with Dewey and Foucault in the assertion that there is no

deeper “Reality” lurking behind and wholly determining our everyday activities, I do not mean to deny the existence of intimidation, deception, confusion, or anxiety in popular culture. That is to say, while I do not view popular culture as some ideological byproduct of deeper political forces and conditions, I *do* acknowledge that the domain often attempts to discipline its consumers to think certain thoughts, to say certain things, or to behave in certain ways. Discipline, however, is not synonymous with ideology.⁴ Indeed, in saying that popular culture disciplines, or can discipline, I am simply saying that *power* exists within popular culture. Like numerous other forms of social activity, popular culture can be deployed for the purposes of controlling others. But I would also hasten to add that such forms of influence are not necessarily *ideological*, in the sense that they veil or obscure the consumer’s knowledge of a deeper political and economic “Reality.” Instead, I would suggest that the operation of power in popular culture constitutes one of the means by which knowledge of our political and economic reality is *formed*.⁵ Following Dewey, then, a material model of culture aims to treat “[l]ies, dreams, insanities, deceptions, myths, theories are all of them just the events which they

⁴ See, for instance, Foucault’s methodological precautions concerning the study of power outlined in the 1975-1976 lecture series, *Society Must Be Defended*: “It is quite possible that ideological production did coexist with the great machineries of power. There was no doubt an ideology of education, an ideology of monarchical power, an ideology of parliamentary democracy, and so on. But I do not think that it is ideologies that are shaped at the base, at the point where the networks of power culminate. It is much less and much more than that. It is the actual instruments that form and accumulate knowledge, the observational methods, the recording techniques, the investigative research procedures, the verification mechanisms. That is, the delicate mechanisms of power cannot function unless knowledge, or rather knowledge apparatuses, are formed, organized, and put into circulation, and those apparatuses are not ideological trimmings or edifices” (2003, 33-34).

⁵ Here I am working from Foucault’s critique of the theory of ideology offered in the series of five talks Foucault gave in Rio de Janeiro in 1973, now collected under the title “Truth and Juridical Forms:” “What I intend to show in these lectures,” Foucault says, “is how, in actual fact, the political and economic conditions of existence are not a veil or an obstacle for the subject of knowledge but the means by which subjects of knowledge are formed, and hence are truth relations. There cannot be particular types of subjects of knowledge, orders of truth, or domains of knowledge except on the basis of political conditions that are the very ground on which the subject, the domains of knowledge, and the relations with truth are formed” ([1973] 2000, 15).

specifically are,” which is to say, not as epiphenomenal phantasms, but *as* reality – as material objects or activities that really *do* things.

Second, in claiming that political theory ought to attend more closely to everyday practices like popular culture, I am not suggesting that the discipline ought to give up its penchant for difficult abstraction and instead work to describe reality “as it is.” If political theorists are to remain critical observers of the society in which we live – and we ought to – then we must continue to think hard and imaginatively about what this society is, and what it could be. Such efforts will doubtless involve developing complex and sometimes even abstruse ideas that may have no immediate use-value. Nevertheless, such ideas ought to help us, if not “change the world,” at least engage pressing political problems that we see, hear, and touch in our daily life. Political theory, I think, should strive to think beyond the academy walls, the professional journal pages, and the disciplinary divisions – in short, beyond the insular cultural economy in which it operates today. This desire is perhaps (to some) naïve and idealistic. But if one dismisses it for these reasons, one has not read enough political theory. And it may be worth recalling that the entire discipline of political science once had this desire at its core. As it was originally conceptualized in the late nineteenth century, political science “just *was* about inquiry into social problems for the purpose of reform” (Farr, forthcoming). Thus while it may be difficult to imagine, the idea that political theory should speak *about* and even speak *to* the society in which it is embedded has not always been as questionable as it is today.

WHERE CAN WE BEGIN?

Because this dissertation was designed to speak about and to everyday practice, it raises some thorny issues concerning application. For example, what kinds of things might we choose

to study with this material model of culture? How might we go about performing such studies? These are difficult questions, though in the foregoing chapters I did try to provide some rudimentary sketches of what a material study of specific popular culture objects might look like (e.g. my discussion of film and jazz in Chapter Four). Still, it may be that detailed answers to these questions are best answered in the *doing*. Given the theoretical and methodological stipulations offered over the previous pages, however, I think it is possible, and perhaps helpful for future research, to identify one or two general features that studies undertaken with the material model might exhibit – or avoid, as the case may be.

First, then, I think that material studies will be wary of treating objects of popular culture as “illustrations” to be analyzed, individually, from which general conclusions about the politics of popular culture are drawn. For if the aim of the material model is to understand popular culture as a complex and dynamic domain, replete with overlapping and sometimes contradictory forces, then applications of this model will be wary of generating general conclusions concerning the politics of popular culture through the discussion of a few select examples. Put simply, I am skeptical that any particular object of popular culture can be defined as representative of popular culture as a whole. Instead, I envision popular culture as a *particular* type of practice in which *specific* political problems and *equally specific* experimental responses to those problems are materialized. Thus, rather than singling out single illustrations of popular culture as uniquely representative of the domain’s politics, applications of the material model would try to situate these instantiations within their surrounding cultural milieu. For instance, a material study of popular culture could certainly read a film like *My Weakness* (to return to one of Lasswell’s choice films, discussed in Chapter Five) as imbricated in some way with the politics of liberal individualism. But to develop a full picture of how liberal individualism materialized in 1930s

popular culture, we would want to put *My Weakness* into dialogue with films of the same period that were also engaging issues this issue. For while *My Weakness* may have played a role in the definition of liberal individualism in the 1930s, that role needs to be situated alongside the myriad other cultural products that were engaging the politics of liberal individualism at the same time, with their own unique (though not necessarily unrelated) effects.

Adopting such a strong sense of contextualism raises an obvious question: Where and how might one begin a material study of popular culture, if not with some privileged object of analysis? To answer this question, it may be helpful to return to Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* ([1975] 1995), which, as already noted in Chapter Five, I find a particularly useful resource for imagining what material examinations of culture might look like. Recall that Foucault's book begins with a dramatic juxtaposition of two instances of punishment: Damiens' execution and the prison timetable. And yet Foucault does not treat these two events as illustrations of his larger argument, in the sense that he does not consider Damiens' execution or the prison timetable as *uniquely representative* of the punitive regimes of their respective historical eras. Indeed, throughout *Discipline and Punish* Foucault makes clear that the success of the punitive regimes of both the *ancien régime* and modernity depended upon their diffusion into a whole range of thoughts, words, and behaviors. Executions and timetables were certainly part of that diffusion, but they were not its sole or even most potent manifestations. On the contrary, they were components of a much larger punitive *network*, an interlocking constellation of tactics and strategies through which punishment was distributed throughout the social (and individual) body. The entirety of *Discipline and Punish* is thus taken up with trying to describe the punitive network of modernity – namely, discipline. Hence Foucault's interest in not just prison timetables but also rifle movements, school desks, and town grids. These practices had

their own specific disciplinary affects, to be sure, but all were also dependent upon and imbricated with one another. Disciplinary power did not arise because it manifested itself in one or two outstanding events, but because it was infused into a range of prosaic activities and practices.

Foucault's approach to punitive practice suggests that rather than reading some particular cultural event or object as *illustrative* of a complex political problem, material studies of culture might instead *begin* with a political *problem* itself, and then trace its emergence and development within the larger cultural network in which it appears. The value of this approach is that it allows for and indeed requires the analysis of specific cultural events and objects, but simultaneously seeks to contextualize those analyses as single components within a larger narrative of how some problem appeared in a particular place and at a particular time.⁶

To explain how this approach could be applied in a material study of popular culture, we can return to the problem of liberal individualism in Hollywood films of the 1930s. Were we to approach this problem by way of the "illustrative" approach, our aim would be to develop in depth readings of a few archetypal cultural objects – like *My Weakness*, perhaps – in order to generate some general conclusions about the manifestation of liberal individualism in the popular culture of the time. My worry, however, is that such an approach fails to distinguish the forest from the trees, as it were. As Lasswell himself noted, liberal individualism *suffused* the popular

⁶ Though I have relied on *Discipline and Punish* to illustrate my case here, mainly because of its extensive descriptions of particular objects and practices, I think many of Dewey's works are also highly attuned to – and indeed begin from – the appearance of some problem in everyday practice. *Art as Experience* ([1934] 2005), for example, begins as a diagnosis of art's troubled alienation from "actual life-experience" (1). *The Quest for Certainty* ([1929] 1988) frames itself as a response to Western philosophy's continued fear and obsession with change. And, though it is less explicitly stated, *The Public and Its Problems* (1984) was written as a response to fraught debates about the meaning of democracy in modern industrial society. The point here is that Foucault and Dewey tended to engage some field of practical activity – e.g. punishment, art, philosophy, community-formation – as a way to trace the development, emergence, and transformation of a *problem* experienced as pressing *in* that field of activity.

culture of the 1930s. It was a topic with which popular culture was consumed, and in many ways still is. Therefore to give a detailed account of what this meant – i.e. to understand how liberal individualism became such a gripping issue for popular culture and ostensibly for its consumers – we would want to examine not just a few outstanding examples, but the larger constellation of cultural objects and practices in which these examples were situated, alongside which they operated, and on which they were dependent. Our concern would be to describe how liberal individualism became *so popular*, a daily concern for so many. Accordingly, we should be attuned not only to how liberal individualism appeared in outstanding cultural archetypes, but also in many less remarkable, but perhaps more widespread, cultural forms. Certainly, no one study could hope to offer a description of *every* cultural object and practice of a particular time and place as it related to the problem of liberal individualism. Analytic choices must be made. Nevertheless, I think it is possible to design studies that remain sensitive to the fact that problems usually only become problems *because* they routinely appear in everyday thought, speech, and action.

In any case, what I hope to have shown in this foregoing discussion is that there is much work to be done, and that this work is possible to do. Though material studies of culture would require a fair amount of effort, given their emphasis on the complexity and specificity of everyday practice, there are many pressing problems calling for study, and almost no end to the objects and practices through which the materialization of such problems could be traced. A glance at current headlines is enough to evidence this fact. Today we are confronting, among other things, misogyny in video games, workers' rights in collegiate athletics, female sexuality and/or empowerment in popular music, and political dissent in social media. These are real

political problems whose meaning is being formed, shaped, and transformed – right now – in the domain of popular culture. It is time for political theory to take note.

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