

The Social Construction of Modern American Culture¹

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1. Introduction

There is currently a crisis in culture theory. The traditional models of culture which emerged from anthropological research are no longer adequate. They fail to adequately explicate the nature of social and cultural change which are currently taking place in numerous modern industrial societies; and, they are unable to clearly define and to differentiate the differences between anthropological and sociological models of cultural theory. So the question remains as to whether this crisis can be resolved. The solution to this dilemma is a surprising one. It can be found in those academic areas of research which are not normally associated with culture theory. One of the newest frameworks on modern culture can be found in the research and writings of Jürgen Habermas, a neo-Hegelian philosopher, who has labored for years on developing a rational model of modern society. He refers to his approach to the social construction of modern culture as **Modernity** (Cascardi, 1992; Bernstein, 1985). Another emerging framework on modern culture can be found in the research of futurists such as Alvin Toffler (1980), who has documented contemporary social and cultural shifts and has focused his interest on the emergence of a postindustrial society which is currently replacing the old industrial revolution which dominated Europe for the last four to five centuries. These works are interesting because they provide informative resolutions to the crisis which is currently crippling anthropological and sociological models of culture.

2. Social and Anthropological Models of Culture

Prior to discussing the culture of modernity, it is necessary to review the nature of the crisis in those traditional academic disciplines which have contributed significantly to culture theory: cultural anthropology and industrial sociology. These disciplines each have unique origins and have consequently sought different approaches to culture. However, these former definitions no longer can be sustained. Consequently, decisions have to be made as to how culture is to be redefined. It is in this sense of the Greek word *krisis* or “crisis or a moment of decision” that the crisis in culture theory is being addressed in this essay. It is time for scholars to decide on a new definition of the term “*culture*”.

There was a time when anthropologists only studied exotic cultures and sociologists concentrated on modern industrial societies. The scholars who eventually became known as anthropologists originally worked on behalf of European entrepreneurs who invested heavily in foreign markets in Southeast Asia, Africa and other centers of international trade (Hays,

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1964; Harris, 1968). The languages and behaviors of these peoples were exotic. They were very different from the industrialized nations of Europe during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Many of these earlier scholars developed models of anthropology in which people were placed in developmental hierarchies. At the zenith of these systems of humanity, one always found the representation of European culture. It was assumed, of course, that European society was the most evolved of all human systems. But, even though this framework of Social Darwinism (Harris, 1968: chapter five) did not remain as the controlling and defining feature of cultural anthropology, the emphasis on exotic languages and cultures remained as tacit assumptions in all anthropological research since that time. Eventually, however, other scholars became interested in other cultures and this led the research in a new direction. This is particularly true of the work of Wilhelm von Humboldt (1841) who had lived in Java, spoke the language, and was familiar with the culture. He raised the issue from one of European ethnocentrism to one of issues of linguistic variability and human development (von Humboldt, 1971). With his entrance into the study of culture, anthropologists raised a variety of new issues as cultural anthropologists shifted to the study of cultural system, language and cultural value, culture and environment, psychological types across culture, and so on (Harris, 1968; Montagu, 1974; White, 1975). But in contemporary research, the approach to the study of culture currently practiced by Clifford Geertz (1973, 1983, 1988) differs substantially with those occasioned by another practicing anthropologist, Marvin Harris (1974, 1977, 1979). As a consequence, many cultural anthropologists are calling for a redefinition of their discipline (Boon, 1982; Peacock, 1986; Shweder & LeVine, 1984).

Sociologists also study culture. They differ from anthropologists, however, by focusing on the subcultures of industrial society rather than exotic foreign cultures. They also differ in their historical development as a discipline. The rise of sociology is linked to the milieu surrounding the French revolution (Barnes, 1948; Mitchell, 1968). The aristocracy of Europe found it necessary to study the masses in order to better control them (Sennett, 1978, Part III; 1981). Hence, the original studies of sociology focused on the divisions of labor in society (Durkheim, 1964), social bonding (Tonnies, 1974), the secular analysis of religious behavior (Weber, 1964), the Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism (Tawney, 1954; Weber, 1958), the rise of science as a social force (Brown, 1978; Hooykaas, 1972), the study of the disintegration (*anomie*) of social bonds or alienation (Ollman, 1978; Schacht, 1970), and even topics such as the sociology of consciousness through class structure (Brown & Lyman, 1978; Ossowski, 1963). Hence, sociologists envisioned cultures from a disparate tradition with its own special vocabulary, theoretical constructs, and political needs. Even when they have shared a common vocabulary such as in ethnomethodology (Douglas, 1980: chapter 5; Mehan & Wood, 1975), their way of doing field work differs substantially from that of anthropologists (Turner, 1974).

What is interesting about these two academic disciplines is that in recent times this distinction has become rather blurred. Anthropologists now have their focus on the analysis of the culture of modern societies. Marvin Harris, who is a cultural materialist, has written numerous works on contemporary American culture (1981a, 1981b, 1989). He does not treat American culture as being exotic as Spradley and Rynkiewich (1975) have done in their edited work, *The Narcirema*. As a matter of fact, Marvin Harris directly attacks modern industrial cultures from a purely economic perspective. His work is reminiscent of similar analyses done

by classical sociologists such as Durkheim and Weber. What this means, in essence, is that anthropologists are doing sociological analyses under the guise of cultural anthropology. But, the problem does not end there. Sociologists are now studying the exotic cultures of traditional anthropology under the guise of social analysis (Blau, 1992; Lebra, 1979; Lebra & Lebra, 1974). Why should this blurring of disciplines have even occurred? Why is it ever more difficult to differentiate the sociology of culture from cultural anthropology? And, why are departments of anthropology and sociology combining into single departments where faculty teach courses and seminars across both of these disciplines?

The reason for the blurring of the traditional disciplines of culture can be readily explained from the perspective of the social construction of mass culture in the United States and its importation into numerous industrially rising nations around the world. When so-called exotic cultures adopt modern technology and when they borrow industrial business practices, the result is one of significant change. The old blends in with the new. People are in transition from one system to another and hence what used to be clearly marked as the domain of cultural anthropology can no longer be definitively differentiated from what was clearly marked as the domain of sociology.

3. The Social Construction of Mass Culture

Where did this new economic perspective on culture come from? The answer to this question can be readily found in the social construction of modern mass culture in the United States which began soon after the turn of the century. The rise of industrial society in Europe and in the United States after the second stage of the industrial revolution has been dealt with in some detail by Richard Sennett (1978, 1981). He provides an in-depth analysis of the social changes occurring in France, England, and the United States before the turn of the century and how these social forces provided the ideal milieu for the development of a mass culture in America. Orrin Klapp (1973, 1978) is another sociologist who provides some insight into the development of the new culture which currently dominates American consciousness. His model has met with some success in the advertising business community (Packard, 1874, 1977; Toffler, 1964). However, one of the most insightful studies of the social construction of mass culture in America can be found in the writings of Stuart Ewen (1977, 1988) and Elizabeth Ewen (1982).

Stuart Ewen (1977) has documented when, why, and where the social construction of mass culture took place in the United States. His research came directly from advertisers and corporate entrepreneurs who wrote about their new founded successes in social engineering in such advertiser's journals as *The Printer's Ink*. In order to better understand how and why this movement took place, it is necessary to first recapitulate the social and historical settings of American society around the turn of the century. It was a time of great change. America was being flooded by a wave of new immigrants who came essentially from Greece, Italy, Germany, and Poland. The influx of immigrants was significant. There were more than 11 million people who came through the Ellis Island Immigration facility in New York harbor. The older and more established immigrants who came earlier to the United States from England and the Nordic countries were appalled. They were threatened by the diversity of languages and lifestyles which dominated the Northeast. To counter this perceived threat, the business leaders

joined with the American government in establishing an Americanization movement.

Just what this social and political venture entailed is rather interesting. From the point of view of the government, there were classes on English for the Foreign Born, and classes on citizenship training. But, the businessmen had a different view of Americanization. They deliberately controlled over 70% of all foreign newspapers and dictated editorial policy. It was their belief that good Americans did things that were profitable for business. Ewen documents how European immigrants took great pride in repairing broken objects and how this trait was bad for business. So the advertisers developed the idea of the throw-away culture in the 1920s. It was good to buy new things and not repair broken items. It stimulated the economy. Another tactic that the advertisers employed was to counter the tradition of venerating the old. If a job became available, a son would defer to his father. But, the father was less efficient, and this was bad for business. So the advertisers developed the idea that old is bad and young is good. In addition to adulating youth, they also told the immigrants that a father should not feel that he has failed in life if his son becomes successful in earning a living wage. To further instill the concept of mass consumption as a way of life, the advertisers told the immigrants that the practice of purchasing something was a democratic act. One voted for a product by purchasing it. This was the American thing to do. The Europeans also had a love of classical music and they admired the great art works of the museums of their homelands. The advertisers were aware of this and they embarked on a program of commercial art in which jingles imitated classical music and the graphics on food cans or advertising billboards were taken from classical art. This upgraded their products in the eyes of the immigrants and significantly increased their sales.

Why was the 1920s a time for the launching of the construction of a consumer culture in America? What was so unique about this period in history that encouraged advertisers and business entrepreneurs into this great social venture? The answers come directly from the business climate of the times. Advertising was only directed to the rich. The masses made the products, but could not afford them. But, factory owners were overstocked. They had more products than they could sell. Their profits were rapidly declining. They needed an escape from this crisis in overproduction. The solution to their problems came in the form of a bold new venture which was proposed by the sociology department of the Ford Foundation. They suggested that the workers should become the new consumers. To ensure that this venture would work, they decreased the 60 hour workweek and gave the workers the weekend off for shopping. They increased their incomes, and they created new department stores or Emporia for the masses modeled after the French Bon Marché. The result met with great success. Pears Soap, for example, had Lily Pons advertise the product and credited it for her great beauty. Pears Soap quickly sold out all of its products. These Captains of Industry soon learned that they could enter into the conscious desires of their workers. They vowed that they would now become their Captains of Consciousness (Ewen, 1977). What is significant about this social movement is that it changed people. They acquired new values and new ideals about themselves. The result was the social construction of a new consumer culture in America.

By the end of the Second World War, the success of the new consumer culture could be readily documented. Landon Jones (1981), a demographer, has documented this legitimation of the consumer culture in America. He noted how it was good for the United States to create the concept of Suburbia. One moved away from the city, bought a house, new furniture, a car,

and all of the trappings of keeping up with the Joneses. Advertisers encouraged having children as this was helpful to a host of industries and more children were born during the Baby Boom generation (1946-1964) than at any other time in America's history. The peak year was in 1957 when nearly 4 million children were born. Mass market consultants were having a heyday. The baby boomers were the most studied group in advertising (Schiller, 1973). With the advent of television, a whole new mediated culture emerged (Fiske, 1987). The television became the new ritual (Geothals, 1981). It provided new role models for children. The situation comedy replaced the bibliography. The consumer culture that was just an idea around the turn of the century had now become a social reality. This scenario is not unique to the United States. It has been repeated in country after country. The cultural values and lifestyles of parents and grandparents literally clashed with the younger generation. A true generation gap occurred.

4. The Culture of Modernity

There have been many reactions and responses to the current changes taking place in the technologically advanced nations. The basic pattern of response appears to be one of documenting the inevitable changes which are occurring in the newly emerging mass culture spreading around the world (Gurevitch, et al., 1992; Mills, 1990; Nieburg, 1973; Toffler, 1971, 1980). Alvin Toffler, a futurist, has written several books reflecting on the new culture of modernity. He refers to it as "Postindustrial Society. In *Future Shock*, for example, Toffler (1971, pp.143-151) dealt with the rapid changes taking place in society. He envisions this new global movement as a reaction to industrial society with its power laden hierarchies, its bureaucratic longevity, its pyramidal structure of authority, and its business model mentality. The shock that Toffler (1971) refers to comes about when people of industrial society are faced with the impending rapid changes which are brought on by the new global age of information. Just what people are reacting to worldwide becomes more apparent in *The Third Wave* (1980, chapter four), where Toffler explains how the Western sociopolitical systems are all reacting to the common problems caused by same the industrial revolution. He claims, in particular, that Capitalism, Socialism, and Communism are all products of the industrial revolution, and consequently, they all share certain features or characteristics in common. These common features mean, in essence, that these supposedly disparate social systems are intrinsically related to each other in highly defined terms. They all share the following characteristics:

Standardization

The creation of identical mass products is characteristic of industrial societies. Clothing styles are mass produced, restaurant menus are copies of each other, and so on. Even language has become standardized.

Specialization

The division of labor into different specialties has been motivated by the quest for efficiency and greater productivity. This leads to a form of social alienation common to industrial societies.

Synchronization

The factory has its own rhythm and human beings must adjust to the beat of the machine, the dictates of production schedules, and the commercial organization of time. Time becomes money.

Concentration

With the rise of factories, work becomes concentrated in the cities. With the growth of governmental bureaucracy, the managerial elite were relocated to seats of power, state or national capitals. And, with the rise of corporations, financial decisions were concentrated in business centers. Before the turn of the century, America was 90% rural, now it is 90% urban.

Maximization

There is an infatuation with bigness, a macrophilia. Big becomes synonymous with power, control, and efficiency. The ruling belief is that there are no limits to growth.

Centralization

The concentration of power in cities, state and national capitals, and business and financial centers lead to the further centralization of power in massive factories (Ford, GE, RCA), national banks (City Corp., Chase National), and mass media (flagship television stations such as NBC, ABC, and CBS).

There are several interesting points that should be made about these common features which define the industrial revolution. The first point of interest is that, it is commonplace in political theory to contrast socialism, communism, and capitalism. They are all seen as separate entities. However, as Toffler (1980, chapter four) points out, all of these systems have much more in common than scholars had previously realized. They have all gone through the First Wave of being agrarian societies, and suffered through the Second Wave of being industrial societies and they are now entering the Third Wave and are becoming postindustrial or global information societies. Such societies are all reacting to the same social forces. The second point of interest is that these societies are still in a transition towards postindustrialism. Futurists have noted global trends, but no one nation has arrived at this stage of development. Even Singapore with its modernization is torn apart by reminiscent social forces of agrarianism, industrialization, and modernity. It has been argued that Japan and Korea are nations that have gone well into the direction of postindustrialism. But, this shift is only relative. The same holds for the United States. Major forces in America are fighting postindustrialism, viz., the steel industry and the automobile industry. But, in the field of electronics, the same claims cannot be made. Hence, there is no postindustrial society as outlined by Toffler (1980). No nation has arrived at that stage of development. The third point of interest worth commenting on has to do with the relationship among capitalism, socialism, and communism. Karl Marx argued that societies would naturally grow from capitalism to socialism and finally emerge as communistic states. It should be noted that the current reality is that with the rise of postindustrialism, previous socialist states such as Brazil are becoming capitalistic and many communistic regimes are following this trend. It

would be wrong to claim, however, that postindustrialism has to do with capitalism because it is, in essence, a reaction to a special form of ideology known as monopoly capitalism -- the world of big business, giant corporations, and centralized power elites. Mass culture has been characteristically associated with monopoly capitalism, but the reactions to mass society have not yet settled. Futurists are unsure as to where this new global movement will lead.

Although many scholars have attempted to document the transition towards a new culture of modernity, Jürgen Habermas (1970, 1973a, 1973b) stands out as a visionary who wants to create a new model of human culture based on rationalism and specifically designed to counteract the emerging patterns of social and cultural change. In *Theory and Practice*, for example, Habermas argues that the state is no longer separated from the economy as it was under *laissez faire* capitalism. Under this view of modernity, the state is now the economy. It has become a cultural force. This approach to melding economics with culture is reminiscent of the work of the anthropologist, Marvin Harris (1980). But the state is not limited to economics. It must be rational and interactive. The state, in Hegelian terms, is always evolving and people supposedly pursue goals and rationally select courses of action that permit them to realize these goals effectively and efficiently. This approach to society is reminiscent of the work of the classical sociologist, Max Weber (1958). What Habermas is arguing for is not new to Americans. After all, it was an American President, Calvin Coolidge, who proclaimed in 1925 that “The Business of America is Business.” Hence, it should be no surprise to students of American history to find that this ideology of a business culture has been uniquely expressed in the United States in the form of a mass culture. But, Habermas is advocating more than the legitimation of business as the new world culture. He is also a Hegelian and believes that societies are constantly emerging into higher forms of natural expression, more perfected states of knowledge and being. Does this mean that cultures are to become more steeped in a business mentality? Habermas argues against such claims. He turns to the writings of Sigmund Freud for direction on this matter. Freud’s work, he notes, was oriented towards the practical. And, it is emancipatory because through the mechanisms of psychoanalysis, the patient is oriented toward a greater self-consciousness. So, he argues, societies must also emerge toward higher states of self-consciousness, a cognitive evolution. But, the work of Jürgen Habermas is much more than a reinstatement of Hegelian ideals. It is proposed as a general theory of cultural evolution, a theory which is concomitant with the work of futurists and other advocates of Postindustrialism. The task of the cultural sciences is to understand the meanings attributed by people to objects and the events in concrete historical settings. Whereas the natural sciences attempt to establish laws of regularity, the cultural sciences focus on knowledge specific to historic situations. Hence, the analyst must reconstruct the subjective meanings held by individuals about themselves and the world around them. What this means, Habermas maintains, is that meanings and rules may differ radically from one situation to the next. Meanings are reconstructed as societies change. It is interesting to note that Habermas considers language to be a key factor in the analysis of culture. It is, after all, one of the cultural sciences. It is through language, he argues, that the individual is able to codify meanings for self-reflection and for self-expression. Habermas also realizes that language codes are limited and that alternative modes of symbolic expression must be employed in his Hegelian model of cultural emancipation.

Whether one refers to the changes taking place globally among disparate nations as

Postindustrialism or the Culture of Modernity, one fact remains obvious: contemporary models of culture must deal with economic forces. Marvin Harris, the anthropologist, has built his theory of cultural materialism on this very premise. Sociologists have always worked from this assumption, and philosophers such as Jürgen Habermas have embraced economic forces as an intrinsic part of the general theory of culture. The question that remains to be discussed is one of cultural change. Why do old cultures die and new ones replace them?

5. Culture as Social Legitimation

In sociology, there is a process known as legitimation. This occurs when new role models are imitated by others without question, and when new epistemological claims are tacitly accepted by the citizenry as cultural norms. It is not claimed in the process of legitimation that alternative views or modes of behavior are unknown, only that they are not officially accepted as mainstream or foregrounded ways of seeing, believing, and acting within a society. The common terminology for these differences can be found in the terms *culture* and *subculture*. The culture reflects the official ways of a nation, while the subcultures represent the alternative modes of symbolic expression. There is, for example, an official language in the United States. This is the language of the media, government, publishing, and public expression. It is the formal language of Standard English. Other dialects occur. There are regional variants, social registers, and other forms of linguistic expression. The same situation exists with what is referred to as subcultures. These are variants of behavior which are not legitimated as mainstream standard behavior. They are analogous to subdialects and represent alternative modes of expression. So the question remains: Why are some subcultures legitimated and elevated to the status of formal culture and others are not? The answers to these questions can be found in the social history of a nation and in the social forces motivating these changes.

When one looks back on what constituted the legitimate cultures of Europe, the panorama of social and historical changes provides interesting insights into the legitimation process. As Habermas (1980) has noted, a nation's culture becomes what it wants to express. There was a period in Germany, for example, when philosophical thinking represented the cultural ideal. It was the time of Georg Hegel and Immanuel Kant. Later, as the culture shifted, the ideal was to be found in biological sciences, the back to nature movement. Germany led the world in numerous biological sciences. As these cultures shifted, the newer frameworks of values were legitimated and the older belief systems were backgrounded. When classical music reigned as a cultural milieu, European culture became synonymous with the great composers. When political theory and the Belles Artes reigned, Europeans turned to their social commentators as the new prophets. This same process of change can be readily documented in the history of the United States. The mainstream culture in America around the turn of the century can be found in the ideals of corporate America. The landed gentry of the previous cultural milieu had shifted into the newly formed corporations who professed a business ethics based on social Darwinism and who saw themselves as above the masses. During the 1920s, these corporate giants created the framework for the social construction of a mass culture in America. After the Second World War, this consumer society had become a reality and represented the new cultural milieu. It was not fully legitimated and it was still referred to as "popular culture." But, now it is well on

its way to becoming the official culture of America, the culture of modernity. At some point, this transition into a new culture will become fully legitimated. One seriously wonders if the process has already taken place. Television news, for example, spends an inordinate amount of time dedicated to the lives and perils of movie stars as celebrities (Alexander & Seidman, 1990). Marketing specialists have carved out the United States and Canada into nine cultural nations (Garreau, 1981; Mitchell, 1984) and others have provided more sophisticated clusters of America into some forty commercial and cultural neighborhoods (Weiss, 1988). Narcissism has become a way of life, a cultural trait (Lash, 1979; Jourard, 1971).

The significance of cultural change in America is just a minor part of why cultural theory is in jeopardy. The problem for traditional anthropologists and sociologists stems from the fact that global cultures have changed radically since the Second World War. This epistemic rupture came about through international marketing and monopoly capitalism which encouraged the importing of American consumer culture to other nations of the world. As a result of these efforts, many so-called exotic countries are now industrialized nations. Many societies that were once only studied by anthropologists are now investigated by sociologists. The new world culture has become an economic culture. The leaders of foreign nations studied at American business schools and have returned to successfully implement these financial techniques in the governance of their own countries. The theory of cultural materialism advocated by Marvin Harris has become the new reality. The model of the cultural sciences integrated with the economic sciences proposed by Jürgen Habermas has also become the new reality. The traditional models of culture have met with their demise. But, what does this mean for the newly industrialized nations of the world such as those along the Pacific Rim, the new seats of financial power? There are many significant changes taking place.

6. Some Implications of the Culture of Modernity

One of the more obvious changes taking place in America society due to the creation of the new consumer culture can be seen in the arena of public self. The concept of public self is well documented in European history. Romans knew that there was a difference between the roles that they displayed or enacted in public and their own personal idiosyncratic behavior at home (Sennett, 1978). One performed a role or a function in public. The personality behind that role was suppressed so that it would not interfere with the job description that one had to perform. One knew of another through his or her public self. They never dealt into one's personal or private self. In contemporary society, this focus on public self is evident in the military where one learns to respect the rank of an officer and not his ethnicity, gender, or age. Most Asian societies still clearly distinguish between the roles that are expressed in public behavior and those that are not (Barnlund, 1975). In Japan and Korea, for example, the focus is on public self. One interacts with others at the level of social roles and this is even reflected in lexical and grammatical forms. Public behavior is more regulated and there is little or no discourse or self-disclosure. What has happened in the United States with the rise of the consumer culture is that the formality of public language is gradually being replaced with informal or colloquial language. Private self is replacing public self: spelling conventions are being violated even in the public mass media; formal dress of the public place is being replaced by new and diverse

forms of personal clothing expression; and, there has been a definite shift from the formal role models of business and government to the more narcissistic behavior of personalities and types. Actors are no longer seen as performers who possess skills, but as celebrities. Presidents and Congressmen are not elected because they are competent, but because they are personable and well-liked. Even in the business world, the focus is on imaging. Life has become a mediated event. The loss of public self is a byproduct of consumer societies. As Stuart Ewen (1977) has noted, advertisers appeal to how people feel about themselves and not to the quality of the products being sold. Narcissistic personalities are good for business. America is engaged in the cult of Narcissism (Lasch, 1979).

Another area in which there is a noticeable shift brought about through marketing and mass media can be found in the reconstruction of traditional literary genres and a shift away from plots to events or happenings. Students of literature are familiar with the rise of the novel (Watts, 1975) and how the novel emerged during the second phase of the industrial revolution when readers became fascinated with the characters developed by Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding. Classical writers developed type much in the way that formal public self is a role or a type. But, when the novel emerged in Europe, it developed the private self, and focused heavily on character development. These shifts foreshadow the fall of public self. What is interesting about this shift in reading is that it has recently been reinstated in the United States, Canada, and England. There is a whole new way of looking at genres. They are called category novels and they are defined by the commercial viability of the reading public. Romance novels used to focus on the categories of bodice rippers, sweet romance (teenage market), and historical romance. But, when America witnessed a very high divorce rate of 29.5% among the Baby Boomers (Jones, 1981), a new category was developed: twice loved. The formula for this new category of romance had to include divorced couples finding the perfect love that they were denied during their first failed marriages. Among the category novels dealing with murder mysteries, there were also created new categories. The detective story was expanded to include romantic suspense, police procedurals, heists, kidnapping, and capers. The action novels also witnessed a recategorization. The story of the quest of the prince for his princess soon shifted to action novels and disaster novels because some 80% of the new generation of Baby Boomers were sensation types who demanded more action, louder sounds, more vivid colors, and fast moving scenes (Jones, 1981). The genre of science fiction used to be totally dedicated to hard science. Now there is a new category called soft science fiction and it includes horror and fantasy. How these new subcategories will eventually emerge is to be dictated by the paying public. Another factor in the creation of category novels is that they are now written more for screen writers and movie producers than for the reading public. So the westerns with their subcategories on the ranchers versus the sheep men and the farmers fighting with the Indians for valuable land have shifted to action type westerns. These are readily developed by screen writers into movies. It is important to note that there are some major problems to be found with the new focus on category novels. One of them is that writers who do not fit the categories do not get published. There is no market for them. And, authors who mix genres such as murder mysteries and westerns are not fully welcomed by the publishing industry because of their smaller paying public. Finally, there has been a decided shift from the old format in which plots were dominant and in which major philosophical themes dominated a novel. The older novels

dealt with the search for value and meaning, the search for wisdom and other morally oriented themes. Modern novels are more happenings and events with a reduction of plot structure such as vengeance, catastrophe, the chase, grief and loss, love and hate, rebellion, betrayal, persecution, self sacrifice, survival, rivalry, discovery, and ambition. The new focus is on story spicers or what was once called page-turners such as deception, the abuse of power, conspiracy, the good versus the bad, search and rescue, and the struggle for wealth. Those scholarly types who read the plot driven novels of classical world literature are in the minority. If they are to survive, it will be in the literature classroom where their texts are required reading. They now have to compete with category novels and television drama.

7. Conclusion

The traditional definitions of culture are in jeopardy. And, the two dominant models of traditional culture as defined by anthropologists and sociologists have begun to merge into one. What is emerging is a new monolith consumer culture. It is the culture that Marvin Harris (1980, 1981a, 1981b, 1989) advocates in his theory of cultural materialism and it is the culture that Jürgen Habermas (1968, 1973a, 1973b) embraces with his culture of modernity. Futurists and students of Postindustrial Society (Toffler, 1971, 1980) also assume that this new culture represents the status quo. There is one factor, however, in this newly emerging culture that merits further discussion.

Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of the new business culture can be found in the reevaluation of the role of academia in the new culture of modernity. The business world has been defined as the “real world.” Academia, it should be noted, is not part of the “real world”. Under this new framework, the humanities are in a state of crisis. Business favors schools of applied science because of how this enhances the profitability of factory owners, and it favors schools of communication that sponsor journalism and other mass media courses, but it does not look kindly on the humanities. Philosophy, they note, is not amoney making venture. History is also another discipline that is seen as being of no interest to the worlds of finance and marketing. English Departments will survive if they teach courses in writing, rhetoric, and composition, but not if their courses are predominantly literary in nature. Under the new culture, the needs of business have become the needs of society. They have defined the new categories of legitimation.

The new culture of modernity is not limited to any one country. It has become an international phenomenon. The problems that many Asian Rim countries are currently facing stem directly from their adaptation of this new world culture. The loss of public self, for example, can be readily documented in many Asian countries. Many of the more overt forms of public behavior are being lost, politeness markers are no longer used judiciously among the younger generations, and world leaders are no longer judged on their record of competence, but on their personalities. The older values of respect, honor, trust, and service are either lost or in the process of attenuation. Modernization comes with a heavy price. The only scholar who has openly advocated the social construction of a new world culture is Habermas (1973b). Perhaps it is time for those world scholars who work in the domain of the cultural sciences to join Habermas in this quest. Just as linguists have worked in the area of language planning, it is now time for scientists to unite and work in the new area of cultural planning.

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