

12.

Pathways of Cultural Movement

WILL STRAW

In 1997, the Swedish ethnologist Orvar Lofgren invited scholars to study the ways in which cultural artefacts move through the spaces of national cultures.¹ Research on culture, he argued, should direct its attention to “the ways in which national differences become embedded in the materialities of everyday life, found not only in the rhetoric of flag-waving and public rituals, but also in the national trajectories of commodities.”² What is novel here is not the challenge to scholars and policy-makers to study everyday life—this has been a well-meaning commonplace in academic discussions of culture for the last two or three decades. More suggestive, I would argue, is Lofgren’s invitation to study the life of cultural artefacts as “trajectories,” pathways of movement through national life. This chapter attempts to gather and develop some of the resources we might use in charting these pathways.

The place of these pathways within notions of cultural citizenship is not immediately apparent, but it merits consideration. In an influential definition of cultural citizenship, Aihwa Ong suggests it is shaped by “negotiating the often ambivalent and contested relations with the state and its hegemonic forms that establish the criteria of belonging within a national population and territory.”³ The examples of negotiation which follow will seem trivial alongside the dramas of displacement and struggle which fill Ong’s ethnographic work. Let us see the realm of culture, nevertheless, as one in which each gesture (each new film or act of artistic activism, for example) presumes an implicit negotiation with the context in which it seeks to emerge. That context includes other people, artefacts and the structures of power or institution. Each such negotiation, in turn, functions as an act of transformation, if only by once more marshalling resources for an oft-repeated confrontation. Cultural citizenship is less about residing within culture than about the necessity of moving within it, and the negotiations and transformations which that movement entails.

The trajectories of movement which interest me here are those by which creators and cultural intermediaries act so as to join together places, people, activities, technologies, and clusters of cultural meaning. This involves an emphasis on production rather than consumption, but both must be seen as transformative gestures within a field of artefacts and social relations. In the sorts of joining I will discuss, cultural artefacts (books, films,

nightclub events, art exhibitions and so on) will be produced, but these artefacts are arguably less important than the patterns of interaction which are forged, reinforced or broken in the process. Vibrant networks of cultural activity may leave behind few visibly successful works or cultural milestones. It is in the movement of social energies along such networks, nevertheless, that we might usefully seek indications of cultural achievement or vitality. Analysts of Canadian culture have become skilled at pausing the movement of our cultural artefacts in order to examine them for the traces of a national sensibility. This has produced an abundance of claims about the character or function of Canadian films, books and music. These include, for example, the argument that Canadian literature best fulfills its national mission when it adopts “allegorical, and mythopoeic or romance forms,”⁴ or that much of “Canadian art and Canadian thought . . . is devoted to a last-ditch effort to establish a satisfactory relationship with nature.”⁵ These definitions bolster that longstanding sense of cultural citizenship as founded upon what Toby Miller calls the “moment of automimesis,” when a national imaginary finds substance in a frozen image of its collective self.⁶ Cultural criticism has identified piles of works which meet these (and many other) criteria, but these works are left to stand as milestones, static embodiments of national sentiment. Time and movement become little more than the empty substance which lies between such milestones, taking us from one to the other.

Orvar Lofgren’s ideas on the trajectories of cultural life might be fleshed out with notions developed within another recent intervention in cultural analysis. In his book *Metaculture*, the anthropologist Greg Urban instructs us to see culture, less as a series of artefacts to be consumed than as the movement which produces that series. “Culture is not in fact prior to movement,” Urban writes, “but is, rather, a derivative of movement. It is not that structure does not exist, it is rather that structure is a consequence of the way in which cultural elements move through space and time.”⁷ It is the movement of culture, he writes elsewhere, that “makes possible the recognition of a system or structure.”⁸ I would quickly add that Urban does not see culture as structure in any static or strictly formalist sense of the latter term. Structure is a particular balance between what Urban calls the “inertial” and “accelerative” aspects of cultural movement.

All cultural products are “inertial” to the extent that they inevitably repeat elements from earlier products or works. This is one of their features which makes them intelligible; the inertia within cultural artefacts ensures degrees of continuity, from one artefact to another. At the same time, of course, very few cultural products simply repeat the already-known. The familiar is constantly reiterated in new works, which displace those which came before them and move the cultural field along through their novelty. Recent successful Québec films, like *Les Boys III*, *Elvis Gratton III*, or *Séraphin*, draw explicitly on older prototypes and thus serve as inertial forces, restating older preoccupations and thus slowing the disappearance of these preoccupations from culture life. At the same time, by pushing these prototypes into an engagement with more contemporary themes (the globalized world into which Elvis Gratton is pulled, for example) these films fulfill an accelerative function. They renew the familiar by bringing it into an engagement with the new and the unfamiliar. For Urban, it is the distribution of inertial and accelerative forces across the field of cultural products which gives cultural life its character—rendering it stable or fragile, static or turbulent. The weak hold of English-Canadian cinema on its audiences, arguably, stems from a consistent imbalance of these forces. Outside of the *oeuvres* of individual directors, few themes or styles are passed along, from one film to another. The result, perhaps, is an excessively accelerative cinema, one marked by constant novelty but by little of the inertial force which would ensure an ongoing engagement with its audiences.

I want to pursue some of these ideas further, drawing on three examples from research in which I am involved in an ongoing fashion (either on my own or with students and colleagues.) Two of these examples (those of 1930s magazines and 1970s disco records) may appear trivial, but that triviality grounds the point I wish to make. Cultural activity which is highly productive and effervescent may, nevertheless, leave behind no canonical, notable works. In the production of “minor” cultural artefacts, nevertheless, we see producers initiating movement across space and through time. This movement shapes and reshapes the cultural domain, pulling people and professions into new relationships with each other, building audiences or publics out of clusters of people, tastes and habits. Citizenship, arguably, takes much of its character from one’s place within these processes and is expressed in the commitments that place presumes.

These processes are described more formally in the work of Henry Lefebvre. In his book *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre claims that

[S]ocial space contains a great diversity of objects, both natural and social, including the networks and pathways which facilitate the exchange of material things and information. Such ‘objects’ are thus not only things but also relations. As objects, they possess discernible peculiarities, contour and form. Social labour transforms them, rearranging their positions within spatio-temporal configurations....⁹

This social labour works to give culture its shape, but the nature of that labour or its effects are not easily grasped by existing methods for measuring culture or judging its vitality. Recent work on the production of Canadian television, by such scholars as Kotsopoulos¹⁰ and Tinic,¹¹ has usefully examined cultural creativity in terms of the “social space” in which it unfolds, tracing the links between geographical location, structures of collaboration and a national imaginary. It is, perhaps, from detailed case studies such as these that new tools for analyzing culture and tracing the pathways of its movement will emerge.

Toronto, 1937

In Toronto, in 1937, a man named Morris Rubin began publishing a series of risqué fiction, scandal and humor magazines aimed at the Canadian market. These periodicals bore such titles as *Broadway Brevities*, *Garter Girls* and the *Canadian Tattler*. They fell loosely within the category of the “spicy” magazine: each title combined saucy short stories, pin-up photography and collections of jokes and ribald poetry.¹² Magazines of this sort have a long history, but their popularity and visibility had exploded in the United States in the late 1920s. In launching his Canadian titles, Rubin was motivated by the recognition of two-fold opportunity. On the one hand, few entrepreneurs in Canada were exploiting the potential market for this sort of publication, in part for fear of censorship. At the same time, the growth of the market for “spicy” publications in the United States had produced an abundance of materials which might be repackaged for Canadian readers. In a move which has been much repeated in the history of the Canadian cultural industries, Rubin exploited gaps between Canada and the United States in the availability of certain classes of cultural material.

In Lofgren’s terms, Rubin was engaged in the “nationalization of trivialities,” devising means by which an ephemeral kind of cultural commodity might be introduced and adapted to a Canadian market. In his first years of operation, Rubin purloined most of the content of his magazines from U.S. sources, notably from titles whose importation

into Canada had been banned through a series of rulings by the Commissioner of Customs. At the same time, Rubin functioned quite literally as a cultural broker, dealing with editors and publishers from the more disreputable rungs of the New York publishing industry. His Toronto-based magazines were full of advertisements for sex manuals, hypnosis guides and other forms of exploitative literature described as coming “from leading New York publishers.” Indeed, the magazines which Rubin published in Canada often seemed little more than vehicles for advertising imported goods which Rubin sold through his various mail order businesses. Like many Canadian sound recording companies, private broadcasters and book publishers, Rubin used the importation of US-based cultural goods to partially finance the production of indigenous materials for the Canadian markets.

Rubin’s pursuit of profit and livelihood led him through the publication of various sorts of magazines and books. Most of the magazines launched in his first years of operation survived only for a few issues. We might ask, though, what else was produced as these activities unfolded. Like most forms of cultural entrepreneurship, Rubin’s career traced and solidified patterns of exchange between places and people. His various activities unfolded at the intersection of the newsstand distribution, job printing, graphic design and mail order industries. Links between such industries, which he regularly retraced, served to solidify pathways along which cultural forms which had originated elsewhere might circulate through the spaces of Canadian culture. Rubin’s status as broker was most pronounced in the early years of his various enterprises, as he assembled Canadian magazines from materials (illustrations, jokes, concepts) transported into Canada by himself or his collaborators. These materials were transformed through processes of adaptation and disguise. Pages of ribald stories stolen from U.S. magazines were reprinted under headings like “Gossip of Canada” or “More Dominion News.”¹³

With time, Rubin’s mediating function was expressed in the attempt to build more explicitly Canadian versions of cultural forms from the United States. Most notably, he launched tabloid newspapers (among them, *The National Tattler* and the *Tattler Review*) which combined topical exposés of Toronto life with images and fictional features reprinted from “spicy” U.S. magazines from several years earlier. In the late 1930s, Morris Rubin changed his last name to Ruby and, in 1940, launched Duchess Printing and Publishing, which went on to become one of Canada’s most successful popular publishers of the 1940s. War-time measures introduced by the Federal Minister of Finance in December of 1940, intended to preserve sterling currency within Canada, resulted in a ban on the importation into Canada of various categories of U.S. periodicals. Ruby’s company took advantage of this ban, offering a full line of magazines, comic books and paperback fiction produced for the Canadian market under the “Superior” imprint. These publications were only slightly less lurid than his magazines of the 1930s, but their content was now acquired legally. As World War II unfolded, the magazines began to boast, proudly, that they were “edited, illustrated, and produced in Canada by Canadian workmen, on Canadian paper.”

The clusters of collaboration within which Rubin operated brought together creative personnel of widely varying career trajectories and stages. Rubin’s first magazines were launched with the help of Stephen G. Clow, a Canadian with literary ambitions who had found disgrace in New York City and returned briefly to Canada, near the end of his life, to wring additional value from previously published materials in his possession. Harold Bennett, who illustrated many of Rubin’s early magazines, went on to a well-respected career as a comic book and paperback cover artist in the post-war years. Milton Cronenberg, a mainstream journalist and father of filmmaker David Cronenberg, wrote true crime stories for Rubin’s magazines during the 1940s. Montreal’s leading

post-war Anglophone chronicler of night-life, the journalist Al Palmer, began his career covering the city in columns for Toronto-based tabloids such as *The Week-ENDER* and Rubin's short-lived *National Tattler*. In the production of Rubin's magazines, distinct creative worlds came into contact and found new sorts of proximity. Some of the dynamism of these creative worlds stems from the fact that, within them, individual careers live out very different phases of their histories. Creative clusters on the margins of cultural legitimacy, such as that in which Rubin began, condense the dynamism of the cultural field by bringing together those seeking entry to the cultural field with others facing their final exclusion from it.

The role of public policy and regulation in shaping Rubin's activities as a cultural mediator is not obvious. In 1930, the Bennett government had removed tariffs on the importation of U.S. magazines, leading to what many regarded as a "flood" into Canada of publications from the United States.¹⁴ This flood intensified public anxiety over the importation of immoral and obscene popular literature; it resulted in pressures on all levels of government in Canada to keep out "spicy" magazines from the United States. Canadian Customs officials and provincial authorities struggled, throughout the 1930s, to meet public demands for censorship, while working out policies for the control of foreign periodicals in the absence of tariffs. Gaps in public policy and hesitations over its interpretation produced the opportunities which Rubin and others moved to exploit. As "spicy" magazines were stopped at the border, Rubin and others moved to publish Canadian equivalents. It is in the contradictions and hesitations of public policy, rather than any enabling function, that Rubin and others found the conditions of their continued activity.

Historians undertaking research on the CBC or National Film Board may find resources in the comprehensive archives which these institutions have built, or in the volumes of research commissioned by Royal or parliamentary commissions. Those studying Canadian popular entertainments (like magazines, recordings or magazines) must begin by imagining all the ways in which those producing these artefacts will run into trouble with the law. It is in their infractions of legal authority, rather than their recognition by policy bodies or cultural critics, that the more illicit or illegitimate forms of popular culture enter the public record. Indeed, the information needed to reconstruct the history of Rubin's various corporate entities is rare outside those details collected by police and prosecutors, and contained in the various indictments charging him with publishing pornographic materials. It is to be found, as well, in the archives of moralizing interveners within civil society, such as the Knights of Columbus or National Council of Women, both of whom documented Rubin's activities in an ongoing effort to stop them.

Much of the time, Rubin persevered in his clashes with legal authority; the government's difficulties in convicting him played some role in an easing of the Ontario's District Attorney's clampdown on "immoral" publications in the late 1930s.¹⁵ Rubin's testing of the boundaries of acceptability was rarely, if ever, presented as an act of civic engagement, and he has found no place within a history of heroic interventions within Canadian cultural policy. Nevertheless, he was one of many cultural mediators who have contributed to the recalibration of norms of acceptability within Canadian popular culture. We might say, of Rubin's publications, what the sociologist George Simmel once said of sociable conversation: that the "content is merely the indispensable carrier of the stimulation."¹⁶ By this I mean that the substance of Rubin's publications was less significant than the entrepreneurial and creative energies through which places (New York and Toronto) were joined, artefacts were assembled, and readers addressed in a variety of ways. I mean, as well, that any one of Rubin's publications was less important

than the forms of unacknowledged testing in which he engaged through the ongoing release of such publications over many years. In these releases, the limits of moral and judicial acceptability were challenged time after time. So, too, were the multitude of ways in which the Canadian cultural commodity might be put together, from materials both foreign and domestically produced.

Ira Wagman has noted that the idea of a “Canadian content,” long central to discussions of Canadian media policy, appears first in policies for regulating the trade in automobiles.¹⁷ Canadian cultural mediators almost invariably do their work with an explicit understanding that the Canadian cultural artefact is assembled from a particular ratio of domestic to imported materials. That ratio will be shaped by a jumble of overlapping policy conditions: the state of tariffs, currency differentials, customs regulations, postal rates and restrictions and so on. The ongoing testing of all these conditions—in the production of magazines, recordings, books and other artefacts—is a form of experimentation unfolding over time. In that experimentation, cultural producers try out almost all conceivable means of interweaving and balancing Canadian and non-Canadian materials. Their labour, typically driven by the quest for profit or legitimacy, might be seen as a form of research which typically produces highly complex kinds of knowledge. Through it, multiple ways of imagining the Canadian cultural artefact and its distinctiveness take shape and are made to circulate.

We should see the activity of Rubin and others as engaged, to varying degrees of explicitness, in working through the dilemmas of national identity and distinctiveness. This *working through* was a collective endeavor; entrepreneurs, police forces, judges and governments all played their part within it. This process was not deliberative, of course, in the sense of offering a circumscribed space of collective dialogue. Nevertheless, the cultural practices which produced Canadian magazines in the 1930s were also, in a sense, forms of civic argument, gestures which tested the conditions under which artefacts and their creators might participate in a national culture.

Montreal, 1979

In 1979, the US music trade magazine *Billboard* described Montreal as “the second most important disco market on the continent, outside New York.”¹⁸ *Billboard* was referring to the enormous popularity within Montreal of disco music, a form which had emerged in the early 1970s and whose international commercial success confirmed the important role of discothèques in popularizing musical recordings. The success of disco music in Montreal was manifest at three levels. It was evident in the observable vitality of Montreal’s night club in the latter half of the 1970s. This vitality built its foundations upon Montreal’s longstanding image as a city of night-time entertainment but did so, in the mid 1970s, with new levels of investment and entrepreneurial inventiveness. At the same time, the sales of disco records were notably higher in Montreal than in most other North American cities, a fact noted regularly in the music trade press. In the late 1970s, as well, Montreal became an important centre for the production of disco recordings themselves, as local producers released music which found audiences and buyers throughout Europe and the Americas.

Music is one of the most mobile of cultural forms, if only because its transportation requires little investment and may employ multiple forms of storage or transmission. For this and other reasons, music regularly evokes the fear that it is a challenge to the integrity of national cultures. Early twentieth centuries panics over the immoral influence of tango music on European culture, for example, emphasized tango’s alien

character even as they acknowledged its seductive ubiquitousness.¹⁹ In the 1970s, disco music was seen as a challenge to prevailing definitions of “Québecness” in popular music, and as an invasive interruption of Québec popular musical history. Disco was often posited as a corrupting musical movement which had ended the golden age of Québec rock, luring audiences and musicians alike away from the ongoing development of an indigenous popular musical tradition. For journalists of the time, such as Nathalie Petrowski, disco represented a “démagogie dansante,” a totalitarian distraction from the more obviously political project of indigenous popular musical forms.²⁰ Writer Renée-Berthe Drapeau, while acknowledging that many Québécois musicians involved themselves in the production of disco music, nevertheless saw this involvement retrospectively as new evidence of a cultural dependence on musical styles whose origins were elsewhere.²¹ The sense that disco represented an invasion of foreign musical styles was common in music journalism of the late 1970s, and has been repeated in subsequent histories of Québec popular music.

The diagnosis of discothèque music as “alien” rested on claims about its style and musical form. (This diagnosis generally overlooked the longstanding popularity of Latin-derived dance music forms within the popular culture of Québec). To the international music press, however, disco was a significant and seemingly organic component of Montreal’s distinctiveness. As noted, the popularity of disco in Montreal was seen to perpetuate that city’s long history as a city of nightlife and musical entertainment, to prolong the sense of youthful modernity which had presided over Expo ‘67, and to reinforce the city’s stereotypical image as the “Paris of Canada,” a capital of leisure and semi-illicit entertainment. All these comparisons presumed a natural affinity between disco music and Montreal, and worked against the perception of disco as an alien, invasive force.

For my purposes, the extent of disco music’s formal or stylistic rootedness within local histories is less important than the cultural textures and pathways within which it was embedded. Like the Francophone *yé-yé* music of the 1960s (Francophone versions of Anglo-American pop), disco music gave density to a national musical culture, less through the themes which found thematic expression within it than in the new sorts of institutional and economic relationships which took shape around it. Disco came to be deeply rooted in the micro-economies of small record companies, retail shops, nightclubs and distributors in Montreal. More so than many forms, it was the focus of a sociologically complex “scene,” whose participants built effective links between a wide range of institutions and activities.

It is for these reasons that Montreal’s disco scene of the 1970s returns us to the ideas of Orvar Lofgren and Greg Urban. The growth of a discothèque scene in Montreal required cultural brokers who could guide the movement of disco recordings into that scene at a time when the music was largely ignored by mainstream media. Those who fulfilled this function moved between a variety of roles and occupations, making money and building careers on the basis of their strategic position within a scene and an industry characterized by multiple trajectories of movement. In 1976, for example, Montreal nightclub disc jockeys formed one of the continent’s first disco “pools.” Disco pools were associations which acquired promotional copies of new records from international record companies and distributed these to disc jockeys throughout the city. The organization of such pools in Montreal served to integrate disc jockeys within the circuits of information upon which record company promotional strategies depended. Pool members reported to pool managers each week on the success of particular records with dancers in their clubs. This information was transmitted to record companies, who used this information to determine which records were taking off and which were clearly destined to flop.

The culture of disco was marked by velocities of change and rates of commodity obsolescence which were generally much quicker than those common within other genres of music. Disco records might die a commercial death in the first or second week of release, and the buzz which surrounded promising new titles led all disc jockeys to demand copies almost immediately. Disco music required, of those engaged in its production and promotion, high levels of flexibility and an acute attentiveness to the signs of change and innovation. The institutional infrastructure of disco music was thus one marked by a fluidity of professional roles, in which individuals stood at the intersection of multiple flows of information and influence. The owners or managers of disc jockey pools, themselves nightclub disc jockeys, often opened specialty record shops to cater to other DJs, or distribution companies which imported disco recordings for an expanding market of non-professionals. Disco music specialty stores, in turn, became meeting places for disc jockeys and important sites for the exchange of information and the socialization of newcomers within the disco scene.

The cultural brokers at the centre of disco music in Montreal interacted with others operating on the international level, ensuring the flow of information outwards (to record companies and international publications) and the movement of new recordings back into the local scene. One effect of this brokerage was the integration of Montreal's disco scene within the rate of change which characterized disco as a worldwide phenomena. While this integration was never total, the efficient structuring of disco's institutions ensured the availability, within Montreal, of the latest recordings and clues as to the music's direction. As effective mediators between the dance floor and the record company, disc jockeys increasingly took over the production of records, as well. Typically, they began by producing specialty remixes of recordings destined for the Top 40 or Album Charts, using their familiarity with audience tastes to "adapt" records for a dancing public. With time, however, disc jockeys came to produce dance records on their own, setting up small record companies and circuits of distribution for that purpose. By the end of the 1970s, several locally-based record companies were producing and marketing disco records of Montreal origin throughout the world.

One face of Montreal's disco culture was thus turned towards the cosmopolitan, international institutions of disco music. At the same time, the cultural brokers at the heart of Montreal's scene worked to implant disco within the city's broader worlds of media and celebrity. Even before the success of the film *Saturday Night Fever*, in 1977, Montreal television stations broadcast weekly disco-oriented programs (such as "Disco tourne"), and hosted annual disco awards shows. The interaction between discothèques and the mainstream worlds of commercial broadcasting was strengthened by longstanding features of the Québec media industries, most notably the popularity of the musical variety program on Québec television. Even as its invisible, subcultural foundations grew ever denser and insular, disco's public appeal spread outwards, into the domains of local social elites and the public theatricality of urban nightlife.

While the records produced and heard in Montreal's disco scene of the 1970s may seem disposable, even trivial, the fabric of connections and careers which took shape around them was substantive. Between the Montreal nightclubs to which a suburban clerk might go on Friday nights and the underground New York discothèques in which records from Montreal might be heard, a finely-layered set of economic and institutional relationships had taken shape. Like local theatre or skateboarding scenes, Montreal's disco scene of the mid-to-late 1970s was the object of no formal cultural policy but was shaped by multiple forms of public regulation and incentive. In the case of disco, these included the following: alcohol licensing laws, municipal zoning regulations, public performance regulations controlling the use of recorded music as entertainment,

Canadian content regulations to encourage the airplay of Canadian music (or French-language music), tariff regulations governing the importing of foreign recordings, agreements between nightclubs and local musicians' unions, and so on. At higher levels of generality, Montreal's disco culture rested on a demographic base which was itself the product of immigration laws and trends, linguistic regulation, and education policies which made Montreal home to four large universities. To these we might add those economic policies and trends which made the decline of downtown nightlife much less precipitous for Montreal in the 1970s than for other North American cities.

All of these factors helped to "produce" the disco scene as one of effervescent, creative movement. Within that movement, the values of cosmopolitanism and localism were regularly renegotiated in creative, novel ways. Montreal's disco culture was, at some levels, a system for adapting international commodities for local usage, and producing local cultural artefacts for a dispersed international musical culture. Within it, the high-velocity development of disco music across time unfolded simultaneously with the expansion of disco culture across cultural and geographical space. Portions of that culture (the nightclubs of suburban shopping malls, for example) came to act as inertial forces, resistant to the forward movement of the music; other components (such as those clubs opening on the Eastern fringes of downtown) articulated themselves to the most rapidly moving parts of that culture, serving as accelerative forces for the scene as a whole.

Multiple trajectories of movement were interwoven in all these processes. The development of individual professional careers was often bound to the fate of disco recordings as commodities and dependent on shifting ratios between their exclusivity and mass popularity. Widely-accepted subcultural lore said that Italians and other "allophone" language groups had found a place within disco culture that was largely denied them in other parts of Montreal's music industries. Neither Anglo-Saxon or French in any obvious ways, disco music moved with relative ease into the spaces of Montreal nightlife, producing mixes of population different from those to be found in the audiences for other musical genres. Each act of building a discothèque or producing records required, nevertheless, calculations about the place of disco music within Montreal's linguistic and demographic divisions. These acts tested tradition and prejudice and transformed the cultural cartography of Montreal. Like Morris Rubin's ongoing launch of magazine titles, they should be seen as acts of civic engagement, expressions of a cultural citizenship which negotiated new relationships between music, place and people.

Cultural News

The movement of national cultures is most forcefully registered in the coverage of cultural life by the media. Media serve to organize cultural life in terms of their own daily, weekly or monthly rhythms of publication or programming. Cultural industries and institutions, likewise, have their own rhythms of change and turnover: the theatrical "season," the gallery exhibition's "run," the release date of books or recordings, the single event of the musical concert. The relationship between these two sets of rhythms has been one of ongoing adaptation and negotiation. The Friday release of new films is tied, in part, to the expansion of entertainment coverage in weekend editions of newspapers, in a manner that serves the interests both of newspaper editors and of cinema owners. Musical genres of limited commercial appeal, such as free jazz or klezmer music, now receive more newspaper coverage as part of festivals than as recording styles, if only

because newspapers now see music festivals as punctual events of local significance and cover them more exhaustively.

In 2004, a number of faculty and students at McGill University began a three-year research project tracking the manner in which the Canadian media cover certain issues.²² The contribution of Anna Feigenbaum and myself to this research is in its very early stages, but it involves an analysis of the evolution of cultural coverage within Canadian media over the short and medium-terms. We are less interested in the deep substance of this coverage than in its shifting presence within newspapers, and in the extent of its reach outwards from a cultural centre or mainstream. We began this research with the hypothesis that the amount of cultural coverage within Canadian newspapers has increased over the last few decades. Indeed, very preliminary examination of the *Globe and Mail* newspaper suggests that the percentage of newspaper space devoted to cultural coverage grew more rapidly over the last fifty years than did the size of the newspaper itself. The average issue of the *Globe and Mail* in 2004 contained roughly twice as many pages as did a typical issue on the same weekday in 1954. The number of pages devoted to culture and entertainment, defined rather strictly, has tripled on average over the same period. With some variation, this increase in cultural coverage seems to be true of other Canadian daily newspapers as well. Dailies which did not have book review sections in the past (like the *Hamilton Spectator* or *Montreal Gazette*) have added these in recent years. Cultural events such as urban festivals are often covered now by several reporters, in coverage that may extend over several pages.

The significance of these changes is by no means obvious. A study of cultural journalism in the United States noted that this growth in coverage lags behind the social and economic expansion of the arts sector itself.²³ Observers of the changing function of newspapers will observe that, as cultural coverage has grown, so, too, has coverage of business, sports and a variety of other phenomena (personal finance, for example, scarcely existed as a focus for journalism a half-century ago, but has mushroomed in the last two decades). As newspapers seek to serve a broad, varied readership (rather than partisan minorities, as was the case 150 years ago) they have expanded the range of ways in which they speak to their readers. The newspaper of the present is a compendium of sections directed at specific audience segments, and there is little expectation that any single reader will read the entirety of any issue.

Nevertheless, it is possible to point with some certainty to at least one trend in cultural journalism which has reshaped its purpose over the last two decades. There has been an observable growth in coverage of the entertainment and cultural industries *as industries*. The *National Arts Journalism Program* study, to which we have already referred, claimed the coverage of commercial entertainment had come to displace coverage of the non-profit cultural sector; other commentaries have echoed this claim. We are not convinced that the same displacement is discernible in Canadian daily newspapers, where coverage of the visual arts and quasi-public cultural festivals seems to have grown considerably in recent years. Still, the commercial character of cultural activity is now openly acknowledged and discussed in newspapers to an extent unknown in the past. The cultural sections of newspapers now include reviews and profiles, as they did in the past, but to these are added a variety of other kinds of coverage: inside information on developments within the cultural industries, or charts ranking the sales of books, recordings or movie tickets. As Charles Acland has noted, many of these sorts of information were once the preserve of industry insiders; now they are an expected part of each newspaper's coverage of the cultural realm.²⁴ Cultural works (like plays or books) are discussed in language which elevates their status and offers judgment, but evaluation sits comfortably alongside coverage of corporate manoeuvrings or financial scandals

within the cultural field. The relationship of the contemporary newspaper reader to culture is one which combines a cynical awareness of backstage machinations with an equally strong acknowledgment of culture's power and appeal.

The movement of cultural coverage to include its industrial foundations is merely one of its extensions outwards, however. Over the last half-century, the definition of the cultural field has changed in a broader sense. First of all, we may note a decline in the coverage of two sorts of activities which were prominent in *The Globe and Mail* of the 1950s: "society" events (debutante and charity balls, for example), on the one hand, and traditional hobbies (like fishing or chess) on the other. Both of these linger in some form, but they have been pulled within new forms of coverage and diluted in the process. Coverage of local social elites has been gradually (if not totally) absorbed within a cultural journalism dominated by the worlds of celebrity and commodified entertainment. Coverage of the worlds of amateur hobbydom (of stamp collecting and Boy Scouts or Girl Guides) has been partially displaced by a lifestyle journalism centred on the individualistic arts of self-fulfillment (like cooking and fitness.)

These changes would appear to confirm widely circulated claims about the decline of civil society's older practices and institutions. More interesting, in our view, are the ways in which newspapers have found themselves compelled to venture further afield in their efforts to report on the cultural realm. Daily newspaper arts coverage in the 1950s rarely moved outside the realm of events (such as plays or symphony concerts) which involved well-established institutions. The "serious" or elite character of these institutions is less significant than the fact that their cultural character was beyond dispute. In the decades since, newspaper arts coverage has more and more come to treat culture as an elusive world which can be captured only through an activity of exploration. As the restless mobility of the cultural field has seemed to increase, so, too, has the degree to which the newspaper's gaze upon that world appears to shift and remain unstable.

Arts coverage in the 1950s appears centrifugal, describing achievements at the centre of the social structure and sending this description outwards to readers, in an act of duty or willful democratization. Increasingly, however, arts coverage functions as a centripetal force, as if it is the responsibility of the newspaper to venture to the margins or obscure corners of our culture and pull back, into the orbit of our attention, practices and works about which it imagines we should be informed. Thus, tattooing, CD-burning, swing music revivals, fringe theatre festivals, raves, flash mobs, activist documentary films and innumerable other phenomena have come to find their place within the cultural sections of newspapers. Ongoing uncertainty as to what constitutes the cultural realm has gone hand in hand with the expansion of cultural sections in newspapers and with an intensification of their effort to address multiple audiences. Writing of urban journalism, Peter Fritzsche has suggested that, in the city, "the incompleteness of civic rule is accompanied by the instability of narrative authority."²⁵ It is certainly the case that, with the slow withering of traditional cultural authority, the newspaper's coverage of the cultural field manifests an unstable sense of its own authority and capacity to "narrate" the city. The cultural realm appears more and more as one of endless, restless movement, over which newspapers no longer seem to exercise a stable and authoritative omniscience.

This expansion of cultural coverage in the daily newspaper has coincided with a decline in the readership of conventional newspapers, particularly among younger people.²⁶ In Canada, as in other countries, an important part of this shift has been the growth of the so-called "alternative weekly" newspaper since the early 1980s. Alternative weeklies are typically more youthful in their orientation and readership than

the traditional daily newspaper. Their most distinctive characteristic, however, is their overwhelming emphasis on cultural life. The central sections of most alternative weeklies are devoted to cultural phenomena and events, typically organized into such sections as “Film,” “Dance,” “Theatre,” “Cinema,” and so on. There are practical reasons for this emphasis. Cultural journalism usually anticipates or reviews events which have been publicized in advance, and such coverage is organized more easily and inexpensively than coverage of crimes or political events (which requires full-time reporters assigned to often unpredictable beats). The weeklies’ appeal to advertisers has much to do with their publication of entertainment listings, which encourage readers to keep issues lying around for regular consultation.

In their emphasis on culture and entertainment, alternative weeklies have reversed a longstanding hierarchical relationship between day and night. This may seem a trivial feature of the alternative weekly, but, in fact, it stands as highly emblematic of the movement of cultural coverage into social and moral “regions” hitherto left unexplored. One of the lessons of recent cultural policy initiatives is that nighttime is no longer to be seen simply as the time of consumption—as that span of time in which people spend money earned from the labours of the day. Numerous studies and policy interventions over the past decade have repeated the observation that cities contain vital and weighty night-time economies and nocturnal workforces. Taxis, bars, restaurants, sex, work and office cleaning are not merely epiphenomena which support, renew or dissipate the more fundamental energies of daytime work. They are “industries” of autonomous economic weight, and the labour which they involve is increasingly acknowledged as such. At the same time, the practices of the night sustain lifestyle experimentation, cultural innovation and the building of diverse communities. While this has almost always been true, it is only recently that these practices have been recognized as fundamental to a city’s appeal and potential prosperity.²⁷ Alternative weekly newspapers rarely acknowledge the pervasiveness of their emphasis on urban nightworlds, but that emphasis reveals itself to even the most cursory analysis.

In Greg Urban’s terms, we might say that these newspapers have reordered our sense of the cultural field through several sorts of movement. On the one hand, they have followed culture into its ever more elusive locations: into undergrounds and subcultural worlds, into the hidden corners of cultural production. More strikingly, as suggested, they have expanded the scope and substance of the night as a cultural terrain, often in tandem with cities’ own acknowledgement of their night-time economies. And, finally, the urban weekly newspaper participates in a broader enterprise through which the limits of culture have expanded to circumscribe multiple spheres of social and political engagement. The alternative weekly is founded on the assumption that the youthful, downtown dweller is connected to urban life principally as a consumer of culture. In their overwhelming emphasis on the cultural realm, alternative weekly newspapers have strengthened culture’s role as privileged site for the elaboration of citizenship and civic belonging.

In 1994, in an insightful analysis of Québec cultural policy, Allor and Gagnon noted that the cultural field had become primary in the process by which governments constructed their legitimacy and fostered a sense of citizenship.²⁸ The alternative weekly newspaper effects a similar absorption of the civic and the social within the cultural. It is within culture, coverage suggests, that the urban dweller encounters sensation, adventure and exoticism—dimensions of experience which, in other newspapers or in other times, were more likely to be found in coverage of crime, war or politics. It is principally within the cultural field, as well, that we negotiate our relationship to the illicit, the scandalous, and other forces which challenge the social order. Civic responsibility and citizenship thus come to be tested and defined through encounters with the cultural field.

It would be wrong, however, to see the alternative newspaper as necessarily more accelerative in its impulses than the daily newspaper. In the uncertainty of its contemporary cultural authority, perhaps, the daily newspaper has come to treat the cultural field as one whose margins are perpetually tested and regularly pushed outwards. There are multiple reasons for this outward movement, but they presume that the reader's regular encounter with the unknown is necessary, in a sense, to an improved and enlightened citizenship. The alternative weekly moves the boundaries of legitimacy even further from a cultural centre, but, at the same time, it works to give order and stability to the peripheries of cultural life, hastening their economic rationalization and public accessibility. In doing so, the alternative weekly produces a stabilized version of civic engagement, one carefully calibrated to the lists of upcoming concerts or other events covered in its regular features. Neither of these media, then, is wholly inertial or accelerative in easily diagnosed ways.

Conclusion

The examples discussed here all return us, however obliquely, to Ong's question of "belonging within a national population and territory." Morris Ruby magazines were meaningful principally as a sequence of experimental gestures; through them, multiple ways of producing Canadian versions of the American "spicy" magazine were tested in both a commercial and a legal sense. The absence of explicit civic purpose in Ruby's activities should not prevent us from seeing, in the movement of his magazines through a national culture and its institutions, a sustained negotiation over the meaning of "Canadianness." The example of Montreal's disco scene raises, quite strikingly, the conflict between texts as bearers of national identity and cultural processes as ways of re-ordering social and cultural relations. The extent to which disco music should be considered an alien form within Québec musical history may be set aside. More interesting, for my purposes, are the ways in which tensions over its cosmopolitan and local meanings served to generate the myriad of institutions and career trajectories which gave the local scene its complexity. Some of the latter were devoted to the adaptation of international recordings to the local market, others formed around the production of local equivalents. In the tension between them, the question of Montreal's place within international circuits of influence and commodity circulation was posed.

The newspaper's role in sustaining citizenship is more widely acknowledged, of course, and it is around the newspaper that influential notions of civic engagement and collective deliberation have developed.²⁹ Changes in the content and organization of the newspaper, over the last half-century, reveal important shifts, both in the importance accorded the cultural realm and in its delimitation. As I have suggested, it is in the alternative weekly newspaper, perhaps, that one finds the most stable image of cultural citizenship, one frozen in the categories of coverage and maps of lifestyle options which characterize these papers. Daily newspapers—marked as they are by ongoing anxiety over the fate of a cultural centre whose contours they can hardly see—have become more genuinely experimental in the constant revamping and awkward openings-up of their cultural coverage. As symptoms of uncertainty over the borders of culture and its place in reader's lives, daily newspapers unwittingly manifest that accelerative nervousness which is one part of the condition of culture.

Notes

¹ Orvar Lofgren, "Scenes from a Troubled Marriage: Swedish Ethnology and Material Culture Studies," *Journal of Material Culture* 2, no. 1 (1997): 95-113, 106.

² *Ibid.*

³ Aihwa Ong, "Cultural Citizenship as Subject-Making: Immigrants Negotiate Racial and Cultural Boundaries in the United States," *Current Anthropology* 37, no. 5 (1996): 737-762, 738.

⁴ Leon Surette, "Creating The Canadian Canon," in ed. Robert Lecker, *Canadian Canons: Essays in Literary Value* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 24.

⁵ Bruce R. Elder, *Image and Identity: Reflections on Canadian Film and Culture* (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1989), 34. See also Michael Dorland, *So Close to the States: The Emergence of Canadian Feature Film Policy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998).

⁶ Toby Miller, *The Well-Tempered Self: Citizenship, Culture, and the Postmodern Subject* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

⁷ Greg Urban, *Metaculture: How Culture Moves through the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 32.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁹ Henry Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 77.

¹⁰ Patsy Kotsopoulos, "L.M. Montgomery on Television: The Romance and the Industry of Adaptation," in eds. Sheila Petty et al., *Canadian Cultural Poesis* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2004).

¹¹ Serra Tinic, "Global Vistas and Local Reflections," *Television & New Media* 5, no. 3 (August 2004): 1-30.

¹² For a much fuller account of Rubin and his publishing ventures, see Will Straw, "Traffic in Scandal: The Case of Broadway Brevities," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 73, no. 4 (Fall 2004): 947-71.

¹³ Both these features appeared in Broadway Brevities, no. 8, November, 1937.

¹⁴ "Competition Continues," *Canadian Printer and Publisher* 48, no. 1 (January 1939): 33.

¹⁵ Straw, "Traffic in Scandal."

¹⁶ George Simmel, "Sociability," in George Simmel, *On Individuality and Social Forms* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1971), 127-40, 136 (edited and with an introduction by Donald N. Levine).

¹⁷ Ira Wagman, "Statistics and Narratives of Canadian Cultural Weakness" (paper presented at the annual conference of the Canadian Communications Association, Halifax, Nova Scotia, June 1, 2003).

¹⁸ "Montreal May be Continent's 2nd Best City," *Billboard*, March 17, 1979, 84. See also "Gold Mine Market For Labels," *Billboard*, January 29, 1977, Q-10.

¹⁹ Marta E. Savigliano, *Tango and the Political Economy of Passion* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995).

²⁰ Nathalie Petrowski, "La démagogie dansante du disco," *Le Devoir*, March 3, 1979, 19.

²¹ Renée-Berthe Drapeau, "Le yé-yé dans la marge du nationalisme québécois," in ed. Robert Giroux, *La Chanson Prend Ses Airs* (Montreal: Tryptique, 1993), 131-57.

²² This project is funded by the Max Bell Foundation, and has its administrative home within the McGill Institute for the Study of Canada. I am indebted to my research assistant on the project, PhD student Anna Feigenbaum, for her contributions to this work, which had just begun at the time of writing.

²³ National Arts Journalism Program, *Reporting the Arts* (New York: National Arts Journalism Program, 1999).

²⁴ Charles Acland, *Screen Traffic: Movies, Multiplexes, and Global Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 4-5.

²⁵ Peter Fritzsche, *Reading Berlin 1900* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 3.

²⁶ For a multinational overview, Le Monde, *Les comptes du groupe* (Paris: La Société Editrice du Monde, 2004) (annual report).

²⁷ See, among many other sources, Andrew Lovatt, Justin O'Connor, John Montgomery and Paul Owens, eds., *The 24-Hour City: Selected Papers from the First National Conference on the Night-time Economy* (Manchester: Manchester Metropolitan University, 1994).

²⁸ Martin Allor and Michelle Gagnon, *L'État de culture—Généalogie discursive des politiques culturelles québécoises* (Montréal: Concordia University, Groupe de recherche sur la citoyenneté culturelle, 1994).

²⁹ E.g., Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991).